

von Arburg, Adrian (Hg.): *Komplex odsunu. Vysídlení Němců a české pohraničí po roce 1945* [The odsun complex. The Expulsion of the Germans and the Czech Borderlands after 1945].

Special double issue of *Soudobé dějiny* 3-4 (2005). 425-487.

Shortly after the fall of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia Tomáš Staněk published "Odsun Němců z Československa, 1945-1947" (The Transfer of the Germans from Czechoslovakia, 1945-1947). Since then he has published numerous books and articles on subjects related to the odsun, all of which share the same characteristics: careful, thorough research drawn from archival materials found throughout the region; an attention to factual correctness; and well-posed research questions. Just as impressive is his ability to put forward thought-provoking arguments that, whether one agrees with them or not, require readers to think about the tragic events surrounding the odsun in new ways. Although obviously horrified by the violence surrounding the odsun and keen to point to its tragic legacies – how the undermining of the rule of law and other effects of the odsun paved the way for Communist rule, for example – Staněk has always approached the odsun as a domestic event, and one of immense historical significance for the Bohemian Lands that must be approached as a scholarly endeavor. Despite the recent explosion of first-rate scholarship on the odsun (or *Vertreibung*, or Transfer) in Czech, German, and English, Staněk remains the leading scholar in the field.

And so it was only natural that Adrian von Arburg, one of the brightest young scholars studying the odsun, chose to collaborate with Staněk and include their work in this recent, double issue of "Soudobé dějiny," which is guest-edited by von Arburg. On the one hand, "Komplex odsunu: Vysídlení Němců a české pohraničí po roce 1945," which appeared in print in 2006, represents a continuation of Staněk's work and values. The destructiveness of odsun is understood, as von Arburg writes, as having its own "endogenous components," its violence committed not by "states against states but people (and mostly citizens) against other people" (p. 425). Throughout the volume solid archival work reveals new insights and problems. On the other hand, the volume marks a departure. As von Arburg points out in the introduction, two of the seven authors are based outside the Czech Republic. The authors' average age is less than thirty-five years old. The legacies of the odsun that Staněk only suggested are now being investigated more thoroughly, and the odsun is seen to have created problems as well as opportunities for Communist rulers. The perspectives have multiplied, so much so that von Arburg, borrowing a term from Polish historians, insists using the term "komplex odsunu" (the odsun complex) to refer to the complicated webs of cause-effect relationships that formed after the war as well as the multiple perspectives on the subject taken by the authors.

Staněk and von Arburg's contribution to the volume is actually the first of a three-part series, the latter two articles due to appear in the following volume of "Soudobé dějiny". It is also the only contribution to focus on the events of 1945 before the Potsdam agreement. True to the idea of "odsun complex," the authors take aim at several dichotomies, questioning the usefulness of dividing the odsun into the "wild" and "organized" phases; seeing events as taking place "below" the state and then by

the state; and classifying events as centralized or decentralized, or local. Indeed, members of the Czechoslovak government not only legitimized the popular violence that rocked the Bohemian Lands before Potsdam, they played a more active role than commonly assumed. Days before thousands of Germans were brutally marched from Brno toward the Austrian border, for example, Interior Minister Václav Nosek, Justice Minister Jaroslav Stránský, and other government officials spoke to thousands of onlookers from the balcony of the city hall. "We see that it is not possible to live alongside the Germans, but to die," Stránský told the crowd. "We will build for ourselves a Czech republic, a Czech Brno, and here we will lay the foundations for the future of our children." Before departing the city, Defense Minister Ludvík Svoboda left Brno's citizens with the following words: "I congratulate you for the return of freedom and wish that the city of Brno will soon be rid of all Germans and traitors" (p. 496). Indeed, the army plays a key role in Staněk's and von Arburg's account of events, from a "study group" formed in 1944 that proposed extraordinarily radical measures for forced expulsions immediately following liberation to Svoboda and other ministers' active role in giving verbal orders to army and revolutionary guard units to rid the Bohemian Lands of Germans. Yet the authors also stress that local actors, including members of the Czechoslovak army, put immense pressure on central government officials to continue the expulsions quickly and without regard for order, while Prague officials came to believe that the chaos and mismanagement that led to tragedies like the Brno forced march could be avoided by assigning to central authorities an even more active role in expelling the Germans.

The remaining articles deal for the most part with legacies. Eagle Glassheim places the *odsun* within the larger context of Czechoslovak attempts at creating borderlands that were Czech, industrialized, and urbanized – the culmination of a modernism that relied on powerful notions of progress, rational planning, and the transformation of peoples and landscapes. After World War II, and especially after the Communists' assumption of power, the borderlands became a laboratory for the realization of these modernist goals. But the experiment ended in, among other things, unbelievable environmental degradation in places like Most. Similarly, Jiří Topinka details the economic and social disasters in the borderlands that Communist rulers confronted after 1948 – disasters that resulted at least in part because of depopulation and poorly planned resettlement policies. Intriguingly, rather than a victory for Communist rule, the *odsun* was partially responsible for a situation that challenged the Communist government's legitimacy long after the Germans had left. Tomáš Dvořák studies the development of the uranium industry in the Jáchymov region, and in particular the use of Germans as forced laborers – many of whom were finally able to leave for Germany when the uranium mining ended in the 1960s. David Kovařík's article traces out the creation, beginning in 1950, of a tightly policed security zone running along the western border of Czechoslovakia. "Politically unreliable" individuals were forcibly resettled in the interior; eventually more than one hundred villages disappeared completely. Kateřina Kočová examines the "second wave" of retribution against Nazi criminals and collaborators that took place after the Communist takeover – an effort that eventually stalled, she argues, in part because of societal pressures. Like the other authors, she sees a Communist state

less powerful than often supposed, and she offers us a complex understanding of the legacies of anti-German sentiment. Lastly, Zdeněk R. Nešpor provides an overview of “western” research on international migration.

As Staněk and von Arburg point out in the introduction, many studies of the odsun have concentrated on decision-making by Beneš and his ministers within the larger context of European foreign policy or the “legality” of the expulsion of millions of individuals. The authors in this volume, however, are concerned first and foremost with events as they occurred within Czechoslovakia. They have also, one might add, stepped outside even more well-worn attempts to assign “guilt” or “innocence” to collective national groups. They are seeking to understand the odsun as a complex event on its own terms – and one that took place at the level of face-to-face relationships – not as part of a grander narrative of the Czech nation battling the German one. Still, while these authors have broken new ground by looking at the legacies of the odsun, looking backwards a “thick line” continues to separate the scholarship on the postwar period from other, new and exciting works on Nazi occupation in the Bohemian Lands. (A notable exception here is the rich collection of literature that focuses almost exclusively on Beneš and his ministers.) Staněk and von Arburg, for example, offer several tantalizing explanations for why members of the Czechoslovak army entered their homeland so eager and willing to do violence upon Germans: they had been robbed of their chance to fight in 1938; they finally had an opportunity to face their long demonized enemy; and many had been traumatized by their experiences on the Eastern front. More research on this and numerous other topics can and should be done, for many of the causal relationships and mentalities that informed the “odsun complex” had been formed before 1945. For now, however, we can be thankful to von Arburg for putting together this collection of insightful, original, and convincingly argued articles. Scholars of the odsun have good reason to look forward to the next issue of “Soudobé dějiny”, as well as to future articles and books by the authors in this volume.