

SUMMARIES

COMPARING THE INCOMPARABLE OR: WAS THERE A TOTALITARIAN EPOCH IN CONTEMPORARY CZECH HISTORY?

Miloš Havelka

This study aims at illustrating some specific problems arising whenever the concept of totalitarianism is applied to the Czech case. The main focus is on broadening the scope by adding sociological and demographic aspects to a perspective more commonly limited to strictly political factors.

Taking issue with the common application of the term “totalitarian” to the entire period from 1938 to 1989, the author emphasizes the scope of change that Czech society experienced up to 1956, and looks for an internal commonality extending over the whole period. He argues that the number of changes altering the ethnic, demographic, social, and political stratification of Czech society between 1938 and 1956, in contrast to what is implied by the “democratic tradition” so frequently being claimed for the First Republic, brought about a “totalitarian mindset” which worked in favour of the dictatorships of the time. An exploitation of mass dynamics (as described by Hannah Arendt) by those in power consciously manipulating social structures in the period 1938 to 1956 is identified as the principal prerequisite.