

PROTEST UNDER COMMUNISM

The Pilsen Revolt of June 1, 1953

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The present study examines one of the most far-reaching protests in Stalinist Czechoslovakia, the revolt which broke out on June 1, 1953, in the Western Bohemian city of Plzeň/Pilsen, triggered by a currency reform that was announced on that date. Applying the so-called “new social movements” theory to the Plzeň events, the author places them in the larger context of comparable protest actions which took place in the whole Plzeň region between 1948 and 1953. This allows him to distinguish between several cultures of protest, all of which had their share of influence on the course of this particular revolt. These are: First, a socially motivated movement among factory workers, second, a movement composed of students and young workers of Western orientation, and third, latent tensions within the communist party causing passive resistance among the rank-and-file members against local party élites. Combined, these very different cultures of protest developed an enormous power. Since the protesters were so heterogeneous, the June 1953 Plzeň revolt cannot be interpreted as an anti-communist uprising pure and simple.