

*Klíma, Vlastimil: Druhý odboj (1939-1945). Svědectví a úvahy [The Second Resistance (1939-1945). Testimonies and Reflections].*

Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, Praha 2017, 394 S., ISBN 978-80-7422-494-2.

Vlastimil Klíma belonged to the generation of Czechoslovak politicians that participated firsthand in the genesis of Czechoslovakia, its demise, and its resurrection. As a participant in the anti-Nazi underground, lawyer and journalist Klíma witnessed the barbarism of the Nazis in his country and was later able to write his memoirs basically as a nonperson imprisoned and persecuted under the Communist regime. This volume represents a welcome contribution to the history of the Czech anti-fascist resistance and builds upon Klíma's earlier autobiographical account published

in 2012. Klíma is generously (and correctly) described by historian Josef Tomeš as a “gentleman of Czech politics.” His views are consistent with a significant number of others belonging to his generation. However, I do not agree with the author on certain issues and I find some of Klíma’s assertions contentious. In the ensuing paragraphs, I shall do my best to comment upon the main arguments presented in the book.

In his foreword, historian Robert Kvaček states that Klíma’s account is not merely about the Czech resistance to the Nazis and that the reader is presented with the particular brand of Czechoslovak nationalism espoused by Klíma and his National Democratic colleagues throughout his life. In fact, while the book contains a plethora of useful information, the author’s presentation of events is often clouded by his nationalist worldview, which clearly pits Czechs and ethnic Germans against one another from the inception of Czechoslovakia without any serious attempt made to give due consideration to the German side of the argument.

In the first chapter, Klíma writes that the state should be based upon a concrete nation, the so-called “state nation” and that he and like-minded individuals believed that the role of the Czech state should be to overcome “germanization” and the exploitation of Czech national wealth by Vienna and “Alp Germans”, as well as to fulfill its international and European role as a guardian against the German “Drang nach Osten.” This viewpoint clearly indicates Klíma’s distrust of the German minority in Czechoslovakia, as well as Germany in general. Klíma points out that the political path embarked upon by Masaryk and his supporters was flawed and that too much trust had been placed in the Weimar Republic. He then states that this perception helped him and like-minded colleagues to form an association advocating the concept of “national democracy”, which established the publication *Národní myšlenka* (National Idea) with Klíma serving as editor. This group opposed participation of ethnic German parties in Czechoslovak governments and voiced its position in *Národní myšlenka*. Essentially, President Masaryk’s efforts to reach out to the German minority were described as contrary to the interests of the Czechoslovak state, as were the international arrangements and treaties, which Czechoslovakia participated in. I must say that Klíma’s retrospective account of events indicates his effort to imply that if only the “national democratic” strategy had been applied, the Czech people would have been spared the tragic later events. Also, I think that Klíma’s adoration for France and its culture resulted in an overemphasis of the notion that France really would have defended Czechoslovakia in 1938 if Czechoslovak policy had been different. Klíma’s opinion is largely based upon his positive experiences in dealings with prominent French politicians and his own stays in the country. While personal observations indeed make a book of this type more interesting and are noteworthy, one must keep in mind that such encounters are subjective and, therefore, should not form the main basis for an argument.

The next chapters discuss post-Munich events and the formation of the anti-Nazi resistance. Klíma vividly recalls the two-track character of the struggle. Klíma is correct when he dismisses the post-1945 myth that the resistance was mainly a Communist matter with the assistance of some “bourgeois progressive and democratic groups.” However, the claim that almost the entire Czech nation participated

in national resistance is ludicrous. The actual level of active opposition in Bohemia and Moravia was rather limited. It is beyond the scope of this review to address every example Klíma cites and I do not question the validity of his observations. But one cannot overlook the fact that the Czechs who fought against the Nazi occupation were more often than not betrayed by other Czechs, which indicates a substantial amount of collaboration.

Klíma writes that his (and his colleagues') intentions were to create a united, "one-track" national resistance together with the Communists. I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of Klíma's words. What I do find disputable is Klíma's assertion that his entire generation inherited some affinity to czarist Russia from their fathers. Indeed, pan-Slavism did have its place in the Czech National Revival and later efforts to achieve autonomy in and, ultimately, independence from the Austrian Habsburg Monarchy. However, there is little evidence to indicate that the masses of Czechs were enamored with Russia and pan-Slavism to such an extent that this formed the basis of their worldview.

Throughout the book, Klíma tends to stereotype German-speakers and Germany (along with Austria), as some sort of homogeneous entity comprised of warmongering zealots. Nowhere does he give credit to progressive Germans and their ideas. Obviously, progressive intellectual currents among Germans and German-speakers does not fit well into the simplistic narrative of the Czechs being mere victims of German expansionist tendencies. The affinity of Czechs to France, which certainly was strong in some circles, is exaggerated in a similar manner. I also do not think that one should consider the horrors of Nazism to represent a continuation of the past strategic goals of the German and Austrian monarchies, as Klíma seems to imply.

The explanation concerning the emergence of a "two-track" resistance is generally accurate. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939 and the loyalty of the overwhelming majority of Communists throughout the world to Soviet policy rendered the unity of the Czech resistance impossible, as was the case in other places. Most Czech (and Slovak) Communists loyally followed directives from Moscow even though a small minority voiced reservations and outright disagreement. Klíma notes that, after the German occupation of the remainder of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939, significant Communist resistance developed and waned following the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact only to resurface stronger after the German attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941. The main non-Communist Czech resistance organizations (Politické ústředí and later ÚVOD) emphasized unity among all factions of the resistance and set the defeat of the Nazis as the main aim. Furthermore, the political future of restored Czechoslovakia would be decided after liberation. The Communists, however, focused on long-term ideological planning for the future as the character of the Communist resistance was more politicized than that of non-Communists. Klíma's analysis of the March 1945 dealings in Moscow is accurate and he is correct that the non-Communists were sidelined and the Slovak London emigration was excluded entirely. Indeed, the so-called Košice Government Program sealed Czechoslovakia's fate, consigned the country to the Soviet sphere of influence, and the so-called democracy would prove ephemeral.

Klíma devotes several chapters to the issue of Slovak nationalism. I think that his

interpretation of the Slovak issue is somewhat biased and insensitive to Slovak concerns. While he is correct that the Czechs invested enormous financial and human resources in the development of Slovakia, which was socially and economically behind Bohemia and Moravia, it also needs to be noted that the Slovaks felt from the genesis of Czechoslovakia onward that the state was too centralized and that Czechs held the real power within the country. Certainly, no Slovak grievance can justify the actions of the separatists and their alliance with Nazi Germany, but, by the same token, it would be inconsiderate not to consider the Slovak side of the argument. Klíma's analysis of events in Slovakia during World War II is accurate.

The rest of the book contains Klíma's recollections of the domestic resistance, including collaboration with Prokop Drtina, František Toušek, and Vladimír Šis. The recounting of Klíma's personal experiences as an active member of the resistance makes for fascinating reading. The style of writing engages the reader, who, in turn, is motivated to consider events in a broader context. In his epilogue, Klíma ponders the state of the world and makes a number of important points. When discussing changes in the social order, he points out that human aspirations and perceptions will never remain static and therefore solutions will not stay the same. According to Klíma, solutions to social questions ought not to be a question of power, but rather one of justice and morality. He concedes that, following the Second World War, notions of Slavdom and Slavic brotherhood fell out of fashion as they are not in sync with the reigning political ideology. In addition, Klíma concedes that the federalization of the Czechoslovak state made an impact on the Czech-Slovak relationship with Slovaks achieving advantages. Klíma then defends nationalism and credits the concept with having achieved the inception of the Czechoslovak state following the First World War, as well as the country's restoration following World War II. Here, I must also say that Klíma most probably could not imagine that the very concept of nationalism would result in the split of Czechoslovakia into respective independent Czech and Slovak states once democratic conditions were restored. However, Klíma is correct that, on the world stage human exploitation through state institutions had not ceased. He also acknowledges that the terms freedom and independence are relative and applied differently in various countries. Subsequently, Klíma questions the wisdom of the divergence of the "scientific-technological" revolution from ethical and moral concepts and describes this reality as being dangerous to humanity. The epilogue concludes with some autobiographical information concerning his later life, including his imprisonment, being barred from practicing the legal profession, and imposed meager material conditions.

This volume should be judged for what it is, namely an impassioned memoir of a man who devoted his life to his country and played a role in both the creation of Czechoslovakia and its later liberation from Nazi rule. Klíma articulates his nationalist views honorably and it is obviously that his actions were guided both by a strong educational background and a strong moral compass. Also, the editors (Pavel Horák, Martin Klečáček, Robert Kvaček, Josef Tomeš, and Richard Vašek) deserve credit for their meticulous work in the organization of the book and clarifying concepts not familiar to many present-day readers. Both scholars and lay readers will benefit by reading Klíma's treatise.

Prague

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