

## THE POSITION OF THE COMINTERN AND THE CPCS IN THE QUESTION OF THE GERMANS IN THE SUDETEN LANDS

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At the end of the Second World War, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia advocated the expulsion of all Germans from the Bohemian lands. Originally, however, the policy of both the Czechoslovak CP and the Comintern was quite different. In the first Czechoslovak Republic, the Communist Party was the only party of the state uniting all the nations. It was precisely the Sudeten German Left in Reichenberg, under Karl Kreibich, which made a decisive contribution to its foundation. Kreibich strove, on the basis of class solidarity, for cooperation between Czechs and Germans. The Czech part of the Party, under Šmeral, followed this path only hesitatingly, for he believed that it was necessary to show consideration for the nationalistic temper of the masses of Czech workers.

The CPCS came into an embarrassing situation when the Soviet Union, which until 1933 had expected the revolutionization of Germany, dictated to the Czechoslovak Party that it advocate the right of the Sudeten Germans to self-determination going „as far as separation from the state.“ Such a policy would have meant for the Czech Communists the danger of losing a large part of their supporters, while the Sudeten German Communists were, as leftist dogmatists, unsuited to the task of successfully standing for such a policy among their countrymen. Both the Czech and the Sudeten German Communists were repeatedly warned by the Comintern not to pay only lip service to this policy, but to advocate actively the right of the German minority to self-determination. When at the beginning of the thirties the Stalinist group under Gottwald took over the leadership of the CPCS, the Party unequivocally advocated the Sudeten Germans' right of self-determination.

With Hitler's seizure of power, a new Soviet policy vis-à-vis Central Europe began. Now the Czechoslovak state as a whole had become valuable for Moscow, and the CPCS thus also changed its policy toward the Sudeten Germans. Though it continued to support the full equality of the Sudeten Germans with the Czech people, it did so at the same time emphasizing the integrity of the state and the protection of its boundaries. The CPCS, which had for many years termed „Czechoslovakism“ as „imperialism“ and the First Republic as a „worse prison of the nations than Austria-Hungary“, thereby became a Party of preservation of the state. The Munich Agreement of 1938 gave the CPCS its great chance to appear before the Czech people as the only reliable guarantor of national independence.

The Communists' seizure of power after the Second World War was based to no small part on the prestige which the Czech Communists had been able to gain in the days of Munich. The Czechoslovak CP now became a Czech nationalistic party, and its attitude toward the Sudeten Germans changed

accordingly. Still, the expulsion of the Germans can be traced back primarily to the policy neither of the CPCS nor of Moscow. The Germans of the Bohemian lands were the victim of the internal Czech struggle for power between the Czech National Socialists under Beneš, and the Communists. The expulsion plans, sustained by revanchism and racism, can be traced back to Beneš. The Communists did not want to stay behind and thus lose their influence among the incited masses. Not only did they adapt themselves to this policy, but they even outdid it, in order to be thus able to begin more easily the overthrow of the property system.