

PROBLEMS OF BOHEMIAN HISTORY BETWEEN 1848 AND 1914

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Bohemian history can only be the history of both peoples living in this area. Up to now the two historiographies — the Czech and the Sudeten German — have tended far too much to view and depict the history of the other people as a purely negative factor, as an influence acting to disturb the unfolding of one's own history.

The nationalities' struggle of the 19th century in the Bohemian lands was part of a political-intellectual wave in Europe which moved in a west-east direction; a process by which the peoples who were taking shape as a result of a gradual fundamental democratization established an intellectual and political demarcation between themselves and other peoples, postulated their own intrinsic value and individuality, and deduced specific state-political demands therefrom. At the same time, nationalism was a means of self-assertion for peoples with a less-developed civilization vis-à-vis the political, economic and cultural pressure of the fully developed nations. Bourgeois nationalism assumed such extreme forms in Bohemia because a German industrial bourgeoisie was confronted there by a Czech bourgeoisie whose foundation was not industry, but the large-scale production of food products (beer, sugar, flour). Thus there were no economic interests shared in common

by the two which could have checked the national struggle. On the contrary, economic antagonisms fired national ones; the separation of Czechs and Germans which emerged ever more strongly in the course of the 19th century was the result, not the prerequisite of the national struggle, as the bourgeois protagonists of this struggle claimed. F. Palacký's achievement on behalf of a national ideology consisted mainly in the fact that he imparted to the successful, rising bourgeois strata which lacked any sense of history, the individual historical awareness of the Bohemian aristocracy, collectivized it, and provided it with the features of a compact linguistic nation. Nationalism thus originated as the historically motivated form of a bourgeois self-awareness.

With the development of the modern industrial society, the antagonism intensified between the Czech bourgeois-national movement and the liberal German and international large-scale capital that was concentrated in Vienna, and the Czechs sought to protect themselves against the latter by developing their own, national Czech economy. The labor movement began in the peripheral German industrialized areas, which meant that it was initially led by Germans, also being furthered in its national aspirations. This situation changed when large industries grew up in the Czech parts of the land, above all in Prague, and with them, a workers' party with a Czech leadership. The national antagonisms within the labour movement also became more significant in the process. The originally uniform socialist party was federated, and the trade-unions likewise split along national lines. Especially severe was the struggle for a national structuring of the originally supranational „Utraquist“ Social Democratic Party organization of Moravia. With the improvement of the workers' living conditions, a stabilization of the language border took shape. The rise in the birth-rate in the more heavily industrialized areas of German settlement largely put to rest the bugbear of a „Slav population pressure“ which the national bourgeoisie had propagated.