

den Unmut der tschechischen Minderheit einbrachte, da ansässige Tschechen von ihren Höfen vertrieben wurden. Auch finanziell stellte sich nicht das versprochene Glück ein, wie die Autorin darlegt: Finanzhilfen wurden nicht, wie versprochen, ausbezahlt, Ablösen für den Südtiroler Besitz blieben zum großen Teil aus.

Der Text von Barbora Štolleová und Miloš Hořejš zur NS-Agrar- und Bodenpolitik im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren fällt etwas aus dem Rahmen des Bandes, gilt er doch einem Themenkomplex, der ansonsten im Buch kaum thematisiert wird. Die Südtiroler werden dabei nur kurz erwähnt. Abschließend veranschaulicht Margareth Lanzinger erhellend, dass die nüchternen bürokratischen Abläufe der Umsiedlung von Südtiroler Optanten die dahinterstehende Zielsetzung – die Umsetzung einer nationalsozialistischen Neuordnung Europas und die Ermordung und Vertreibung Anderer – verschleierten.

Dem Band sind neben einem Abkürzungsverzeichnis vier Anhänge beigelegt. Bei den Anhängen 1 und 2, auf die vielfach Bezug genommen wird, handelt es sich um Quellenabschriften von zwei Schreiben aus dem Jahr 1942. Besonders aus dem zweiten von Konrad Henlein an die SS gehen Probleme bei der Ansiedelung der Südtiroler im Sudetenland und die damit verbundene Enteignung tschechischen Besitzes hervor. Die Anhänge 3 und 4 hätten dagegen einer Einordnung bedurft. So wirken die veranschlagten Vermögenswerte beschlagnahmter, für Südtiroler vorgesehener Wohnungen, Gewerbebetriebe und Höfe und die Schätzungen zu Todesopfern unter den tschechoslowakischen Staatsangehörigen während der nationalsozialistischen Besatzung im Gesamttrahmen des Sammelbandes verloren.

Zusammengefasst ist zu resümieren, dass dem Herausgeberteam ein lesenswerter Band gelungen ist, sowohl für diejenigen, die in der bohemistischen Forschung bewandert sind, als auch für Laien in diesem Feld. Das Buch bietet viel Inspiration, um weitere Forschungen zu den sogenannten Volksdeutschen und den Umsiedlern im Reichsgau Sudetenland anzugehen. So würde es sich lohnen zu untersuchen, ob und wie die sudetendeutsche Bevölkerung von der sudetendeutschen NS-Administration angehalten wurde, sich der Südtiroler anzunehmen, oder ob es zu konkurrierenden Konstellationen zwischen beiden Gruppen kam.

Berlin

Stefan Johann Schatz

Nigrin, Tomáš: The Rise and Decline of Communist Czechoslovakia's Railway Sector.

Central European University Press, Budapest, Vienna, New York 2022, 260 pp., 22 tables, 56 figures, ISBN 978-963-386-476-0.

Between the currency reform of 1953 and the Velvet Revolution of 1989, as Tomáš Nigrin points out in this translation of his 2020 Czech study, the prices of rail tickets in Czechoslovakia remained unchanged. This may seem unbelievable to contemporary readers accustomed to hefty annual price hikes. Thirty-six years with the same ticket prices! This is but one example of how static the Czechoslovak railways were during the Communist period. In fact, the original Czech title of the book, “Od nepostradatelnosti ke stagnaci” (From indispensability to stagnation)¹, seems

more accurate than “the rise and decline of the railway sector” – for it was not the railway sector that changed, but the world around it.

In particular, there was no “rise” during the period studied. Nigrin calls the immediate post-war era a “golden age for rail transport, when the railways were completely dominant in the transport of people and freight” (p. 39). But the real rise of the railways had of course already taken place in the nineteenth century. They dominated the transport sector during the interwar First Czechoslovak Republic as well, which could perhaps more appropriately be called a golden age: With its dense and central network, Czechoslovakia represented a European transport node and featured a renowned high-speed train, the *Slovenská Strela* (Slovak bullet). From the 1960s onwards, however, Czechoslovak trains were increasingly plagued by unreliability, low speed, dirty and worn-out railcars, and staff shortages. The reliance on a few key routes as well as on freight traffic to support the heavy industry caused bottlenecks and maintenance problems. And as a result of the low tariffs in both passenger and freight traffic, the railway sector was chronically underfunded and had to be subsidised from other sectors of the economy. By the end of the 1980s, these problems had intensified so much that they threatened the survival of the entire sector – stagnation thus led to a decline in real terms.

Nigrin discusses these developments with a strong focus on the institutions of the economy. Following an introductory chapter on the railway history of Czechoslovakia from 1918 to 1970, he deals with the “actors and institutions” of railway policy in the centrally planned economy. Using an impressive range of archival sources, he traces even minute changes in the decision-making processes from the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Ministry of Transport all the way down to the Czechoslovak State Railways (ČSD). The subsequent chapter on the “internal mechanisms” of the sector shows how the railways were made to work despite the plan. Employees often had to avail themselves of informal practices and personal connections to procure spare parts. The final and longest chapter discusses the ČSD’s operations, staffing, and cooperation with neighbouring countries. Nigrin argues that to some extent, the ministry and the ČSD conducted an “autonomous transportation diplomacy” (p. 158). The close working relationship across the Iron Curtain with the West German Deutsche Bundesbahn (DB) is especially remarkable.

Nigrin offers an insightful discussion of economic development that often extends beyond the railways. However, he could have put more flesh on the bone of economic history; the book at times loses sight of the people who ran the institutional processes. The role of long-serving Minister of Transport Vladimír Blažek (in office from 1975 to 1988) remains opaque, and most Party and state leadership are not mentioned at all. It is perhaps indicative that Nigrin states six interviews as sources without actually revealing who his interviewees were. The reliance on ministerial and governmental sources means there is little discussion of the experience of

¹ Nigrin, Tomáš: *Od nepostradatelnosti ke stagnaci? Železniční odvětví v Československu v 70. a 80. letech 20. století* [From indispensability to stagnation? The railway industry in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s]. Prague 2020.

travelling or working on the railway. This would be a valid decision were it not counteracted by the reproduction of fifty-six contemporary photographs that are largely not discussed in the text. These images hint at the key role the Czechoslovak railways had in everyday life and social representation: It would be fascinating, for example, to learn more about the two pictures showing anti-Soviet graffiti on railway stations and trains after the Warsaw Pact invasion in August 1968 (p. 144).

Nigrin's main argument is that the inflexibility of a planned economy impeded the necessary modernisation accompanying the changing role of the railways in society. The "technocratic approach" and "preference for making political and professional decisions without regard to public opinion" of the centrally planned economy led to neglect of the railways (p. 44). In something akin to economic self-delusion, however, the railway sector still always fulfilled the plan due to an overreliance on quantitative indicators. There is clearly something to this thesis, but I found it only partially convincing – for the railways' problems were in fact glaringly obvious to the Československé státní dráhy (ČSD) and the Party leadership. They closely monitored the reforms in countries such as West Germany, where the German Railway reacted to the rise of road transport and car ownership by abandoning unprofitable rural lines, focusing on high-speed connections between major cities, and developing suburban transport. And especially after the Prague Spring of 1968, the authorities did also pay close attention to public opinion. Nigrin himself notes that the refusal to raise fares and close unprofitable rural lines despite pressure from the ČSD was intended to avoid an "explosion of local discontent" (p. 94). He thus gives implicit credence to arguments made by historians such as Michal Pullmann and Muriel Blaive that the stability of normalization-era Czechoslovakia was the product of a continuous negotiation between the Party and the people. Cheap trains that went to the tiniest villages were part of this equation – even if they were dirty, slow, and rarely on time. The railways show that citizens had more agency than traditional theories of totalitarianism have acknowledged, if only because the Party feared their wrath. (Ironically, in the context of the climate crisis, the lack of reform during the Communist period may yet turn into an asset: While activists in Germany and elsewhere push decommissioned rail lines to be reopened, the Czech Republic still boasts the densest railway network in the world.)

At times, the book reads too much like a translation. For example, it is a mystery why the translator decided to retain the author's voice in the plural ("we"), as is the Czech academic convention. Turning points of post-war Czechoslovak history, such as the Communist takeover, the Prague Spring, federalisation and normalization, could have been better introduced in the English edition. While such historical context is probably evident to a Czech readership, it might not always be apparent to an international (even a scholarly) one.

Despite these objections, the study is a rewarding read for its details on institutions and economic practice in Communist Czechoslovakia. It charts the stagnation of a key sector of the economy and society in a system bound to an inflexible plan and under a government that clearly feared the power of its citizens.

Munich

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