

*Schäffler, Eva: Der Weg in die Marktwirtschaft. Tschechien und die Privatisierung in den 1990er-Jahren.*

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The closer we get to the present, the harder it is for historians to find a distinctive and original approach that would help them stand out from the crowd of other social scientists. The period of post-communist transformation has been extensively studied by economists, sociologists and political scientists from the very beginning, so the reader who is familiar with their scholarly reflections cannot help but wonder whether a new book on the subject brings new perspectives or facts worth studying.

A new book by Eva Schäffler, a young historian at *Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin*, attempts to address this problem in several ways. First, she has chosen a particular national context that has not yet been the focus of scholarly attention (at least not in English and German-speaking academia). Her monograph *Der Weg in die Marktwirtschaft* (The Road to the Market Economy) focuses on post-communist privatization in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic, with special attention to Czech-German relations. Second, she conducted research in hitherto unexploited archival collections, namely in certain parts of the archives of the

Czech National Bank, the Federal Archives in Berlin, the Political Archives of the Foreign Ministry or the Centre for Voucher Privatization in the Czech National Archives. Even when working with documents that have already been analysed (such as company magazines or documents related to the privatization of Škoda Auto), she manages to use them from a new perspective. Moreover, the passages of the book in which she summarizes the already published literature are concise and readable, which makes *Der Weg in die Marktwirtschaft* a perfect introductory monograph for those interested in the political history of post-communist economic reform who are not yet familiar with the subject.

The book is divided into four parts; the first two summarize the political context of post-communist privatization in Czechoslovakia, the remaining parts contain the results of Schäffler's own archival research on specific problems of voucher privatization, the impact of property issues on the development of Czech-German relations and two case studies of German foreign investment. In the first two chapters, she places conflicts over privatization among other issues on the contemporary political agenda and traces the history of the post-communist reform back to pre-1989 Czechoslovak perestroika, drawing on monographs by Michal Pullmann and Martin Štefek. Building on her own research in the party's main newspaper, *Rudé právo*, Schäffler focuses on a new ritual that emerged in the late 1980s: staged "public debates" designed to confirm the party's political line while giving it the appearance of "genuine" public support. The fact that the actual legislation that emerged during perestroika *de facto* preserved the party's dominance in the economy is made clear in Schäffler's analysis of the key 1988 law on state enterprises, which set the limits of reform at the level of the workplace.

The monograph sometimes borrows minor inaccuracies from the referenced literature: the description of Valtr Komárek's (deputy prime minister in the first post-revolutionary government) political orientation as "reform communist" (p. 78) echoes the criticism of his liberal counterparts (above all Václav Klaus), who sought to label him as backward and misguided. Komárek's views were technocratic and based on extensive state investment in industry, but his connection with the reform communist thought of the 1960s was more imagined than real. On the other hand, some of Schäffler's conclusions from her own research correspond with the most recent research on late socialist reforms; the attempt to shift the state economic regulation towards a more flexible model ("what is not forbidden is allowed", p. 62), potentially compatible with some market elements, sheds new light on the "futures past" of the late socialist rule. In some cases, Schäffler breaks new ground, as when she analyses how the early post-dictatorship institutions coped with the demand for restitution of previously nationalized property months before the relevant legislation came into force.

Another part of the book, devoted to the examination of archival documents, lists several lines of conflict that emerged during the preparation and implementation of the Czechoslovak voucher privatization. Again, Schäffler decided to combine the existing accounts from the secondary literature with her own analysis of primary sources, mainly from the contemporary press, but also from the archives of the Centre for Voucher Privatization (which had not yet been extensively analysed). To

analyse two notable cases of foreign investment in Czechoslovakia/Czechia, she takes an example of a previously successful state-owned company (Škoda Auto, bought by the Volkswagen Group) and one of a nearly bankrupt company (Barum, later bought by Continental). Especially the case of Škoda Auto, for which Schäffler secured the access to the enterprise archive, reveals interesting details: a non-German reader may be surprised to see how much effort the German government put into helping Volkswagen win what was supposed to be the most lucrative bid in post-communist Central Europe. Schäffler also explains how VW's subsequent attempt to revise the terms of the 1991 contract had serious implications for the Czech government's contemporary decisions on future privatization of large companies.

All in all, it is this final chapter on the Barum-Škoda merger that best illustrates the strengths of the monograph and also contains the greatest contribution to scholarly reflection on the subject. A few minor factual inaccuracies (e.g. the first wave of voucher privatization in Slovakia did not end after Mečiar came to power, sometimes the development of different pieces of privatization legislation is confused) and occasional typographical errors in Czech quotations sometimes detract from the otherwise positive impression the book leaves on its reader. *Der Weg in die Marktwirtschaft* is useful for those seeking a readable and thorough guide to the subject, as well as enlightening for those seeking new facts and perspectives.

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Václav Rameš