

Czechoslovak and British Concepts of a Sudeten German Genocide¹

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Czech historiography tries to make us believe that the Sudeten German genocide resulted from a spontaneous reaction of Czech nationals to the brutality of German occupation between 1939 and 1945². This is not true. First of all, there was no significant homeland resistance and atrocities essentially did not happen until after the assassination of Reich Protector Heydrich, an act that was organized and executed from abroad. During the war the Czech population neither offered any considerable resistance nor practiced any effective sabotage against the German war industry.

On the other hand, documents have been unearthed from the archives that prove that the expulsions were thoroughly thought out and prepared by Czech politicians in exile in London during the war, masterminded by Dr. Edvard Beneš, with other Czech exiles such as Dr. Ladislav Feierabend, General Sergěj Ingr, Jaromir Nečas and Dr. Hubert Ripka in supporting roles. Shockingly, those Czech exiles were extensively supported by British intelligence officials, as the British historian Martin Brown recently revealed in his book "Dealing with Democrats"³. As a result, the British government is much more implicated in the Sudeten German genocide than a mere consent to the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia at Potsdam would suggest⁴.

In 1940, the concept of population transfers was not a new one. Beneš himself had considered limited transfer of Sudeten Germans in September 1938 in an attempt to appease Hitler⁵; Greco-Bulgarian and Greco-Turkish exchanges of populations had been carried out under the auspices of the League of Nations in the 1920s⁶; in 1937, the Peel Commission had proposed exchanges or transfers of Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine⁷; the term 'transfer' had appeared in article seven of the Munich Agreement of

¹ The term 'genocide' was coined by the White Russian Jew Lemkin and adopted by the United Nations in Article II of the 1948 Genocide Convention as 'any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part'. All of the above took place in Czechoslovak concentration and slave labor camps, and during the massacres of Aussig, Brünn, Landskron, Postelberg, Prague, Prerau, and others.

² See, for example, Petr Čornej and Jiří Pokorný, *Kurze Geschichte der böhmischen Länder bis zum Jahr 2000*, Prague 2000.

³ Brown, Martin David, *Dealing with Democrats*, Frankfurt 2006.

⁴ At Potsdam in August 1945 the victorious Allies requested of the Czechoslovak government an "orderly and humane" execution of the expulsions. This raises a question: Is there such a thing as an "orderly and humane" genocide?

⁵ Luža, Radomir, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans: A Study of Czech-German Relations 1933-1962*, London 1964; Wiskemann, Elizabeth, *Germany's Eastern Neighbors: Problems relating to the Oder-Neisse Line and the Czech Frontier Regions*, Oxford 1956.

⁶ R. Hischon (ed), *Crossing the Aegean. An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange between Greece and Turkey*, Oxford, 2003; D. Pentzopoulous, *The Balkan Exchange of Minorities and its Impact on Greece*, London 2002.

⁷ B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestine Refugee Problem Revisited*, Cambridge 2004.

1938 in reference to the transfer of territory and population from Czechoslovakia to Germany; Nazi Germany had made use of population transfers of ethnic Germans in Italy and the Baltic States. Techniques similar to transfers had long been practiced in the British Empire and now were to reemerge in British strategic thinking. Surely, Czech and British officials in the 1940s must have been aware of these exchanges.

Following suit, in a speech to the Royal Society on 22 January 1940 Beneš raised the possibility of population transfers as a solution to Czechoslovakia's minority problems⁸. According to Brown (p.273), "he returned to this theme during conferences held in Oxford on 8 March and 4 April, both organized and sponsored by the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIAA), where he proposed undertaking some limited internal and external transfers of Sudeten Germans, combined with border rectifications". Simultaneously, ethnic cleansing of Sudeten Germans was the subject of a research paper produced by the Foreign Research and Press Service (FRPS), a think tank that was created in late summer 1939 by the British Foreign Office in response to the developing international crises as "both a reference library and a source of information on the background of current problems" (Brown). The FRPS staff included many of the foremost British experts on European, international, and imperial affairs and, most significantly, Robert Seton-Watson, a British Slavic scholar and a close friend and collaborator in anti-Austrian-Hungarian clandestine activities of the first Czechoslovak president, T.G. Masaryk, before and during World War I. Both men met for the first time in Rotterdam in 1914 when Masaryk handed Seton-Watson "a lot of secret information, some of sensational kind"⁹. Seton-Watson was a member of the British delegation to the Paris Peace Conference 1919 and was involved in the negotiations over Czechoslovakia's frontiers and the inclusion of three million ethnic Germans into that state.

It was under the auspices of FSRP that in May 1940 John David Mabbott, "an academic political philosopher with some knowledge of minority issues in eastern Europe" (Brown), completed a memorandum "The Transfer of Minorities". Brown states: "Crucially, Mabbott's memorandum not only suggested that 'transfers' were indeed possible, based on evidence from previous exchanges of populations and supported by Hitler's own opinion on the subject, but he concluded that it was probably the best solution to Czechoslovakia's ethnic minority problems. ... Mabbott went on to set out a clear framework in which 'transfers' might occur, including an assessment of the social and financial costs of such an operation. Lastly, and most importantly, he concluded that such large-scale 'transfer' would have to be undertaken with international consent and co-operation." According to Brown, "...Seton-Watson handed a copy of Mabbott's original paper to Beneš (even though it was clearly marked secret) and several distinct similarities between it and later plans can be identified. Whilst a direct correlation between these two documents has yet to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt, it is very likely that Beneš used Mabbott's paper to produce a credible policy on 'transfers' that was acceptable to the British authorities. ... It should, however, be made absolutely clear that the subsequent evolution of a policy of 'transfers' was driven forward by the Czechoslovak Government in exile and not by the British Foreign Office".

⁸ Taborsky, E., *Politics in Exile*, in Mamatey and Luža (eds) *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic*

⁹ Kalvoda, Josef, *The Genesis of Czechoslovakia*, Boulder 1986.

Interestingly, in the Taborsky¹⁰ files in the archives of the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford University has been located a typewritten copy of a document with similar content but a different title than the Mabbott paper. It is entitled "Minority Regimes and the Transfer of Populations in Central Europe after this War" and is subdivided into the following sections: Four ways of dealing with minorities; the necessity for a radical separation of the nationalities in central Europe; the cession of territory; transfer of populations; conventions regarding transfers and their content; international participation and assistance; exemption from transfer; the region of the remaining minorities; and transfer of populations as a factor in the solution of the great political problems of post-war Europe. Neither author nor date are specified, but it probably originated in 1942 and, if needed, the author could possibly be identified from handwriting samples shown in the margins of this paper.

It possibly was the content of these memoranda that Beneš handed over to Foreign Commissar Molotov on 14 December 1943 in Moscow during his visit to sign, against the advice of the British government, a "Pact of friendship and mutual assistance after the war between the Czechoslovak Republic and the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics" which, as it turned out later, was a significant leap toward placing post-war Czechoslovakia under Soviet yoke. Beneš handed his expulsion plans to Molotov as a "first draft of the fundamental principles of the transfers" which he considered "a radical solution, the realization of which would make me very happy." He indicated that he already had discussed the transfer issue with Stalin who agreed with plans and concept. He described 'his' Germans as the worst war criminals of them all who deserve the severest punishment. He asked Molotov to study his transfer plans and to let him know what he thinks of it.¹¹

Molotov didn't dare object to Beneš's plans which Stalin already had approved. Subsequently, on 15 December 1943 Beneš's acting foreign minister Ripka declared in a report on the Czech-Soviet treaty to the Czechoslovak State Council: "We can rest assured that Czechoslovakia's great Soviet ally will grant her all effective support in her endeavor, the aim of which is that Czechoslovakia should emerge from this war as a strong state, internally well balanced to the utmost possible extent, and nationally as homogeneous as possible, having as its basis the indissoluble unity determined by destiny

¹⁰ Edvard Taborsky was a Czechoslovak diplomat and Beneš's personal aid 1939-1945.

¹¹ Mastny, Vojtek, *The Beneš-Stalin-Molotov Conversations in December 1943: New Documents*, in *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Band 20, 1972.

Mastny's paper is a compilation of diary notes of Jaromir Smutny, who attended the talks as Chief of the President's Chancellery. Smutny's widow donated her late husband's papers to Columbia University where they were discovered by Mastny. The conversation between Beneš and Molotov took place on 14 December 1943, which was more of a monologue than a dialogue in which Beneš identifies himself as a hatemonger, obsessed by vengeance, mainly toward 'his' Germans but also against his western allies by which he felt betrayed in 1938. Molotov responded scarcely as, for example, by a smile of disbelief when Beneš offered him the nationalization not only of German, but also of Czechoslovak banks and industries.

of Czechs and Slovaks together with the sub-Carpathian Slavs, who are united with them".

A few days later, on 21 December 1943, Beneš himself said in a message to the Czech people broadcast from Moscow: "... the Soviet Union sincerely desires a strong and consolidated Czechoslovak Republic, nationally as homogeneous as possible, which would be a real good and strong friend and collaborator with the Soviet peoples in the maintenance of a lasting European peace." On another occasion Beneš declared in Moscow: "Our Republic will be a national State of Czechs, Slovaks and the people of sub-Carpathia".

In January 1944 the Executive of the Sudeten German Social Democratic Party under the leadership of Wenzel Jaksch took a stand against Beneš's expulsion plans¹². They show that, according to the 1930 census, Czechoslovakia's 14,729,536 citizens consisted of 10,325,545 Slavs and 4,403,991 non-Slavs, including 3,318,445 Germans and conclude: "Even the most liberal interpretation of the term 'as homogeneous as possible' would imply the elimination from the State of millions. Furthermore, as Czechoslovakia claims her pre-Munich frontiers, this does ... mean (nothing less than) mass transfer of populations".

The social democratic memorandum then addresses extent and implications of the planned population transfers: "The full magnitude of the problem emerges only if it is judged not in isolation but in its wider aspect. Similar demands have been put forward by the Poles, whose claim to East Prussia and Silesia is coupled with the demand that these territories should be cleared of their German inhabitants, who are an overwhelming majority. Disregarding the question of 'un-mixing the Balkan populations' and other problems of this kind, which would undoubtedly be raised ... and counting for the moment only Germans, as many as ten million people are involved in the plan of 'establishing a more permanent equilibrium'¹³ by enforced transfer of populations.

"It can safely be contended that five years ago, at the outbreak of the war, suggestions of this kind would have met with unanimous and indignant repudiation from all progressive quarters. That they are now seriously presented as a solution of the nationality problem only shows how far contemporary 'realistic thinking' is removed from the ideological issues of an anti-Fascist war, how nationalistic and militaristic considerations, in short: power politics, have again gained the upper hand over the ideals for which the United Nations still profess to fight.

"The British government have solemnly declared that they will never consent to mass reprisals against whole populations. The uprooting of millions, the destruction of their whole social existence - what else would it mean than mass reprisals? The guilty, the less guilty and the innocent could never be sorted out in this process. How, then, can it be reconciled with the declared policy of the British government, or for that matter with the

¹² Typewritten memorandum "Mass Expulsions of Sudeten Germans?" dated 6 January 1944, located in the archives of the Hoover Institution of War and Peace at Stanford University.

¹³ Beneš in a speech in Chicago on 25 May 1943

Atlantic Charter? However, we do not wish to dismiss the problem with this general rejection on humanitarian grounds, nor do we allow ourselves the cheap consolation that such plans are impracticable, anyway, and the more so while fifteen to twenty million displaced people, victims of Hitler's war, are anxiously waiting for their repatriation. We want to go more fully into the special Sudeten problem.

"After Munich, the most convincing argument for the Czechs' case was the crippling of Czechoslovakia's economic life by the loss of valuable, and indeed indispensable, resources. She lost, above all, most of her export industries, upon which her economy depended to a large extent. To give only a few figures, Czechoslovakia lost 95% of her lignite mining, 88% of her linen industry, 70% of her wool industry, 55% of her cotton industry, 70% of her glass industry, and 85% of her chinaware industry. Moreover, the Sudeten industries have been substantially expanded during the war, and though much of the inflated war industries will become useless after the war, certain developments, e.g. the increased utilization of electric power and gas, or the erection of a big plant - one of the largest in Europe - for the production of synthetic petrol, will remain permanent assets.

"If Czechoslovakia cannot live, or at least not prosper, without these resources, can she satisfactorily exist without the manpower trained to operate them? The Sudeten German population in 1930 numbered 683,000 wage earners, the overwhelming majority of whom were employed in industry. They include a very large proportion of highly skilled workers and craftsmen - in the glass industry they might be styled artists. Granted, by the application of ruthless methods they can be expelled, but can they be replaced? Would not the loss of labor, skill and experience inflict upon Czechoslovakia an economic disadvantage hardly less serious than the loss of material resources?

"Secondly, 23.4% of the Sudeten Germans are engaged in agriculture. Most Sudeten peasants are small holders, gaining a poor living from their stony soil. Only their innate and tenacious attachment to these inherited holdings induces them to get any yield at all. Their expulsion and replacement, provided they can be replaced, would lead to a considerable loss of agricultural output, and that at a time when every bit of grain will be a priceless asset."

"It might be argued that Czechoslovakia will have to face economic disadvantages for the sake of political stability, and that she would have to get rid of her German population, if it were a source of disturbance. This argument, however, is not supported by history. The shoe is rather on the other foot: It was the deep economic crisis of the thirties, saddling the Sudeten Germans with nearly 500,000 unemployed¹⁴, that largely contributed to making the broad masses despair of democracy. Czech-German relations must not be judged by the stormy events of an exceptional period, but by the fact that Czechs and Sudeten Germans have lived together for centuries in the countries of Bohemia and Moravia, which, until the treaty of Versailles created the Czechoslovak Republic, were parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire. In independent Czechoslovakia, German

¹⁴ Although the Sudeten Germans numbered only 22% of the total population, they included about 50% of the unemployed.

democratic parties joined the governmental majority as early as 1926, and for almost ten years those Sudeten German parties which stood for collaboration with the Czechs in a common state represented the preponderance of the Sudeten German population. The majority gained by Henlein in 1935 (and later, in the municipal elections, 1938), in a period of deep economic distress, of lethargic weakness of European democracy, and through the connivance of Czech reactionaries, did not express the real will of the German population.

"Czech politicians still emphatically deny that Czechoslovakia was, in 1938, broken up from within. They show thus a realistic evaluation of the significance of elections held in a state of mass psychosis and mass terrorization. A state is not, after all, broken up by shouting, flag waving and casting votes. In September 1938, at the height of international tension, while all Europe bowed to Hitler's will, his Sudeten agent, Henlein, attempted a revolt. The vast majority of the Sudeten population remained absolutely passive, and a few gendarmes sufficed to restore order, although the prestige of the administration was then at its lowest. When this happened in face of an all-powerful Nazi-Germany, we have not the slightest doubt that after the destruction of Nazism a Czechoslovak Republic, built on sound economic foundations and ruled democratically, in the true spirit of T.G. Masaryk, would have in the Sudeten Germans a constructive and not a disruptive element.

"We deny emphatically that such (expulsion) plans are in the true interest of the Czech people, for whom we feel a great admiration. Our movement has a fine tradition of (a) common struggle against Nazism with the democratic masses of Czechoslovakia. Three thousand Sudeten German socialists in exile are living witnesses to this struggle. Tens of thousands have paid for their stubborn defense of Czechoslovak democracy with years of imprisonment, detention in concentration camps, and even death. In the underground movement the struggle goes on, in spite of the difficult conditions of underground actions in a country where the workers are dispersed over thousands of small towns and little villages, where the young people are sent to their death on the Russian plains, where hundreds of thousands have been drafted for work into Germany, where the factories are crowded with alien workers and prisoners of war, and where there is one Gestapo spy for every ten workers. Still our underground cadres are intact and maintaining the tradition of 1938. They are prepared to fight for the military defeat of Germany, but how can they be expected to risk their lives for the expulsion of their countrymen? We have not abandoned the 1938 tradition. It is being destroyed by plans which are incompatible with the spirit of 1938. Only by a genuine understanding on a truly democratic basis can it be restored."

The call to reason by the Sudeten German social democrats remained unheeded. After World War II had ended, three million Sudeten Germans were deprived of their civil and human rights, of their possessions and of their homeland with 240,000 dead. Today, 65 years later, the Sudeten German national group (Volksgruppe) has been eradicated; decrees and laws that then were created to legalize the Sudeten German genocide are still on the books of the Czech and Slovak judicial systems; in 2004 the Czech parliament unanimously declared them "unimpeachable, unalterable and unchangeable"; the majority

of the Czech and Slovak peoples still consider the violation of human rights by the inhuman treatment of their German countrymen right and just; and all across the Czech Republic, Beneš statues are being erected in honor of the mastermind of the Sudeten German genocide. And only a very few individuals on planet Earth, mostly private citizens at that, object to it. ●