

*McDermott, Kevin: The Czech Red Unions, 1919–1929: A Study of their Relations with the Communist Party and the Moscow Internationals.*

East European Monographs, Boulder, 1988, 350 S., Tafeln.

In *The Czech Red Unions, 1918–1929*, Kevin McDermott has undertaken to debunk the myth of the international communist movement as a monolithic and highly disciplined entity increasingly controlled by the Soviet leaders of the Comintern and the Profintern. He portrays the Red trade unions and the Czechoslovak Communist Party (the KSČ) as reluctant from the beginning to follow blindly the Moscow line and as tending to pursue autonomous, nationally specific policies often at odds with those of the Communist International. McDermott interprets this striving for autonomy as a precedent for the attempts from 1945 to 1948, and again in 1968, to develop a “Czechoslovak road to socialism.” Although the author does not consider the reform communist movement of the 1960s part of a continuum of developments in the 1920s, he notes that both the desire for independence and autonomy from central control and the efforts to seek domestic solutions to domestic problems have been evident in the KSČ from the beginning.

This volume does not simply concentrate on relations between Prague and Moscow, but rather focuses on the often acrimonious relations of the Red trade unions

not only with both the "reformist" Czech trade unions and the KSC, but also within the movement itself. In the first three chapters, McDermott traces developments in the Czech Social Democratic Party and trade unions under the Habsburg Monarchy until 1918, and in the First Republic until 1922, when the Red trade union center (*Mezinárodní všeodborový svaz*, the MVS) was founded. Chapters four to eight examine developments in the Red trade unions between 1922 and 1929, while chapter nine places the Czechoslovak experience in its European context, providing an overview of Moscow's relations with the communist parties and trade unions of France, Germany, and Great Britain.

McDermott does an excellent job of detailing the dissension in the Czech Social Democratic Party and trade unions, the formation of the KSC and the MVS, disagreements over the structure of the MVS, and relations with the reformist trade unions. The situation was complicated by dissent within the party over directives from Moscow, as well as the attitude of many Red trade union leaders that the unions should be independent of the party. This sorry story of missed opportunity, bickering, and internal strife ends with the split of the MVS in 1929.

The one weakness in McDermott's study is his failure to treat sufficiently the role the Red trade unions in the German-speaking parts of the Czech lands. Although he informs the reader that he is concentrating on the Czech Red trade unions to the detriment of this area (and Slovakia), KSC and MVS policies make such a neat division virtually impossible. For example, German Social Democrats-cum-Communists Karl Kreibich and Alois Neurath, who played relatively important roles in the events described, are not adequately identified, nor does the author speculate on the possible effect of nationality on their attitudes, something which might have enriched the book. There are also a few factual errors: German-Austria did not consist of the four German-speaking areas of the Czech lands; they were merely part of it (p. 36). These regions were occupied by Czech troops in November and December of 1918, not January of 1919 (p. 36).

These remarks aside, this well-documented book has filled a lacuna in the historiography of the working-class movement in Czechoslovakia. In addition to mining thoroughly the All-Trade Union Archive (*Všeodborový archiv ROH*), due to his knowledge of Russian he had also been able to employ Russian-language documentary sources.