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INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

## From Kokoschka to Modigliani Czech-German Relations Today

by Chandler Rosenberger

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Dear Peter,

**Usti nad Labem, Czech Republic** -- A man asks for reconciliation and is not welcomed. He asks for forgiveness, offers forgiveness, but is spurned. Later he makes his own peace alone. He walks across a bridge where his ancestors were shot and tosses flowers down into the river into which their bodies fell. Then he goes home -- to Germany.

The man, Dr. Dieter Leder, teaches math in Dresden. But on July 31 he traveled an hour south to a Czech town, Usti nad Labem, that he still calls "Aussig" its German name. Leder and some forty other Germans had come to commemorate the 49th anniversary of the deaths of their ancestors, ethnic Germans who had lived in the "Sudetenland," the broad swath of land within Czechoslovakia along the German border.

Leder's relatives, along with 200 other Germans, were shot on the bridge by the "Revolucni Guarda," the postwar Czechoslovak military police entrusted to restore Prague's authority over a region



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that, populated largely by ethnic Germans, had attempted to secede from pre-World War II Czechoslovakia and join Hitler's Germany. Killed in reprisal for an explosion at a munitions dump two weeks before, the 200 who died on the bridge over the Labe River in Usti were a small proportion of ethnic Germans lynched and shot before finally being expelled.

Of the many anniversaries of World War II events now being celebrated, those commemorating incidents of harsh treatment of ethnic Germans by the postwar Czechoslovak government are especially controversial. The collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe has allowed open, even 'revisionist' discussion of events after the war to slip out of the *samizdat* journals in which they were published and into the public realm. That sphere had previously been dominated by orthodox Communist ideology which broadly condemned "revanchist Germans" supported by their "Nazi relatives" in the "unreconstructed Federal Republic of Germany."



**Hitler's division of Czechoslovakia 1938 to 1939 and Contemporary Central Europe.**

But the division of Czechoslovakia and the reunification of Germany since 1989 has also redrawn the map of Central Europe, eerily remaking it in the image of Hitler's "Mitteleuropa." The Czech Lands and Slovakia were last divided as a consequence of the 1938 Munich agreement, which led five months later to the founding of a Slovak puppet state and German occupation of the "Bohemian and Moravian Protectorate." During the division, 155,000 Jews and tens of thousands of Czechs and Slovaks died.



The genuinely unreconstructed Nazis that have swept into post-Communist Central Europe along with other Western influences have given Czechs afraid of German influence ample demons to populate their nightmares.

Sometimes it seems there is no escape, that William Faulkner's description of the American South applies as well to Central Europe. When one watches Czech nationalists lob eggs at Germans carrying wreaths for their dead, or hears unapologetic former Nazis refer to Sudeten towns as "occupied" by the Czechs, it is

tempting to say of Ustl, as Faulkner did of the South, that "here, the past isn't dead. It isn't even past."

But such open clashes are rare and usually merely fodder for journalists eager to find someone else to put in the extreme a view that justifies their own more moderate prejudices. Among ordinary Bavarians and even among leaders of the dominant political party, the Christian Social Union, bloodlust for the Sudeten 'Heimat' is almost unknown. Thanks to forty years of Communist propaganda, Czechs are far more susceptible to quiet fears of Germans *per se*.

History has been obscured only when contemporary political issues are at stake. Among Czech and German politicians with mass appeal, one has excelled in his populist use of such fears as do exist. Perhaps knowing his fellow countrymen all too well, Czech premier Vaclav Klaus has obstinately refused even to discuss the past. But he has struck a hard line for contemporary reasons. To Bavarians, long used to wielding influence in their decentralized federation, Klaus' dismissal of "special interest" groups within their *Land* (or 'state' in the American sense) has convinced them that he is not the man to take the Czech Republic into a federal Europe they imagine will resemble the German federation. If Klaus clings possessively to the exclusive rights of representatives of a sovereign state to discuss cross-border issues, they wonder, how will he fit into a "Europe of the Regions?"

That, Klaus might answer, is exactly the point. The Czech premier no more wants to water down a sovereign state's rights in such a Europe than his idol Margaret Thatcher had. To minimalists like Klaus and his tutor, regional administration, either within or beyond their borders, muddies the waters between the autonomous citizen and the responsible state. Klaus did not push through the division of one federation, the Czech and Slovak republic, only to be thrown into a morass called "Central Europe" that he imagines is largely myth.

But Klaus' obstinance might yet come back to haunt him. In purely political terms, the Czechs will have to learn to get along with their powerful neighbors in Munich and Bonn. Klaus can rant against regionalism all he likes, but should not expect the Germans to take much notice as they plod towards their own dream of a federal Europe. And on a cultural level, Klaus' pigheaded and populist abuse of Germans is preventing a crucial debate about Czech identity from taking place. Can the Czechs lay exclusive claim to the cultural inheritance of Bohemia? Or should the Czechs mourn the loss of the two other elements -- the Germans and the Jews -- that have been expunged from their lands? If unable to acknowledge the harm Czechs themselves have done to their country, Prague's political class risks fertilizing the soil for radical, muddled-headed extremists who are both anti-German *and* anti-Semitic.

Klaus, of course, can get away with this for now. The only ethnic minority that might have demanded collective political rights within a compact territory in the Czech lands was expelled almost fifty years ago. Klaus does not have to negotiate

with Hungarians, as any Slovak premier must, or with the heavily-armed "Krajan Serbs" that will plague Croat leaders for years to come. Perhaps, as the Czechs so often say, they simply lucked out. They inherited their "ethnically cleansed" republic.

And to give Klaus his due, even moderate Germans like Leder still fail to grasp the nettle that Hitler's systematic destruction of old Bohemia cannot be compared to the sufferings, however traumatic, that the Czechoslovak government meted out on his parents. The old ethnically-mixed Bohemia was destroyed twice -- once by the Nazis, then by the Communists. But to weld the entire event into one monster called totalitarianism as Leder does<sup>1</sup> is to muddle discrete events that had discrete consequences. A murky "common history" of suffering that embraces and nearly equates Hitler and Benes will leave the people of the region more divided than reconciled.

### **The Heart of the Matter**

It is easy to see why Sudeten Germans feel so aggrieved. From 1945 to 1947, Benes' government, under the watchful eyes of the Allied occupiers, executed "population transfers" of Germans and Hungarians by decree. All of the decrees, proclaimed when Benes returned in 1945, were later confirmed by Czechoslovakia's first postwar elected parliament.

Four of Benes's decrees hit the Sudeten Germans (and Hungarians) particularly hard. Decree number 5, proclaimed on 19 May 1945, proclaimed that "Germans, Hungarians and other collaborators" may be denied the right to hold property. Decree 12 allowed the seizure of agricultural land held by the minorities. Decree 33 (proclaimed on Aug. 2, 1945) took Czechoslovak citizenship away from Hungarians and Germans. Decree 108 (25 Oct. 1945) expanded seizures of property to all "moveable and unmovable property."<sup>2</sup> In theory, subjects of the transfers and expropriations could challenge the rulings by demonstrating that they had actively opposed the Nazis. But in practice only a handful were allowed to. Nearly 40,000 Germans died during the expulsions (some put the number as high as 250,000). The 350,000 that remained in the country were denied educations and jobs.

But were the decrees justified? Were all Germans Nazis, and all Nazi collaborators Germans? Does "collective guilt" fit the bill?

It is obviously improbable that *every* German expelled was a collaborator. In the 1935 Czechoslovak elections, the pro-Nazi Sudeten Party of Konrad Heinlein won 68 percent of the German vote. The remaining 32 percent was divided among the Social Democrats, the German Agrarian Party and the Czechslovak People's Party, all of which expressed loyalty to the Czechoslovak state.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most famous example of injustice was the seizure of lands held by the von Lichtenstein family. Although the principality was one of the few states in the world to oppose the Munich agreement, von Lichtenstein family members in the Czech Lands were

inaccurately classified as "Germans" and deprived of some 160,000 hectares.<sup>4</sup>

It is equally improbable that only Germans and Hungarians were Nazi collaborators. Bohomil Hrabal was not drawing merely on his imagination when he sketched the Czech fans of Hitler one finds in *Closely Observed Trains*; the Nazi regime carefully cultivated the extremist "Vlaicha" group to put pressure on the protectorate government. Nor, if treason to the Czechoslovak state were reason for expulsion, could one say that supporters of Slovak independence had been treated as harshly as the Sudeten Germans; if they had, there would be far fewer Slovaks at home today. Of course Czech and Slovak collaborators were tried and often hanged. But Germans and Hungarians might have been given the same, discriminating justice.<sup>5</sup>



**The Czech Lands today. Areas shaded were regions where the majority spoke German according to the 1930 census.**

However flawed and irrelevant the Benes decrees are, some answer, one cannot annul them, since that would weaken the moral inheritance of the current Czech government. Legally, the government is heir to every previous Czech regime, including the Communist one (the protectorate government of the Germans is treated as an occupying force.) Morally, the current Czech government identifies with every democratically-elected government, especially Benes', which endured exile. "Were the Germans 'expelled' or 'transferred'?" Olrich Horak, president of the Club of Czech Borderland Dwellers in Usti nad Labem, asked me. "It was approved by an elected parliament. No one has the right to change that."

How admirable the Benes government was is a huge question of its own, and one I'm not qualified to address.<sup>6</sup> But the history even of asking that question is itself revealing. The debate over the validity of the Benes decrees began during the Prague Spring and was thereafter conducted in *samizdat*. Jan Mlynarik's

underground paper, "Theses on the Expulsion of the Czechoslovak Germans," argued that since population transfers were the specialty of totalitarian regimes, the Benes decrees marked Czechoslovakia's first steps into dictatorship.

In his *Judge on Trial* the former dissident novelist Ivan Klima puts flesh on this abstract idea. Klima portrays anti-German feelings as the first step a young student takes on his way to becoming a Communist *apparatchik*. Walking through the woods of Northern Bohemia, the protagonist, named Adam, and a classmate come across the ruins of German churches destroyed in reprisal attacks and left abandoned after the expulsions. "Some of the gravestones lay overturned . . ." Adam remembers. "Stained glass from the church windows crunched beneath our feet. . . " He then recalls how he defended the attacks. "When we lay down to sleep in an abandoned woodcutter's hut," he remembers,

my friend told me that we had entered an era of barbarism and soon we would witness the new Vandals strutting about the burnt-out Forum and dancing their war dances in the ruins of the temple.

"I felt duty-bound to contradict him, to excuse somehow the havoc we had seen. The real barbarians, I told him, were those who had started the war. Now, on the contrary, we were at the start of a new era, an era of freer people. It no longer mattered who started it, he replied. What mattered now was who assumed their mantle. He had no way of judging whether the new era would bring greater freedom, but one thing he could see: that it lacked nobility of spirit. And what was the use of freedom without nobility of the spirit?"<sup>7</sup>

While defenders of the decrees are a dime-a-dozen among ex-Communists, it is very difficult to find a former dissident who does not have his or her doubts. But when they argue that the decrees ought to be annulled, they are quickly shouted down by Czechs who point to the extremists on the border's other side.

### **The extremists**

Extremists among the Sudeten Germans have given anti-German Czechs ample ammunition. Take, for example, a booklet published in 1992 by the Sudeten German Landsmannschaft entitled *Czechoslovakia: The end of a False Construction*. The booklet features essays by self-proclaimed and unapologetic soldiers of the Third Reich revising history and current affairs almost beyond recognition.

Alfred Schickel, a schoolteacher from Ingolstadt, applauds the Slovak nationalist Vladimir Meciar as a worthy heir to a patriotic tradition that began with fascist collaborators such as Josef Tiso. Alfred Ardelts defends Nazi terror in the Bohemian-Moravian Protectorate as a unfortunate but necessary part of the Reich's "battle of

life and death." Ardelt goes on to argue that the Czechs are "occupying" Sudeten towns, such as Liberec (Reichenberg), that "do not belong to them. . . (I)t is German land." Seigfried Zoglmann complains that Havel's attendance at celebrations marking the assassination of Protectorate governor Reinhard Heyrich was "a grotesque example of Czech chauvanism."<sup>8</sup> Zoglmann, a frequent speaker at Sudeten meetings, was chief of the Hitler Youth under the Protectorate. Such statements have received great play in the Czech press, especially in the papers of the former Communist party. But even Egon Lansky, a respected political commentator who favors annulling the Benes decrees, described the booklet as fascist.

Nor have the efforts of some Sudeten German activists since 1989 endeared them to the Czech elite. Daniel Kroupa, a vice president of the Civic Democratic Alliance, complained in May 1993 that Sudeten Germans had supported Slovak nationalist parties in the 1992 Czechoslovak elections. Although Kroupa gave no evidence, the Austrian business magazine *Wirtschaftswoche* had previously claimed that a political foundation close to the Bavarian CSU had helped Meciar. "According to Bonn experts," the magazine reported, "the CSU intends to weaken the CSFR in order to strengthen the position and claims of Sudeten Germans against Prague."<sup>9</sup> British researcher James de Candole discovered strong financial links between some Sudeten German leaders and Slovak banks directed by nationalists. In 1991 the Bayerische Sparkassen-und Giroverbund (BSG), directed by Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft president Franz Neubauer, signed a one year cooperation deal with the Slovak State Savings Bank.<sup>10</sup> The latter bank lent Meciar's campaign funds for the 1992 elections. Had Neubauer want to channel funds to Meciar, he would have had a convenient machine at his disposal.

### **Moderates squeezed out**

Neubauer and his associates are as noxious as they come. But by staunchly defending the Benes decrees, Klaus has weakened German moderates and strengthened the extremists.

Radicals like Neubauer used to have little sway, largely because they are not representative. Peter Becher, a 41-year-old German writer, runs the Adalbert Stifter Union, named for the nineteenth-century writer who chronicled the story of the von Rosenberg noble family of southern Bohemia. Becher is also the first German and first foreign member of the Czech PEN club in Prague. In an interview in *De Spiegel*, Becher complained about the sense of history of people like Neubauer.

"The Germans led a terror regime after the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1938. But the Union of the Expelled will never acknowledge that. . . Why don't the Sudeten Germans apologize officially and publicly, in the way that Havel did on behalf of his country to the Sudeten Germans?"

In another interview, Becher said the Sudeten Germans had damned themselves.

Despite the "national struggle" that the Sudeten Germans led from 1918 to 1938, their life under the Czechoslovak government was infinitely better than their first months under the Nazi dictatorship. "The Sudeten Germans do not want to remember that among the tragic things that happened to them was the senseless death of 180,000 soldiers on Hitler's eastern front," Becher said, "but they will emphasize every single one who died during the expulsion."<sup>11</sup>

Nor should the Sudeten Germans necessarily regret their expulsion from a country quickly falling under Communist dominance, writes the German historian Ferdinand Seibt in a Czech journal. "Before 1945, Hitler's henchmen drove helpless deportees into gas; after 1945, the "Revolutionary Guard" drove the Germans into freedom."<sup>12</sup>

Leaders of the Bavaria's ruling CSU say Neubauer has little real influence. Charles Weston, a Texan-turned-foreign-policy-specialist at CSU, said the Sudeten Germans bark far more loudly than they bite. In order to win elections in a *Land* of 11 million, Weston said, the CSU has to cater some to the 2.5 million Sudeten Germans. But the party would never adopt the platform of the extremists like Neubauer, Weston said, since the Sudetens always vote for the CSU anyway. The only competition on the right, the Republican Party, has no interest in the issue.

True, the Republicans won 6.8 percent of the Bavarian vote in European elections held in June. And they did do best along the Czech-German border. But Otmar Wallner, head of the Republicans' election campaign in Bavaria, showed almost no interest in the Sudeten Germans and said his party had no contact with Neubauer. He said the party was more interested in keeping Czechs from working in Germany and in restricting German foreign investment. "Workers feel it," Wallner said, "whether they have lost their jobs or fear losing their jobs."

The CSU, on the other hand, favors open borders, free trade and early admission of the Czech Republic to the European Union, Weston said. And it does not want to jeopardize German investment in the Czech Lands by pursuing old territorial claims.

"The CSU always says (to the Sudetens), 'OK, we are the party you can trust, but we can't accept some of the aggressive claims that are made within the Sudeten Germans,'" Weston said. "We will pursue a moderate stand."

Speaking to the "Union of the Expelled" in June 1994, CSU leader and Federal Finance Minister Theo Waigel did not call for a redrawing of boundaries and did not celebrate Slovak separatism. He did denounce the Benes decrees. "Just as we have acknowledged the crimes that were committed in Germany's name, so we expect the other side acknowledge the crimes they committed against Germans. It is tragic that the Czech side is not yet ready to distance themselves from the Benes Decrees violations of national rights and to declare them void." But he made no



plea for restitution of German property.

Instead he celebrated the Sudeten claim to "Heimatsrecht," or "Homeland Rights." "Heimatsrecht" is a slippery concept; maybe that's why so many Sudeten Germans use it. It does not mean the right to one's old home, or homeland; The CSU opposes dual Czech-German citizenship that some Sudetens say would give them their just right to purchase property in the Czech Republic. Instead, Waigel called for the rights of minorities in Europe to practice their religions freely and to speak languages traditional in the region. Such rights, Waigel said, are the key to a strong Europe, "built from visible regions into strong states that are then bound together in Europe." <sup>13</sup>

And there's the rub. For all their protests that they want to live in a "European Germany, not a German Europe," politicians in Bonn want a federal Europe that looks a lot like the *Bundesrepublik* itself. Article 23 of the German constitution (the 'Basic Law') calls for a European Union "which is bound to democratic, legal, social and federal principles and that of subsidiarity, and secures a protection of basic rights essentially comparable to that of this Basic Law." As the British historian Timothy Garton Ash has written, "Now these things might be good in themselves . . . German federalism has much to recommend it . . . But these were German things, and it would be obfuscation to pretend otherwise."<sup>14</sup>

Klaus does not want to live in a German Europe, or a federal Europe of any sort. Receiving the Konrad Adenauer Award in December 1993, Klaus said Adenauer's vision of a united Europe seemed outdated to Czechs. "Of course we want to become part of advanced Europe," he said, "and I am convinced that our basic conditions for this are better than anyone else's. But we want to become part of it as a sovereign political entity, as the Czech Republic, which will not dissolve into the vastness of Europe."

Nor does he want the German federal model for the Czech Lands. Not because they are German, a Czech foreign ministry specialist told me, but because they are federal. In June this year he vehemently opposed a plan to introduce regional administrative districts similar to the German *Länder*, then attempted to dilute the plan by kicking the number of districts up to 81.<sup>15</sup>

So when the German government insisted that Klaus speak to Sudeten German representatives, Klaus bristled (calling the invitation a "provocation") -- not because they were 'neo-Nazis' but because this was not how he wanted to conduct business. No Czech diplomatic or government officials attended the May 1993 Sudeten German Congress, although many German heavyweights, such as Waigel and Bavarian state minister Max Striebl, were there. A month later a fudge, a plan by which 'non-governmental' committees of leaders of the governing parties, was scrapped in the face of nationalist, opposition criticism.

And Klaus has often gone beyond the call of duty to insult the Sudeten Germans. Streibl was reportedly furious with the Czech premier when, in March 1993, Klaus announced that the two had spent "less than 40 seconds" of their talks discussing the Sudeten question. At joint press conference, Klaus reaffirmed that Czech government would not negotiate with Sudeten Germans.<sup>16</sup> Streibl, a Czech foreign ministry specialist said, feared Klaus was undermining Streibl's position at home.

### **A necessary evil?**

Some Czechs who do not like Klaus nonetheless say the Benes decrees must stand to prevent Sudeten Germans from reclaiming land under the Czech Republic's restitution laws. But far from preventing such claims, the Benes decrees may advance them.

In September, when Rudolf Dreithaler, a Czech citizen of Sudeten German origin, will take his case to the country's constitutional court. The 49-year-old Dreithaler will argue that the decrees violated and violate his human rights, since his parents were deprived of their property on the basis of their nationality. Dreithaler will argue that the decrees were in violation of the 1920 constitution, in force at the time. Moreover, he will argue that the decrees, which remain on the books, are in violation of the Czech Republic's new constitution.

At stake in this case, some argue, is far more than the small building in downtown Liberec that Dreithaler would like returned to him. Were he successful, Dreithaler might open the door for the 2.5 million Germans (and their heirs) who lost their property between 1945 and 1947. The case, it is argued, could be the first step towards pushing back the date enshrined in current Czech restitution law, which only allows for claims to property seized after the Communist putsch of February 25, 1948. Today only Jews who lost their property under the "Aryanization laws" of the German occupation are allowed to challenge state seizures previous to the Feb. 1948 date.

But are the Benes decrees really the only finger in a dike holding back a flood of German restitution claims? In assessing the relevance of the decrees in the post-Communist Czech Republic, it is important to separate the legal consequences of annulling them from the moral and political. Would annulling the decrees, either by passing a law in parliament or overturning them in the constitutional court, make it easier for Sudeten Germans to reclaim their property under the Czech government's restitution program? Klaus, the Czech premier, has said the decrees cannot be annulled because they are an "organic part" of Czech law.

Here again we have to distinguish between two different actions. Passing a law in parliament annulling the decrees might have quite different consequences from seeing them lose a test in court.

A legal expert close to the case (who therefore insisted on anonymity) argued that

parliament could easily annul the decrees without opening a Pandora's Box of new restitution claims. True, the Czech Constitutional Court is a "European"-style, or Roman Law, court. That means that the court can (indeed must) assess whether challenged laws are compatible both with the constitution and with existing law. Since the Czech Republic has adopted a host of laws defending individuals from persecution according to nationality, the Benes decrees, which refer explicitly to nationality, could easily be found wanting in the constitutional court.

But that does not mean that parliament would risk making Sudeten restitution claims easier if it decided to annul the decrees. The Czech constitution, like the Austrian one, is *ex nunc* (from here on), not *ex tunc* (from the thing itself.) The parliament can therefore annul a law without bringing all of the legal consequences of its previous enforcement into question. The only consequence would be that the law no longer applies in the future.

One can see this, for example, in the passage of previous restitution laws. Communist laws nationalizing industry were annulled and, in separate legislation, property seized by the state from 1948 on was returned. But no recipient of returned property could sue the state for revenues earned while the property was in state hands. *From here on* the state had no right to claim the revenues. But equally, the restituted owner had no right to back profits.

It's easy to see how this would apply in the case of the annulment (by parliament) of the Benes decrees. *From here on* the state would not have the right to claim the property of Sudeten Germans. But equally, Sudeten Germans who lost their property could not claim it back on the basis merely of the annulment of the decrees. They, like all other beneficiaries of restitution, would need separate legislation positively restoring their property to them. Perhaps annulment of the decrees and acknowledgement of their impropriety would put new political pressure on the Czech parliament to pass another round of restitution laws, this time giving back property to Sudeten Germans and Hungarians. But it would not make the government's legal position any weaker.

In fact, it might strengthen it. To see why, look at why the Dreithaler court case has the Czech government in a tight corner. Dreithaler was one of the few Sudeten Germans to keep his passport, so the court is ruling about how one of its own citizens was treated. Moreover, Dreithaler can claim that his rights are being violated today because the laws remain on the books. There may be some legal means by which the court can use the *ex nunc* principle to extract itself from difficulty. But if Dreithaler convinces the court that the Benes decrees unfairly bolster the Czech government's decision to mark Feb. 25, 1948 as the cutoff date, then he can use the decrees' presence on Czech lawbooks as evidence that the government is unfairly discriminating against him by choosing that date rather than an earlier one. Far from being a legal barrier to German restitution claims, the decrees may prove a fatal legal flaw that weakens the Czech government's ability to resist such claims.

But even if the decrees were annulled by the court and Germans were allowed to apply to get their land back, it's unlikely many would try. Of the Czechs living in Germany who were given the chance to take back land, only 5 percent actually did. Why would a relatively prosperous German give up his passport in exchange for land in a foreign and poor country?

### **Remembering the First Republic**

Raising the German bogeyman is certainly good populist politics in the Czech Lands. A poll taken in June 1993 by the Institute for Opinion Polls shows that 3/4 of all Czechs are against dialogue with the Sudeten Germans. Even among Czech under age 29 (and therefore too young to remember the war), 66 percent said they thought the expulsions were justified.

"Look out, one never knows!" the left-leaning Czech daily *Lidove Noviny* wrote at the time of the proposed party talks. "The Sudeten Germans, and their liberal, Christian and even their Social Democrat representatives, could play the role of a Trojan Horse for a new, now economically-based, German imperialism."

Walter Piverka, now president of the German Union, said Klaus had done little to change people's minds.

Piverka was one of the few Germans to remain in the country after the war. As a teenager in Cesky Krumlov, then two-thirds German but a bastion of Social Democrats, Piverka watched the Communists use the expulsion for their own ends. "If a man worked against the Nazis, but also had a nice house," he said, "then his property was also confiscated."

When he was not allowed to enter the university, Piverka found an unpaid internship with an electrician and moved from town to town, sometimes working as a farm laborer, sometimes forced into special military service for political prisoners, as the situation dictated.

"Everything that was in Germany was capitalist, so those who remained in the country faced two difficulties," he said. "First off, we were fascists; then, after 1948, we were labelled ravanchists, and people who had relatives in capitalist countries. So we were 'enemies of the people.'"

Piverka thought his union was making progress under the 1990-2 government, which allowed them to fund a German teacher for a primary school in Cesky Krumlov. Minority-language education is usually only allowed in areas with a large indigenous population; but the ministry, seeing that Czechs wanted their children to learn German, allowed the scheme.

But when Klaus was elected premier, Piverka said, the new Minister of Education said the school could only continue if parents identified themselves as 'German' on

the census. After word spread of "Germanization" the school received several bomb threats. The German program was closed.

Many Czechs on the right who had previously supported Klaus also fear that he is ruining Czech-German relations by unduly pandering to a Communist-inculcated view of their neighbors.

Dr. Rudolf Kucera, editor of *Stredni Europa* and a former member of the steering committee of Klaus' party, said Klaus' approach is "oriented towards public opinion, for which this (reconciliation with the Sudeten Germans) is unpopular. But he is doing nothing to change public opinion." Klaus was even bolstering the Sudeten Germans' influence in Bonn by flaunting his lack of interest. Klaus' statement, for example, that the Benes decrees could not be annulled "had some consequences. As far as Bonn is concerned, this statement completely isolated Czech foreign policy." When Roman Herzog, the new German president, visited Liberec in July, Kucera said, he turned down invitations to meet with Czech government officials.

Ludek Bednar, managing editor of the magazine, was even more scathing. Czech foreign policy, he said, was adrift. In Brussels, the Czechs were dismissed as apple-polishing applicants to the European Union, eager to do other East Europeans down. Other Central Europeans, especially the Poles, were afraid Czech obstinance would put the Germans off the region entirely.

Kucera and Bednar are typical of a growing splinter faction within the Czech right that believes mere economic liberalization is not enough to restore a prosperous and just society. This group, gathered now around Alena Hromadkova and her new Democratic Union party, favors stricter screening of former Communist officials and the conscious reconstruction of a "Central European" political and legal culture. While still small, they have the backing of the publisher of *Blesk*, the country's largest tabloid. And they have found common ground with moderate Sudeten Germans like Becher, who also mourn the gutting of the cultural ties, such as the Czech and Moravian nobility, the Jewish culture and the Catholic church, that once bound the regions' ethnic mix together.

Becher recently sponsored an exhibit of artists, such as Oskar Kokoschka, who fled Vienna after the rightist putsch of 1934 and took Czechoslovak citizenship. Kokoschka is a potent symbol of the old Prague for two reasons. As a man, he sought in Prague the Central European mix that German chauvinism had squashed in Austria. And as a painter, he composed from small flecks of color scattered among one another much as the nationalities of old Central Europe had been intermingled. The sociologist Ernst Gellner, a Jew who fled Prague shortly before the Munich agreement, has written that before the onset of Nazism and Communism, a map of Central European nationalities resembled a Kokoschka painting. After ethnic cleansing back and forth, he wrote, it now looks more like a Modigliani composition of bold unified blocks.<sup>17</sup>

"There was a Jewish, German and Czech culture in the First Republic," Kucera said. "The process of separating these cultures had not been undertaken. The Czech government should have an active policy of attempting to rebuild this culture. This rebuilding of this culture cannot be managed by the market alone. The state must make this part of their cultural policy. Austria, Hungary, have many state-funded cultural institutions. But Klaus is of the opinion that we should close the ministry of culture."



**The old Jewish cemetery in Prague**

To accuse him of mere nostalgia, Kucera said, was to fail to understand the importance of culture to prosperity. "The ODS (Klaus' Civic Democratic Party) calls itself as a conservative party," he said, "but it is a party of economic technocrats who have no understanding of the political, cultural and historic components (of the economy.) They think that the only signs of health of society are the macroeconomic indicators." 18

### **A different nostalgia**

Klaus and his economic policies were just as unpopular among the Union of Czech Borderland Dwellers whom I spoke to in Usti nad Labem on the day the Sudeten Germans arrived. They too were a little nostalgic, but not for the days when Germans, Czechs and Jews had lived together. "Our main goal is to protect the republic from Germanization," Olrich Horak, president of the union in Usti, said.

Horak mourned the breakup of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia ("The Croats work with the Germans") and said a new German invasion was being facilitated by Klaus, who had set the exchange rate far too low.

"They (the Germans) are buying everything," Horak said. "Hitler came with a gun. The Sudeten Germans are coming with the Mark. We are becoming a developing country, like Africa."

Horak, a former Communist trade union leader, also said Klaus was savaging the Czech economy by allowing too much money to sit in banks, where it encouraged asset-stripping instead of pushing it into factories to boost production.

Vera Jarosova handed out pamphlets disputing the German claim that 200 had died

on Usti's bridge. She had witnessed the event herself, she said. A few Germans, identifiable by the white armbands they were required to wear, had indeed died in a spontaneous outburst of violence, she said.

"It was after the war," she said. "There was so much hate." But the Revoluční Guardia had quickly restored order. Nowhere near 200 had died, she said. The real crime had been committed at the munitions dump a few days before, where a German terrorist unit named "Werewolf" had come down from hiding in the Krusne Mountains to strike.

Jarosova had spent the war as a servant to the von Thurn and Taxis family at the castle in Loucen, where she milked the estate's cows. Not knowing that she spoke German, family members used to condemn the "Czech swine" in front of her, Jarosova said. She used to milk the udders into the dirt, she said, rather than hand over the fruits of her work.

"We are not against friendship," Jarosova said, citing her ties to citizens of the former East Germany. "We just don't want the Germans to return to celebrate where a murder was committed."

When the Germans actually arrived in the region, another group fond of the old Czechoslovakia struck a more strident note.

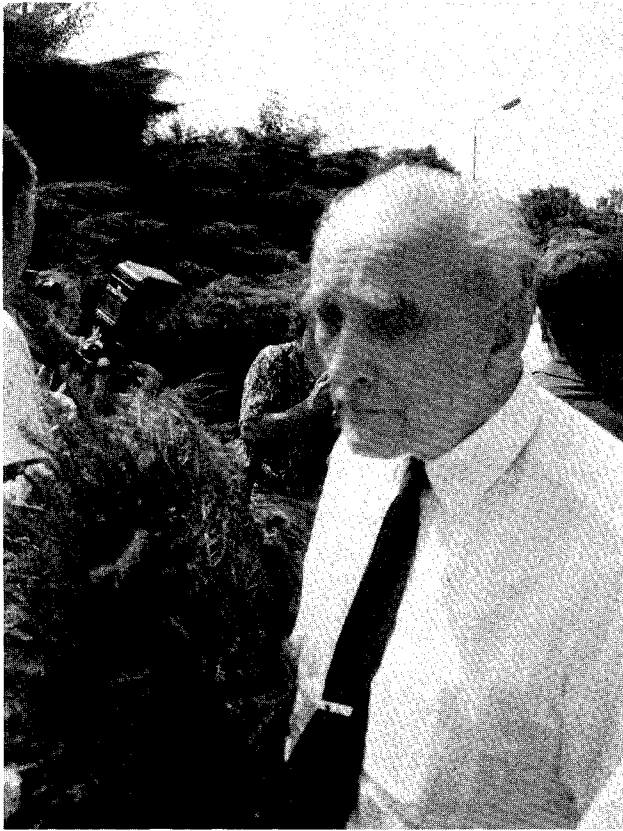
Fifteen to twenty members of the Czechoslovak Republican Party had gathered at the memorial to the victims of Nazism in Terezin, a Habsburg walled city that had served as a concentration camp during the war. They lay in wait for the Sudetens, who had planned to lay a wreath to the "victims of oppression" before moving on to Usti.

"We are here because we know perfectly well that there are SS men in the Sudeten German Landsmannschaft," one said. "Ninety-five percent of the Sudeten Germans were Nazis."

When they spotted the German delegation crossing the cemetery along a path on the far



side, the Republicans burst into a trot across the graveyard and strung banners reading "No more second Protectorate" across the path. Others muscled up to



Ratmir Zoubek, a Czech carrying the wreath, and began shouting in his ear. Still others stood behind and lobbed rotten eggs fell on Zoubek and Father Ernst Tecan, a Catholic priest from Slovakia now serving in Usti.

"Shame on the fascists! Germans go home!" the Republicans shouted. "Jews out! We will govern ourselves!"

In the middle of the fray I asked one younger Republican to explain the slogans. "The Jews have taken over Germany," he said. "That's why they are making the EU -- so that they can dominate Europe. Hitler was a Jew."

"We want an independent CS without Jews, without Germans," he continued. "We had the Nazis, we had the bolsheviks. Now we want independence."<sup>19</sup>

### **Ratmir Zoubek at the Terezin cemetery**

When the police finally started restraining the Republicans, they shouted, "Traitors! You can't be against the CSFR!"

Some of the Germans in the delegation turned up their noses at the display. "Look at them -- they are so young," one said. "They don't remember the occupation."

"Someday the Czech Republic is going to be in Europe," another said, "and our money is going to be the best."

Zoubek was just quietly bitter. "The so-called Republicans always shout, 'Jews out' and celebrate Hitler's birthday. And then they say that we are (Nazi) collaborators. They are the collaborators, not us."

"Why are you here?" I asked. "As a Czech?"

"Because on the last census I gave my nationality as 'Central European,' " he said.



When, back in Prague, I recounted this scene to Vilem Precan, a former dissident and now director of the Institute for Contemporary History, he sighed. Precan's family had sheltered Soviet partisan organizers of resistance to the Nazis but had never hated the Germans *per se*. After the war, Precan's father defended in court a neighbor who had been a "good German."

"People who fought against Nazis, against Germans at that time," Precan said, "didn't feel the desire to take revenge after the war, because they were not cowards during the war. Most of the atrocities against Germans after the war were committed by cowards during the war. And then they took revenge on their own cowardice."

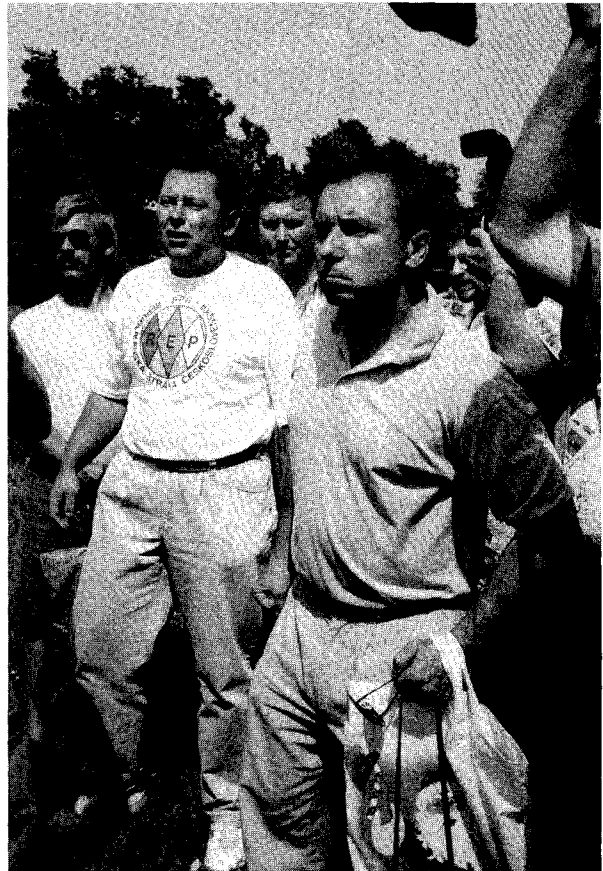
This comment made me wonder if perhaps some of the younger members of the Republicans had been 'cowards' under Communism.

Like Kucera, Precan mourned the loss of the Germans and Jews who, along with the Czechs, had cultivated Bohemia for 800 years. Even Czech society, having lost two generations of elites to Nazi and then Communist terror, was no longer what it was.

"What is here now -- it is a new nation, a new society. The discontinuity is terrible. And I don't know if the people are aware of it."

"Do they want to know?" I asked.

"They have to," Precan said, "even if they don't want to, the past which we cannot face will come back at the most unsuitable moment."



**The Republicans. The man who explained the Jewish influence in the EU is on the right.**

"You cannot get rid of your past, as an individual, as a nation, as a society. This past is part of your life, of your identity. And even if you neglect it, it is still here, waiting to remember, to remind you of your sins which you committed, or remind you of that moment when you were weak."

"This (new Czech nationalism) is the feeling of guilt, some feeling of guilt, of

and then it causes much harm," Precan continued. "This is then the closing up from the world, and the neglect of the learning from others. I know they are better than me, and the inferiority complex says, 'Ach -- they are stupid, or too complicated.' I used to say to my colleagues, 'As long as we stay uncritical to our flaws, we will stay provincial.' "

When the Sudeten Germans moved on from Terezin to Usti, a stiffer police presence kept the Republicans at bay. Standing on the banks of the river, Rudiger Kollar from Dresden read a short statement in German. Zoubek translated into Czech.

"We come here directly from a memorial service in Terezin," Kollar said, "The view of innumerable graves marking the cruel death of thousands of Czechs, Slovaks, Jews but also Germans can only leave us with one wish -- never again violent regimes! The world has entered a new era."

Afterwards Czechs and Germans mingled, debating in softer voices.

"We were Bohemians, you were Bohemians," one German said.

"I remember you saying," a Czech answered, " 'Rot, Weiss und Blau -- das ist die Tschechische Sau.' ('Red, White and Blue' -- the colors of the Czechoslovak flag -- 'That is the Czech Pig' )"

" We didn't say that," the German protested.

Although pleased to see the quieter discussions, I had my doubts about Kollar's talk and the whole idea of commemorating the deaths of Germans in a place in which so many more victims of Naziism had died. Yes, some Germans had died at Terezin when it was later converted to a waystation for Germans being expelled. But it is in a camp resembling Terezin, one with a "system of corridors (that) was rational and simple in true Maria Teresa style," that Adam, the protagonist of *Judge on Trial*, first loses the sense of humanity that might have slowed his slide into Communist collaboration.

"Even at that time I was becoming used to it," he recalls,

"... to not taking any notice of the weeping and terror of others, those who were selected; to not thinking about the emptying rooms, the people who had spoken to me not long before and would never say anything to me again; to being attached to anyone or anything when everything was destined for destruction." <sup>20</sup>

Later, Adam is even more explicit about how Terezin had been the school of the bolshevik in him. "Convinced I had to do something to ensure that people never

again lost their freedom," he recalls,

so that they should never again find themselves in hermetically sealed surroundings with no chance of escape, ruled solely by butchers' knives, I prepared to become a foot-soldier of the revolution, a hobbyhorse for new generation of butchers to mount, and wielding their cleavers drive the scattered human herd into new enclosures, and set to with their knives to carve out the splendid new future."<sup>21</sup>

Surely Terezin could not become a symbol for the victims of some mass weather system called "violence." However much the Germans had suffered, and however important it was for the Czechs to remember their own crimes, hadn't the destruction of the soul of old Bohemia really begun in earnest with the Nazis? Wasn't it a distortion for Sudeten Germans, however personally innocent, to go to Terezin seeking "forgiveness?" As Garton-Ash has written, "Forgiveness is when I say, 'I am sorry for what I did,' not 'I am sorry for what *you* did.'"

Wouldn't it be better to commemorate the deaths of Czechs, Slovaks and Jews at Terezin, then mark the deaths of Germans in Usti? Surely there were two discreet events -- the Nazi Terror, then the expulsions -- that, by virtue of the scale and systemization of the first, could not be compared.

Leder, the math teacher from Dresden, would have none of that. "We have a saying," he said. "Mother Bohemia had two children. For 1,000 years they got along, and Bohemia flowered. Then they fought, and Bohemia fell. Every country that destroys another of its constituent parts destroys part of its cultural treasure."

"But wasn't it a little provocative to hold the ceremony in Terezin?" I asked.

"But some Germans were interned in that camp after the war," he said. "They were taken there and never seen again."

"Yes, but that was a messy postwar effort, whereas the concentration camps were a systematic attempt to destroy entire races. Aren't those two a little different? Maybe they shouldn't be equated?"

"Where is the difference between the Nazi system and a system that killed 250,000?" Leder responded.

I watched Leder walk up over the bridge and throw in his flowers. He then continued on to the other side and drove back to Germany. He hadn't been welcomed. And for all my love of the old Bohemia both he and I mourned, I thought then that I knew why.

Yours,



Chandler

**A note to readers:**

I've decided to take a place at Boston University's 'University Professors' program. I'll be writing a Ph.D. in political philosophy with Prof. Roger Scruton. I hope anyone who has read these newsletters and would like to stay in touch with a fellow Central Europe buff will write to me in care of the program. The address is:

The University Professors  
745 Commonwealth Ave.  
Boston, Mass. 02215  
USA

Please write!

## Notes

1. This is, of course, exactly what I did in my last newsletter about the sufferings of Italians under the Yugoslav Communists. But I think it's more appropriate to mix and compare the experiences of Istria under Italian fascism and Yugoslav communism, if only because the Italian fascists were milder than the German Nazis and therefore more in the same ballpark. Nothing, not even Mussolini's regime, compares to Hitler's Nazism.
2. Prinz, Friedrich. *Geschichte Böhmens, 1848-1948*. Ullstein Sachbuch.
3. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 11, 1994.
4. Heinrich von Lichtenstein reckons that his family were classified as Germans and remain barred from regaining their land simply because they had so much of it.
5. Anyone who both opposes the Czech "lustration law" banning former Communists from office and supports the Benes decrees ought to look deep into his or her heart. It is surely possible to support lustration and oppose the Benes decrees, since lustration picked out only high-ranking Communist officials and then only denied them the right to serve in the state. But it is impossible to support a law that meted out harsh punishment to people with the bad luck to be born German and then oppose "lustration" because it is based on "collective guilt."
6. For a good discussion of the pressures the Benes government was under, see Crane, John O. and Crane, Sylvia, *Czechoslovakia: Anvil of the Cold War*, Praeger (New York), 1991, especially Chapter 17, "Nationalities Transfers and Allied Army Withdrawals."
7. Klima, Ivan. *Judge on Trial*. (Verso, London) 1991. p. 166.
8. *Die Tschechoslowakei: Das Ende einer Fehlkonstruktion. Die Sudetendeutsche Frage Bleibt Offen.* Reihe, Deutsche Geschichte; VGB-Verlagsgesellschaft Berg, Berg; 1992.
9. "München: CSU stützt CSFR Separatisten," *Wirtschaftswoche*, 19 June 1992. The CSU denied the charges but did not take legal action.
10. de Candole, James. "Slovak-Sudeten Equation = ?", *The Prague Post*, April 28 - May 4, 1992. Neubauer also signed an overt electoral pact with the Slovak National Liberal Party, a neofascist, separatist party. And his bank arranged the financing for the Ingolstadt pipeline running from Bavaria to the Czech Republic. The pipeline took on incredible strategic importance after the split of Czechoslovakia, since the Czechs now receive most of their oil from Russia via a pipeline crossing Slovakia. Now even Bavarian politicians are beginning to link its opening to improved conditions for Sudeten Germans.

11. Interviewed by Ota Filip in *Die Zeit*, 29 April 1994.
  12. Seibt, Ferdinand. "K diskusi ceskych a nemeckych histotiku," in *Soudobé Dejiny*, vol. 2/3, 1994. pp. 275.
  13. Waigel, Theo. "Rede des Parteivorsitzenden der Christlich-Social Union Bundesminister Dr. Theo Waigel, MdB: Europatag der Union der Vertriebenen," delivered on June 4, 1994 in Neusaß.
  14. Garton-Ash, Timothy. *In Europe's Name*, Random House, (New York), 1993, p. 388. A valuable if often turgid and equivocal book.
  15. In foreign policy, the specialist said, Czech Foreign Minister Josef Zieleniec lives on the delusion that the British will bail them out if they get in trouble with the Germans. He told me a funny story about Zieleniec trying to get British Foreign Minister Douglas Hurd interest in the 'German threat.' Hurd listened patiently, he said, then said it was obviously a 'seriously problem' and asked for more information. This specialist said it was obvious to him that Hurd did not think it was an issue at all. Zieleniec, on the other hand, went away delighted.
  16. Obrman, Jan. 'Sudeten Germans Controversy in the Czech Republic,' RFE/RL Research Report, vol. 3, no. 2, 14 Jan. 1994, pp. 9-16.
  17. Quoted in Rupnik, Jacques. *The Other Europe*, Schocken (New York), 1989. p. 49. Although written before the fall of the Berlin Wall, this book remains my favorite guide to the region. Rupnik rejects the idea that all (now former) Communist countries were alike and somehow managed to look beyond the grey cover of Communism and get at their national characters. His chapters on how the countries viewed each other are excellent. Highly recommended.
  18. My friend at the foreign ministry was less worried. Klaus' attempts to build an island of English liberalism in the Central European sea was constantly frustrated by nature of the Czechs themselves. "He says, 'We must have an open society here,' and then we adopt a Roman law legal system based on the Habsburg model. He gives the clerks in the ministries new liberalizing measures, and they introduce them in the same old bureaucratic way. It suits people."
  19. For a hysterical satire of all the ideologies common in the First Republic, see Karel Capek's *The War of the Newts* (trans. by Ewald Osers: Catbird Press, 1990). Capek imagines how the world would respond to the discovery of an intelligent, underwater race, the Newts. One Czech nationalist writes a grammar of his language and a history of the Czechs that is studied enthusiastically by one obscure Newt that two Czechs come across in the South Seas.
- "It is a pity crying to Heaven that so many splendid memorials have perished in the

Thirty Years' War!" the Newt says. "Unless I am mistaken, the Czech land was then turned into a desert drenched with blood and tears. How fortunate that the genative of negation did not die out then as well . . . "

The Newt says he is fascinated by Czech history,

" . . . (e)specially by the disaster of the White Mountain and the three hundred years of servitude. I have read a lot about it in this book. No doubt you are very proud of your 300 years of servitude. That was a great period, sir!

'Yes, a hard period,' I agreed. 'A period of oppression and grief.'

'And did you groan?' our friend enquired with a keen interest.

'We groaned, suffering inexpressibly under the yoke of the savage oppressors.'

'I am delighted to hear it,' the Newt sighed with relief. 'That is exactly what it says in my book.' "

But Capek also offers a keen satire of the National Socialist program now so much like the Republicans' own. He describes a fictional author, Wolf Meynert, and his influential book, *The Decline of Mankind*. (surely a mockery of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*.) Meynert urges men not to be blinded by prosperity of liberal, democratic order: people are gripped by "an irresistible sense of uncertainty, anxiety and malaise."

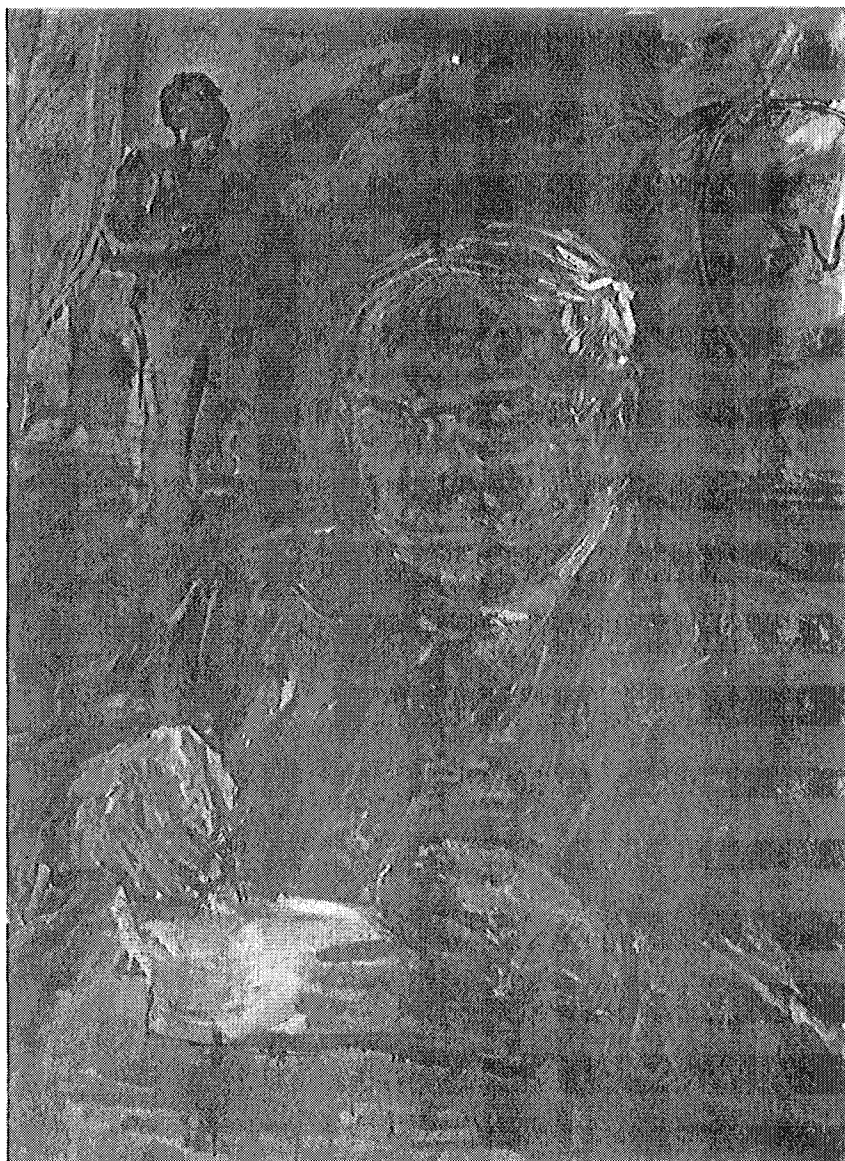
"For biological human entities, such as race, nation or class, the only natural road to undisturbed happiness is: to establish room for themselves and to exterminate all others. . . We have made ourselves too many doctrines and obligations to protect 'the others' instead of getting rid of them . . . We have violated the great natural prerequisite of all community existence: that only a homogenous society can be a happy society."

With groups like the Republicans around, the Czech Republic sure could use another Capek.

20. Klima, Ivan. *Judge on Trial*. Verso, (London) p. 39

21. *ibid*, page 69.

Although he is in no way responsible for the final product, I would like to thank Dr. Vilem Precan of the Institute of Contemporary History for spending so much time discussing these issues and providing documents.



Oskar Kokoschka's portrait of a Soviet diplomat in Prague