The Czech Resistance at Home:  
Thirty Years After

In the early 1960s studies began to appear in Czechoslovakia that discovered the unexplored territory of the anti-Nazi Resistance. A group of talented young Czech historians, gathered in a newly founded "Czechoslovak Committee for the History of the Anti-Fascist Resistance," prepared to write a trilogy on the history of the Czechoslovak Resistance during World War II, a work which, in fact, never materialized beyond publication of an outline.\(^1\) Independent research, and not dogmatic schemata, became the foundation of their studies. In a few significant books and in a great number of well-researched articles they told and retold a story of the Resistance that would otherwise have remained unknown.\(^2\) They helped remove the debris of vulgar presumptions, unscholarly guesswork, and facile indignation which had more to do with Party line than with past reality. Although their accounts still were treading a narrow line between complicity with political partisanship and the requirements of critical scholarship, they had almost completed their transformation from Party propagandists into scholarly investigators when the Husák leadership cut their careers short after April, 1969.

The exacerbating impact of the Soviet occupation as the ever-present and widely pervasive factor since 1968 has fueled the regime's retrogression, validated its right to strict censorship, and justified its coercive policies against the historical profession. As a result, the post-1969 Resistance literature, promoted by the regime because of its obvious propaganda value, has conveniently ignored the considerable body of works which have been published during the past decade. Unfortunately, its content is only rarely original and it lacks anything approaching the competence, stern commitment, and sense of excitement of the historiography of the sixties. No present

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1. The first result of the collective scholarly endeavor was the outline by O. Janeček et al., Odboj a revoluce 1938-1945. Nástín dějin československého odboje (Praha: Naše vojsko, 1965). The Committee began to publish in 1962 a mimeographed bulletin, "Odboj a revoluce. Zprávy," which has become a vehicle for a stimulating and thorough discussion of the subject. The last volume still sponsored by the Committee before its dissolution initiated the second phase of its research program. This centered on case-stories of the various networks in 1939-41, written by their former leaders. Oldřich Janeček et al., Z počátku odboje 1938-1941 (Praha: Naše vojsko, 1969).

Czech author makes any pretense at deep analysis or anything that can be considered a major contribution. Admittedly living in difficult conditions, the writers have made limited use of new materials, and for the rest they have been obliged to depend upon evidence much of which was familiar before 1969. In these circumstances, an author’s task was in the main one of indoctrination. All in all, the books are sadly dogmatic and disappointing in their approach and method. Again, perhaps inevitably in a regime reflecting the ethos of occupation, the democratic underground is given short shrift and its achievements largely passed over, while the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) goes down as the sole heroic leader. No more than a legend, this rendition bears little resemblance to the actuality; in fact, it goes so far astray as to be almost ludicrous. This is regrettable and is moreover wholly unfair above all to those farsighted and resolute Communist resisters who by their exemplary struggle have conveyed to the generation presently in power the moral message that the achievement of national justice is more important than life itself, a message apparently largely ignored.

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In general, it is not possible to write a history of the Czech home Resistance without going some way toward also writing a history of the German occupation system. Because of the acute shortage of documentary evidence by the resisters themselves, who naturally committed as little as possible to paper, the reports of the German security organs are of overriding importance. Well arranged in a collection of 113 Nazi documents, concerned with the KSČ underground, their publication is to be welcomed.3 The documents are ordered chronologically in divisions that are terminated by the dates of the liquidation of the successive Communist underground centers, 1939-1941, 1941-1943, 1943-1944, 1944-1945. This set of mostly Gestapo, SD, and Abwehr documents makes available pertinent information on the considerable extent of the KSČ actions. The editors have also provided an introduction to the German security machinery. Each section begins with a succinct account of the period under study. The reader, however, should be reminded that the sources were gathered at random on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the KSČ.

The same theme appears in the volume published by officials of the State Central Archives, who claim to use a wealth of evidence—some of it for the first time—relating to the KSČ anti-Fascist struggle from 1939 to 1945.4 Its 510 pages appear to bring back nostalgic memories of the fifties. This self-satisfied, chatty journalistic account is deliberately obscure about the