

*From Prague*  
*after*  
*Munich*  
*Diplomatic Papers*  
*1938-1940*

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*1. Personal notes on the  
Munich crisis, written in early*

*October 1938*

Prague could never have been more beautiful than during those recent September days when its security hung by so slender a thread. The old streets, relieved of motor vehicles by an obliging army, had recovered something of their pristine quiet and composure. Baroque towers—themselves unreal and ethereal—floated peacefully against skies in which the bright blue of autumn made way frequently for isolated, drifting clouds. In the sleepy courtyards, sunshine varied with brief, gentle showers. And the little groups of passers-by still assembled hourly in the market place, as they had for centuries, to watch the saints make their appointed rounds in the clock on the wall of the town hall.

Yet rarely, if ever, has the quaint garb of this old city seemed more museum-like, more detached from the realities of the moment, than it did during these strange days. The world had taken final farewell, it seemed, of nearly everything that these monuments represented. Gone were the unifying faith and national tolerance of the Middle Ages; gone—in large measure—was the glamour of the Counter-Reformation, the outward manifestation of the wealth and power of Rome; gone indeed were the gay dreams of the empire of Joseph II and Maria Theresa: the laughing voice of Vienna, the spirit of Mozart. A sterner age was upon us; and it was only in the gaunt spires of the Tyn Church—those grim reminders of the century-long struggle of a stubborn and rebellious Bohemia against the united power of western Europe—that there was something vitally connected with the problems of this day. The ghosts of Jan Hus and the Bohemian Brethren stalked again through “black-out”

streets which could not have been darker in the fifteenth century itself. And again a remarkable little people, whose virtues and whose failings are alike the products of adversity, found themselves standing out in lonely bitterness against what they felt to be an unjust and unsympathetic Europe.

These days, so tragic for the Czechs themselves, have been anything but pleasant for their friends. It is easy to point out the mistakes of the past; but it is not easy to comfort people for what they regard as twenty years of misplaced endeavor, betrayal by their friends and the loss of the dream of centuries—a dream that seemed, only a short time ago, so tantalizingly close to realization.

No one can deny the efforts the Czechs have put forth to develop their territories and to lay the foundations of a permanent, healthy state. No one can look at their beautifully prepared atlases or follow the excellent Sokol foot-trails through the Bohemian forests without sharing their grief at the rude smashing of the clay which they tried so hard to mold into a sound and enduring vessel. It is impossible not to agree when they tell you that they were not responsible for the presence of three million Germans within the natural strategic and economic frontiers of Bohemia, and that they feel themselves to have been, despite their lack of experience in government, more considerate hosts to their own racial minorities than many of those who have now, with such sudden flutters of indignation, gathered non-Slavic minorities under the maternal wing. It is not easy to tell them why, after they have worked so hard to make their country a bulwark in central Europe of those virtues which the Western democracies professed to cherish, they should be punished with an arrangement which to many of them spells the virtual end of their political and economic independence. Finally, it is impossible to object when they now turn as bitterly on their erstwhile liberalism as they have on the alliances which supported it, and set out to show the world how well they too

can play at the game of authoritarian government, if the only alternative be failure and isolation.

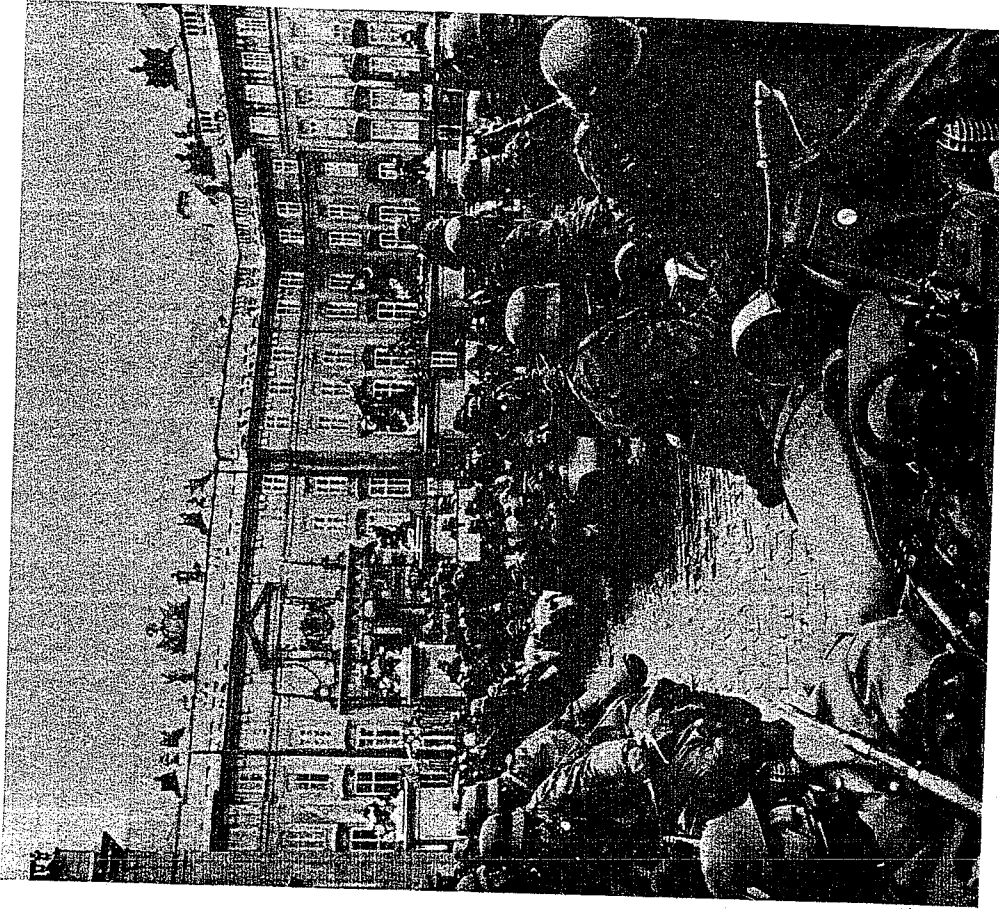
Fortunately, one does not need to share this despair in order to understand it. In this crowded heart of Europe, where neighborly jealousies run so high, there can never be any solution of the ills of the day which will satisfy both Jack and Tom alike. It is comforting to reflect that if no good wind can fail to blow ill, no ill wind can fail to blow good. Change will always involve suffering, but one can at least hope that such changes as occur will lead in the direction of greater economic security and greater racial tolerance for people sadly in need of both. And while recent events, to be sure, have done no immediate service to either of these goals, there is hope that their ultimate results may lead in this direction.

Czechoslovakia is, after all, a central European state. Its fortunes must in the long run lie with—and not against—the dominant forces in this area. It is generally agreed that the breakup of the limited degree of unity which the Hapsburg Empire represented was unfortunate for all concerned. Other forces are now at work which are struggling to create a new form of unity where individualism and sectionalism have held sway for two decades. To these forces, Czechoslovakia has been tragically slow in adjusting herself. It is idle at this late date to attempt to apportion the blame for this fact between the country's own statesmen and its foreign advisors. The adjustment—and this is the main thing—has now come. It has come in a painful and deplorable form. But it has relieved the Czechoslovak state of liabilities as well as assets. It has left the heart of the country physically intact. Finally, and perhaps most important of all, it has preserved for the exacting tasks of the future a magnificent younger generation—disciplined, industrious, and physically fit—which would undoubtedly have been sacrificed if the solution had been the romantic one of hopeless resistance rather than the humiliating but truly heroic one of realism.

*Notes on the Munich Crisis*

The story of Czechoslovakia is not yet ended. There is no use in minimizing the dangers and trials that lie ahead. But if there is any lesson to be learned from the tortuous history of this continent, it is that strength, courage, and perseverance—qualities which the Czech people now possess in greater degree than ever before—have never been permanently suppressed and have never failed in the end to win their just place in the surging, changing movement of political life.

This thought will not comfort the Czechs in their present mood of bitterness and frustration; but it may well be a source of consolation to those outsiders who have followed their past struggles with sympathy and admiration and who have never ceased to wish them well for the future.



“ . . . word came that the German troops had already reached the palace”