

# Weighty academic study is objective and thorough

The name of the author of this substantial volume will be familiar to most members of the BCSA. Dr Brown has addressed the association on more than one occasion, bringing into play his detailed knowledge of the history of Czechoslovakia in general and the course of Anglo-Czechoslovak relations in particular.

His expertise has also been drawn on by the Foreign Office in the briefing of newly appointed ambassadors to Prague.

The title of this new publication is a mildly ironic reference to *Dealing with Dictators*, the title of the memoirs of Sir Frank Roberts, the eminent member of the Foreign Office who for much of the war period was responsible for liaison with the Czechoslovak émigré government in Britain. One of Brown's principal themes is the rather low priority given by the British government to relations with Dr Benes and his colleagues; the exiled government's demands for recognition, the annulment of the Munich "diktat", and the re-establishment of Czechoslovakia in its prewar boundaries were viewed as problems to be deferred as long as possible rather than given full support. Being 'dealt with' as importunate foreigners with what they saw as typically British 'effortless superiority', could be almost unbearably frustrating for exiles uncertain of their status and the outcome of their efforts.

Through methodical examination of a wide range of source material, Brown aims to dispel what he regards as the 'Cold War myths' of much historiography, among them the belief that Benes's rapprochement with the Soviet Union was tantamount to the betrayal of Czechoslovak democracy. He argues that the exile government had little choice but to come to some accommodation with Stalin, and stresses the sheer magnitude of Benes's achievement in resurrecting his country in the face of British reluctance to commit itself to definite arrangements for postwar Europe. This British posture is neatly summed up in the continued use, at least in the early stages of the war, of the hyphenated term 'Czecho-Slovakia', rather than straight 'Czechoslovakia'.

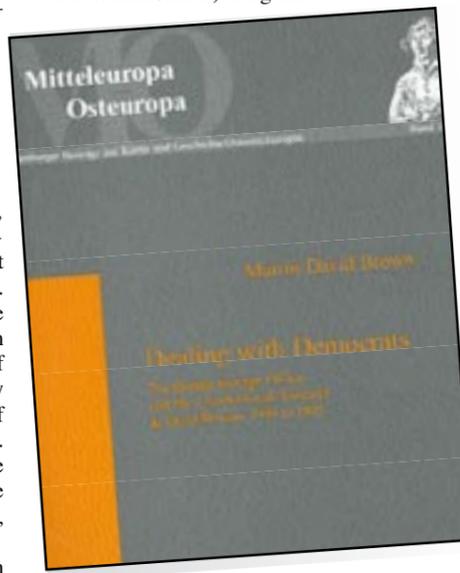
The spectre of Munich lingered long, with

## Dealing With Democrats: The British Foreign Office and the Czechoslovak Émigrés in Great Britain, 1939 to 1945

by Martin David Brown  
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Peter Lang Frankfurt am Main 2006

elements in the Foreign Office and elsewhere continuing to regard the First Republic as a failed state, dismissed on one occasion as a 'distressful and indefensible mosaic'.

Benes emerges once more as a tireless, wily, and resourceful operator, outmanoeuvring his potential adversaries (such as former prime minister Hodza or the Sudeten German Socialist leader Wenzel Jaksch) and gener-



by Michael Ivory

ally keeping one step ahead of his Foreign Office 'minders'. After a systematic evocation of the workings of the Foreign Office and the wartime Anglo-Czechoslovak relationship, successive chapters of the book deal with Benes's success in gaining full recognition for his government, that government's relationships with the Polish government in exile and with the Soviet Union.

A chapter devoted to the issue of the Sudetenland traces the evolution of the policy of 'transfer' (aka 'expulsion') and the progressive dashing of the Sudeten exiles' hopes of a future role in a re-established Czechoslovakia, while another, "Assassinations, Supplies and Uprisings", deals with the limited ability – rather than unwillingness – of the Western Allies to intervene decisively in such episodes as the Slovak National Uprising of 1944 and the Prague Uprising of May 1945.

Brown's work is a weighty academic study, one of a respected series of *Oldenburg Contributions to the Culture and History of East-Central Europe*. Its thoroughness and its objective stance will no doubt make it a standard work of reference on its subject. It is also a fascinating read, its serious tone lightened by the occasional revelation of nuggets of historical trivia.

One such: the recovery on May 9, 1945, after seven years, of the British Ambassador's Rolls Royce, by an SOE Colonel who had bluffed his way into Prague through Red Army lines; another, the apparently spontaneous (but in fact orchestrated by Jan Masaryk) rendering of *Rule Britannia* by a Czechoslovak army unit after an inspection by Churchill, an event which supposedly brought tears to the Prime Minister's eyes; yet another, Benes's approaches to the Soviet Union being referred to by a member of the Foreign Office as 'casting sheep's eyes towards Moscow'.

Should a reviewer try and find fault? As a non-historian I should perhaps perhaps keep silent, but as someone who writes about people and places I feel obliged to point out that Banská Bystrica should not be described as being 'deep in the Tatra Mountains', nor should the Sorbs of Germany be referred to solely in the past tense; on my last visit to Saxony this little Slav ethnic group seemed to be doing quite well. And finally as a Slovakophile I would have preferred a rather more nuanced description of the regime of the 1939-45 Slovak State than as 'staunchly pro-Nazi'. But that is another subject, and none of the above is intended to detract from Dr Brown's impressive achievement.

**PS.** Among the multitude of references in the book is one to *Who's Next? The Lesson of Czechoslovakia*, a work of 1951 purportedly written by one 'John Brown'. Dr Brown suggests that this particular Brown may have been Count Maximilián von Lobkowitz, the wartime Czechoslovak Ambassador. Perhaps a reader might be able to identify the mystery author?

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