

The book by three authors represents a very thorough examination of the question of the evacuation of the Germans from Slovakia at the end of the Second World based on the original sources. The authors offer many new facts and details. However, they have also maintained an overview of the geographical and historical context, considering all the possible connections that played a role in the evacuation process. The book advances our knowledge of the end of the Second World War, while also raising a whole series of inspiring questions.

Dušan Kováč
(*Historický ústav SAV*)

LONDÁK, Miroslav – MICHÁLEK, Slavomír et al. *DUBČEK*. Bratislava: VEDA; Historický ústav SAV, 2018, 532 pages. ISBN 9788022416511.

LONDÁK, Miroslav – MICHÁLEK, Slavomír (Eds.). *ALEXANDER DUBČEK. The Symbol of Spring*. Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang GmbH, 2019, 556 pages. ISBN 9783631783191.

The collective monograph devoted to Alexander Dubček originated in the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences on the occasion of two important anniversaries of Slovak and Czechoslovak history in 2018 and 2019: the fiftieth anniversary of the attempt to reform socialism and the thirtieth anniversary of the fall of communism. The aim of the publication was to collect the latest research on this theme and present it to the Slovak and Czech public. The English version of the book is intended for foreign experts and others interested in this important figure from 20th century Slovak history.

The work is not only a political biography of Alexander Dubček supported by sources. It is also to a large extent a guide to (Czecho-)Slovak and international history during Dubček's life from his birth to his death. This approach already shows that the book is not a classic historical biography, constructed around a historical personality, his internal and social life, activities and contribution to a particular field, placed in the context of the period. The publication presents a different conception, also partly derived from the fact that almost all its parts have different authors, with 22 chapters written by 20 historians. Each of them is an expert on a particular problem, and this conditions his or her view of Dubček's activities and the reactions to them in the public space. Another element that disturbs the homogeneity of this biography is that in spite of the strict historical approach of the authors, subjective views based on their personal ideological preferences are reflected on their views and evaluations of A. Dubček. The extent of recent research is not the least important factor. Although the authors have researched the whole period of Dubček's life, in comparison with the state of research, for example, at the time of the twentieth anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, the most researched problem is the Prague Spring, and not only from the point of view of Dubček as its leading figure and symbol, but also in terms of knowledge of its deeper processes and wider connections.

For objective reasons, the least covered period is the childhood and adolescence of Alexander Dubček. The authors of the first two chapters make substantial use of Dubček's autobiography: *Nádej zomiera posledná* (*Hope Dies Last*). (Bratislava 1993). He was born in Slovakia into a working class family, which had emigrated to the USA, then returned to the newly established Czechoslovak Republic. However, four years later, they were in the Soviet Union. Alexander's parents had belonged to the socialist movement in America, and they believed that after Lenin's revolution, the new Soviet Union represented a juster world. They did not change their view after thirteen years of harsh Soviet conditions, when they again returned to Czechoslovakia. They automatically passed on this faith to their son Alexander, who returned to Slovakia as a convinced communist. Although the authors of the book could not directly trace the personal development of A. Dubček, they succeeded in convincingly mapping the environment and thought world in which he grew up and which influenced him throughout his life.

Dubček's return to the turbulent conditions of Central Europe in the summer of 1938, which grew into the Second World War a year later, only confirmed his ideological orientation. He participated in the resistance and the Slovak National Uprising. After the war, as the author confirms from contemporary materials, he acted as a consistent pro-Soviet Communist. The author of the chapter describes Dubček in these years, using his own words, as "more or less only a spectator of the dramatic political development."

An important turning point in the life of the 28 year old Dubček came only in 1949, when he became the organizing secretary of the District Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia. After this milestone, the authors devote their attention to his development as a functionary, in 1950s Slovakia and from 1960 at the headquarters in Prague. By using archive materials, they document his political progress and activities, both official and within the party. They trace the growth of his political importance and state that his loyalty to the changing top leadership of the party gradually began to crack from the beginning of the 1960s. From Dubček's election as first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia in April 1963, tension built up especially between him and President Antonín Novotný. This party political biography is supplemented with chapters about Dubček's political-economic and cultural-political views and activities. All this is placed against the background of the general social and political development of Slovakia and Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s.

The actual year 1968, when Dubček officially stood at the head of the so-called renewal process and became its symbol in the whole state, is similarly analysed in the book. The authors of the appropriate chapters trace his political actions not only in the reform questions, but also in encounters with groups for which the reformist course set by Dubček's new party leadership was too narrow, and obviously also his approach to the Soviet Union and other socialist states, which progressed from growing criticism to the military invasion. Two chapters covering the attitude of the West and the USA to Dubček and events in Czechoslovakia before and after the invasion by its allies fill in the wider context of the reform process in Czechoslovakia in relation to the Soviet Bloc. Paradoxically, the chapters devoted to the Prague Spring do not contain references to archive sources in their footnotes. The authors cite the basic research from their own works

devoted to this problem or from the numerous publications on this theme published by the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

The invasion of August 1968 ended A. Dubček's "star period" as the symbol of the reform movement both at home and abroad. After the humiliating talks in Moscow, he was gradually pushed into the background at home and discredited by the opponents of reform. In April 1969, he resigned from the function of first secretary of the CC CPS, and he gradually lost all his positions in high politics. He was expelled from the Communist Party in June 1970. Several chapters are devoted to this period and to Normalization. Dubček is presented in them as an unbroken and morally firm person, who was not silenced in spite of the isolation forced on him by the regime. They start from his own memories and the memories of people who engaged in the reform process of 1968 before being persecuted by the Husák regime, as well as from a multitude of documentary sources. The last period covered by the book, that covering the new challenges and defeats brought to Dubček by the Velvet Revolution, has a similar material base, supplemented by Czech memories and sources.

Apart from the chronological presentation of the political life of A. Dubček, the publication also contains another three texts, which increase its value and attractiveness. The first is a chapter about Dubček as a subject of historiography, in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and abroad, especially in the English speaking countries, from 1968 until the present day. The author analyses the basic tendencies in the evaluation of Dubček, with variations by nationality between Slovak and Czech or across the left – right political spectrum. The second text, the introduction to the book, points not only to the contradictions in the person of A. Dubček, but also in his evaluation by society, which was not only divided in its evaluation, but also mixed its view of history into its view of him and associated events. The third text concludes the publication about Dubček. It is one of the first attempts to analyse and understand his overall profile as a person and as a politician. The authors open new questions and seek at least partial answers, which move between two polls: Dubček as a hero and icon of the reform process at the end of the 1960s, or as a flawed person without moral integrity, who needs to be historically disqualified.

Edita Ivaničková
(Historický ústav SAV)