

RECENZE

MAJEWSKI, Piotr Maciej

Kiedy wybuchnie wojna? 1938. Studium kryzysu.
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A professional historian stands for tough problems quite often. Namely, with the following ones: „How to get through the wide circle of readers with the results of my research?“ „How can I be free from the fetters of writing only for a narrow group of specialists in a strict area of mine“. „Is it possible to popularize knowledge in thorough way, as well as in way interesting for someone who is not familiar with topic?“ The process of finding out the solution for aforementioned problems is definitely difficult. Contemporary books' market does not make this task easier, because it is occupied with publications in the category of 'History', that have sensational character, most often with tendency to some concrete political views presented by their authors. These writings are usually very attractive for the readers, because they are oriented on looking for sensations than systemizing knowledge in some area. Publications which are endeavored to presenting history in way as more objective as it possible, have tough competition with them. Tough but possible to winning. The proof is a new work about the Munich Agreement entitled in Polish „Kiedy wybuchnie wojna? 1938. Studium kryzysu“ [„When the War will break out? 1938. The Study of the Crisis“] written by Piotr M. Majewski.

The author is a researcher employed at Institute of History, University of Warsaw. In the years of 2009–2017 he had been a deputy director at the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk. His science interests concern contemporary history of the Czech Republic and Czechoslovakia as well as relations between Czechs and Germans in 19th and 20th centuries. The most important publications of Piotr M. Majewski are „Edvard Beneš i kwestia niemiecka w Czechach“ (Edvard Beneš and the German matter in the Bohemia, Warsaw 2001), „Niemcy sudeccy: historia pewnego nacjonalizmu“ (The Sudeten Germans: the story of one nationalism, Warsaw 2007)¹ and „Zmarnowana szansa? Możliwości obrony Czechosłowacji jesienią 1938 roku“ (A Wasted Chance? Defence Capabilities of Czechoslovakia in Autumn 1938, Gdańsk 2016)². The work „When the War will break out?“ concerns main part of author's science in-terests and in some way it is a recapitulation of his research in the sphere of Czechoslovak situation on the eve of the Second World War up to now.

Discussed publication consists of several dozen chapters. Each of them describes one concrete event, that took place in one concrete day. Author began since 31st December 1937, when daily „Lidové Noviny“ published horoscope of French astrologer Maurice Privat, that prophesied political confusion to Europe. The book's narration is ended on 22nd October in Prague, when president Edvard Beneš is taking off from Ruzyně airport to enforced emigra-tion in the United Kingdom. In the end of the book is also something like an epilogue in which author presented day of Beneš death – 3rd September 1948 in Sezimovo Ústí. It could be an addition, that have aim to present Czechoslovak president' tragic figure. After this, we could read the last part entitled „From the Author“, in which Piotr M. Majewski briefly talk topic of the Munich Crisis over in the context of Czech social remember and popular culture. Author gave there also an acknowledgements to the people, who contribute to his book come into being. The work is completed by the lengthy bibliography, list of the photos sources and index of names.

The discussed work is based on primary sources – documents, that are deposited in eight archive in general: The Archive of the Security Services in Prague, The Archive of the Czech Republic President's Office, The

Archive of the National Museum in Prague, the Archive of the T. G. Masaryk Institute, The Central Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw, the German Federal Archive in Koblenz, The National Archive in Prague and The Military Central Archive in Prague. Author used also Czech, German, English, French and Polish editions of published documents as well as several dozen diaries and memories. Piotr M. Majewski joined to this lengthy source material nine press titles – four Czechoslovak, three British, one Polish and one French. In his work Author used also a lot of Czech, Polish, English, German studies and couple materials, that are available on the websites.

The big advantage of reviewed publication is thorough worked lengthy source base out. Piotr M. Majewski used big amount of varied primary sources, that have diversified provenance. It made possible to look through the Munich Crisis from many perspectives. Owing to this author took into consideration opinions about those events from Czechoslovak, German, French, British and in some extent also Polish political environments. There are no doubts, that author would not gain this level of detailedness, if he had not been an experienced researcher and an expert in the field of Czechoslovak and European policy in 1930 s. But, on the particular attention in Piotr M. Majewski book deserves form in which problematic of the Munich Crisis was presented.

The narration is simple and innovative at the same time. Author gave up traditional form of popular science historical book, which describes events in objective way as far as possible, and tries to create row of causes and results. Piotr M. Majewski constructed his narration from plenty of small stories about individual days and events of 1938 year in Czechoslovakia. In this way, he wrote a book, which is composed of several dozen short chapters. When we are reading them, we not only see those events and decisions, that had been making in Prague, Berlin, Paris and London, but we can also empathize to actors of this political crisis and their emotions. We can imagine that époque, be in shoes of peoples, who had been decision makers of those times as well as we could try to understand their thoughts. This effect Piotr M. Majewski reached, because of the precise analysis of memories and official documents. Of course, from the science's point of view such approaching to the process

of the pre-senting results of research could raise doubts. How can we reconstruct thoroughly emotions of people, who had died long time ago? Would it be reliable reconstruction? In this work are that – doubts raising – attempts of reconstructing emotions and moods. An example is expression: „President Beneš with satisfaction, although without a trace of surprise, was looking through the newest issue of weekly „Demokratický střed“ (p. 35).³ How does author know, that Beneš was precise in this mood? The whole situation concerns corruption scandal connected with politician from agrarian party, who was president's adversary. In the endnote author re-fers to the memories of diplomat Hubert Masarik, but endnote is general and we cannot be sure which information in whole paragraph concerns. The sentence stems rather from author's presumption, than real situation, that was immortalized in primary sources. The goal of this operation in plot constructing was raising of attraction of the story that was presented.

In another place Piotr M. Majewski wrote: „At the early afternoon, when Czechs were ending Sunday's dinner and in many homes radio sets were already switched on, looking for Berlin's broadcasting station with curiosity, from the loudspeakers rang hoarse, loud voice and sloppy pronounced sentences, that were thrown on the ether with impetus of machine gun by the man, who was not formal educated and good-mannered admittedly. Some of words he tried pronounced in the Prussia manner, but his German language seemed strange familiar on the Vltava river“ (p. 59).⁴

The narration constructed in this way has a big impact on the reader imagination. It arouses a concrete scene in his mind, picture and situation, that make described historical events closer, more familiar. From the perspective popularization it is a big advantage. Even more because plot additives are not deceptive or tendentious. In fact, they are very probable and harmless to the relevant understanding of whole problematic. Author reconstructed these scenes on the basis of people's memories, namely people, who were engaged in the events of 1938 year or on the base of logical reasoning. In popular science book – work written by Piotr M. Majewski is in this category undoubtedly – reconstructing mood of the epoque and emotions of people, who participated in describing events,

could be a key to interest to proposed topic of a wider group of readers. Piotr M. Majewski did it in an accomplished manner. He joined curious form with perfect style of writing. „When the war will break out?“ is like good crime story or political thriller. Even better, because described events took place in reality and were one of the most important turning point in the history of Czechoslovakia in the 20th century as well as Europe and the whole World at the same time.

But, the work written by Piotr M. Majewski is also valuable from the scientific point of view. „When the war will break out?“, day per day, systematizes knowledge about Czechoslovak crisis in 1938. Thanks to this, researcher can check what happened in concrete day in very easy way and use this information during his work. Just look to table of contents and find the date that interested us. From the standpoint of researcher, who is dealing with inter-national relations in interwar period, this feature could be very useful.

To sum up all considerations, that were made above, „When the war will break out?“ is a remarkable book.⁵ It was written with lightness and detailedness, that are sign of enormous effort, which was put in preparation of this work. Piotr M. Majewski created an universal publication, that is directed both to the wide group of readers, but also to the science environment. In the second case, as a challenge – it is possible writing reliable and widely interesting books about complicated, political and social topics. „When the war will break out?“ is exactly that kind of publication.

Notes:

¹ Published also in Czech language: „Sudetští Němci 1848–1948: dějiny jednoho nacionalismu“, překlad z polštiny Markéta Páralová Tardy, Brno 2014.

² As above „Bojovat, či ustoupit? Možnosti obrany Československa na podzim 1938, překlad z polštiny Markéta Páralová Tardy, Brno 2018.

³ Translated by author. Original quotation: „Prezydent Beneš z zadowoleniem, choć bez śladu zaskoczenia przeglądał najnowszy numer tygodnika „Demokratický střed“.

⁴ As above. Original quotation: „Wczesnym popołudniem, gdy Czesi kończyli właśnie niedzielny obiad i w wielu domach włączono odbiorniki, nastawiając je

z ciekawości na rozgłośnię berlińską, z głośników rozległ się chrapliwy, podniesiony głos i niechlujnie artykułowane zdania, wyrzucane w eter z impetem karabinu maszynowego przez człowieka, któremu z pewnością brakowało formalnego wykształcenia i obycia. Niektóre słowa starał się wymawiać z pruska, jego niemieczyzna wydawała się jednak na Wełtawą dziwnie znajoma⁵.

⁵ The proof of this statement is that in 2020 „When the war will break out?“ was nominated to prestigious Nike Award.

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