

Apart from its very considerable analytical value, Zielinski's book is also a gold mine of statistical information on various aspects of Polish economy. Most of these data have been accessible to Western scholars in the past only if they could read Polish fluently. This reference material is an additional windfall, which should prove very helpful to many serious students of East European economies.

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IDEA NÁRODA V HUSITSKÝCH ČECHÁCH. By *František Šmahel*. České Budějovice: Růže, 1971. 230 pp. Kčs. 30, paper.

The precocious emergence of a Czech nation in the fifteenth century, both as idea and as fact, has long been recognized as a problem requiring explanation. The author enlarges this problem into a problematical complex: What were the components of the national idea? What social groups formed the idea? To how much of Czech society did it apply? What were its similarities and differences with other national ideas of the time? With the modern idea? The inquiry is based on a sound combination of semantic and historical analysis, embracing in fact much of the course of Hussite history from the late fourteenth century through the reign of George of Poděbrady, with full and erudite attention to all late-medieval parallels. We see how a national idea originally conceived as a linguistic differential (*jazyk český*), and developed as the self-consciousness of university masters and nobles, passed through the Hussite experience into a mode of religious self-consciousness extensible to all social groups of the Hussite people—even at times to its non-Hussite compatriots. Thus in certain temporary contexts the national idea prevailed over the social and religious categories. Hence the Czechs were indeed “ahead” of other groups destined to become nations, even though it would be wrong, for the reasons here implied, to identify their national idea with the modern one.

The substance of the book was originally published in English in *Historica*, volumes 16 and 17 (Prague, 1969); this is a revision and expansion. It is a solid piece of work, far more comprehensive, sophisticated, and scholarly than any previous treatment. In its own terms it is definitive. Its limits would lie in its problematics, about which historians may reasonably differ. There is the old question about the usefulness of attacking the categories of medieval self-consciousness with the peculiarly disjunctive categories of our own. It seems to me useful only when ideas are systematically ideologized, something that cannot be done by semantic analysis. And there are those who believe, with Durkheim, that the totemic force is that of society rather than that of the totem itself: does it matter, then, whether the totem is this or that? Šmahel himself is scrupulously diffident about the substantive autonomy of the national idea that he disengages from the sources, and often gives the impression that only his program keeps him from dissolving his construction of an idea into straight history.

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