

THE LITTLE DICTATORS: THE HISTORY OF EASTERN EUROPE SINCE 1918. By *Antony Polonsky*. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975. xii, 212 pp. Maps. Statistical appendix. \$16.50.

Books should be judged by the intentions of their authors, not the alternative preferences of their reviewers. In the case of this book, Dr. Polonsky, lecturer in international history at the London School of Economics, obviously intended to write a clear and short survey for the instruction of the general public, not a research tome for professional scholars or even for college students. In this self-assigned task, he succeeds well. The author introduces the reader to the many political, economic, social, demographic, ideological, and international problems that racked the area between the Soviet Union on the east and Germany and Italy on the west during the two interwar decades. He then outlines the extent to which some of these problems persist today, while others have been attenuated or replaced by new ones.

In this brief volume, Dr. Polonsky could achieve no more than a delineation of the outlines of these several problems and issues. The introductory twenty-five-page survey is followed by a survey of each individual country during the interwar period (allowing, on the average, for a little over a dozen pages per country), a twenty-nine-page epilogue on World War II and the postwar era combined, a relatively long statistical appendix, thirteen pages of suggestions for further reading, and an index. The statistical appendix, though rich, is a bit mystifying because most of its tables are not correlated with the narrative, are not comparable to each other for the several countries, are not systematically organized, and seem to be reproduced here simply because Dr. Polonsky has randomly collected them. Indeed, in a few cases the tables in this appendix even contradict the narrative text—for example, in the case of the estimates of the population of interwar Poland dependent on agriculture (table 11 on page 164 versus text-page 34), and in the case of interwar Hungary's land-distribution pattern, where the correct data in terms of *holds* (table 15, page 166) is erroneously transposed into *acres* (text-page 7).

Because Dr. Polonsky is admirably bold in his judgments, he inevitably risks disagreement with other students of his subject matter. But such intellectual controversy is the engine of scholarly progress. This reviewer, for example, is not as confident as is the author that Hungary's "village explorers" of the 1930s "basically upheld western democratic values" (p. 7); wonders why Jews were omitted from the demographic map (pp. 12–13); and disagrees with the claim that Bethlen's financial policy for the Hungary of the 1920s was one of "rigorous orthodoxy" (p. 51). Moreover, several judgments—that the Austrian Nazis' neutrality in the civil war of 1934 won them substantial support "even among the socialists" (p. 74), that the Rumanian dictator, Marshal Ion Antonescu, was merely an "old-fashioned conservative" (p. 91), and that the German administration in wartime occupied Bohemia-Moravia was particularly harsh (p. 131)—are open to question. Some dates are also in error.

Nevertheless, Dr. Polonsky frequently hits the nail on the head with valid insights. Particularly neat is his stitching together of domestic failures in interwar East Central Europe with the collapse of the French alliance system and the erosion of the democratic ideological model. The best single chapter is the one on Rumania.

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