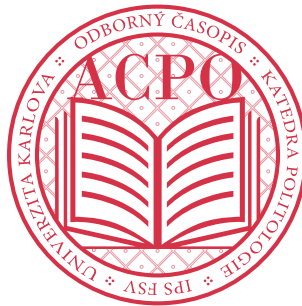


ACTA POLITOLOGICA

www.acpo.cz

RECENZOVANÝ ČASOPIS | PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL

2023 | Vol. 15 | No. 3 | ISSN 1803-8220



CHADIMA, Jan (2022). *Rudolf Slánský*. Praha: Vyšehrad, 448 p. ISBN 978-80-7601-623-1.

RECENZE MICHALA MALÉHO
REVIEW FROM MICHAL MALÝ

https://doi.org/10.14712/1803-8220/33_2023

Published: 31/10/2023

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The reviewed book is a relatively new work in the field of political science, and especially history. As the title suggests, the book's central topic is Rudolf Slánský, a lifelong communist who fell victim to the regime. Although this is not a book that would reflect current political events or contemporary history, it does deepen awareness of one of the most key and, at the same time, most terrifying figures in the history of the Czech (Czechoslovak) state. It is not only a description of the life of Slánský but an attempt to systematically examine his transformation in various stages, connected especially with his career progression within the Communist Party and his relationship with his family. In the introduction, the author outlines the methodological framework according to which he will examine the extensive life events of Slánský. The text uses the method of Pierre Bourdieu (1998), which is based on three key terms: habitus, social field, and capital. The term habitus refers to the actor's behaviour and decision-making, attitudes, and approaches to the perception of everyday reality. The social field refers to creating one's own rules of the game, the possibility of profit from a given situation, and the influencing of actors who become part of this field. Each field has its logic and dynamics, and it is necessary to orient oneself in them. In the space of the field, actors operate with resources, which we call capital. The text's author follows Slánský's development within these concepts, with the help of which he captures the transformation of this personality.

The book itself is divided into eleven chapters, arranged chronologically. The first chapter, "Early Years," presents the beginning of Rudolf Slánský's life. Specifically, that he came from the village of Nezvěstice, that his parents ran a small shop in this village (which later made it quite difficult for him in political trials), that he attended grammar

school in Pilsen, and that he later transferred to a business academy in the same city. In short, a summary of childhood. The chapter ends with a significant event in Slánský's life, his entry into the Communist Party. The second chapter focuses on the beginnings of Slánský's political career. The central theme is the formation of his ideological anchoring, and at the same time, describes the first field in which he was active, i.e., the newly formed Communist Party in Czechoslovakia (KSČ). At the beginning of the party's establishment, several currents of opinion were active in the party, which the author tries to describe in detail to understand the context and situation. The chapter describes the beginnings of anti-Semitic behaviour that Slánský faced for the rest of his life, especially during his trial. The author's attention is transferred to the beginnings of Slánský's party career in the third chapter. Slánský was sent to Ostrava as the editor of the Communist Party daily *Delnický deník*. It was not a comfortable environment for him for several reasons. The first reason was his young age, so he was not entirely respected by the Ostrava communists (primarily miners). The second reason was the considerable influence of former members of social democracy and the ideas associated with this current. The chapter ends with Slánský leaving for Kladno. There, his task was to Bolshevize the local communist cell. In this chapter, the author emphasizes the "Red Day" event, which ended in an organizational fiasco. This fact was a burden for Slánský for an even longer time, and at the Fifth Congress of the Communist Party, where the group around Klement Gottwald took power. Ultimately, Slánský moves again to a new workplace, namely to Prague. The fifth chapter focuses on the period after the Fifth Congress until the beginning of World War II. The central topic is a change in the

tactics of the Communist Party. The party started operating with the term “social fascism”, which it wanted to use to distinguish itself from social democracy and, at the same time to respond to the increasing level of fascism in society and Europe. As part of the change in tactics, the party began to prepare for a potential transition into illegality. At the same time, the chapter deals with issuing an arrest warrant for Gottwald, who emigrated to Moscow because of this, and the communists’ efforts to exchange his immunity for support for President Beneš. In the following chapter, attention is paid to Slánský’s emigration to the USSR and his participation in the exile leadership of the Communist Party. One of his jobs was announcing Czech news on Moscow Radio. He was later transferred as a political and ideological worker to partisan units, within which he also participated in the Slovak National Uprising. In the seventh chapter, the central theme is party building. Slánský began to build the KSČ in much larger dimensions and for much more significant tasks. At the same time, after the war, many new members joined the party; when some were in parties before the war that were abolished in the restored republic,

it was necessary to create new structures and policies. The last four chapters deal with a topic about which much has already been written, the February coup and the political show trials. Here, the author describes the incredible rise and even more significant fall that Slánský experienced during seven years. The last part, when Slánský was already in custody, is exciting. Using letters and investigative reports, the author captures the last transformation of Slánský, when the second most powerful man in the country becomes her greatest enemy. As the documents mentioned, Slánský took his “last role” as a sacrifice for the party to which he sacrificed his entire life.

The reviewed book is undoubtedly essential for studying the history of the Communist Party and its representatives. Apart from the relatively well-known information about Rudolf Slánský himself, the book provides an exciting insight into his personal life and his family’s lives. An outstanding contribution is the number of historical photographs the author uses in the book. The disadvantage is the occasional excessive detail, especially the large number of names and titles, which can confuse the reader.

Michal Malý¹

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