

Four Britons and Nationalism

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Abstract

Up to this day nationalism has remained a powerful and durable phenomenon: nations in East-Central Europe and beyond have not only survived into but even thrived in the twenty-first century, while their deeply ingrained nationalisms have remained incomprehensible to the West. This is despite the fact that the region has been a hotbed of ethnic conflict, where two world wars have started, and where even today there is no peace. The four Britons profiled in this volume were among the few Westerners who made a sincere effort to understand the nationalist spirit which has historically played such an important role in the region.

These influential journalists and scholars were; Robert William Seton-Watson, the much-celebrated historian of East-Central Europe, the influential Vienna correspondent and later editor-in-chief of *The Times (London)*, Henry Wickham Steed, as well as the world-renowned scholar and Director of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Arnold Joseph Toynbee, and the British Foreign Office-expert on minorities and Hungary, Carlile Aylmer Macartney. All four lived in East-Central Europe for a time and learned its language(s).

Drawing on a vast amount of archival material, this book outlines Seton-Watson's, Steed's and Toynbee's pre-1920-activities that were rooted in the belief that national self-determination would provide "one cure for all". The volume then focuses on nationalism within the Successor States of Austria-Hungary during the interwar period and World War II.

In this work, Ágnes Beretzky's research shows that once post-WW1 events demonstrated the weakness of the small nation-state system, only Toynbee came to reconsider his earlier stance, whereas Steed and Seton-Watson remained avowed apologists of the territorial status quo they had helped create. In line with Toynbee, the youngest of the four, Macartney on the other hand strongly believed, from his early days as historian, that it is a scholar's obligation not only to seek the truth but publish it, withholding nothing.

Beretzky's valuable book provides us with evidence of the long-term problems caused by the rush to establish small national entities out of the break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the end of World War I. The resulting destabilization of the "sick Heart of Europe", created consequences that the world lives with to this day.