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IN MEMORIAM

# An Economic Historian of Central Europe, Prof. Alice Teichová (1920–2015)

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**T**HE AUSTRIAN, CZECHOSLOVAKIAN, AND BRITISH ECONOMIC HISTORIAN ALICE TEICHOVÁ passed away in Cambridge on 12 March 2015. Austrian by birth and Czechoslovakian by choice, Teichová left Central Europe for the West twice in her life, driven out by two totalitarian regimes that successively seized control of the turbulent heart of Central Europe that was her home.

Alice Teichová was born Alice Schwarz in Vienna on 19 September 1920. Her father, Arthur, was a watchmaker and goldsmith and had a small store and workshop in the Floridsdorf district of Vienna, where he, his wife, and his two children lived in a modest one-room apartment. The Great Depression led to the collapse of his business and, as was the case for many people, it severely altered the family's circumstances.<sup>1</sup> The then-adolescent Alice drew from this experience her lifelong belief in the possibility of a better social order. She had to leave her studies at a gymnasium when she was fourteen, and from then on always had to fight hard for the right to study. This led her to the conviction that people who obtain an education have the obligation to think about things differently and to value education.

Her mother, Gisela Maria, née Leist, tried to make life easier for her children by converting them from Judaism to Catholicism. The only way they were ultimately able to evade the fate of Jews in Central Europe, however, was by emigrating to Great Britain. Germany's Anschluss with Austria occurred on 12 March 1938—exactly seventy-seven years before the date of Alice Teichová's death. When crossing the border in 1938, a German officer helped Alice. Thirty years later, when the armies of the Warsaw Pact occupied Communist Czechoslovakia, it would be only the sloppiness of the authoritarian state that helped her to cross another critical border. The airport and train stations in Prague were closed, and roads in the entirety of Czechoslovakia were under military control, but luckily, not all of the trains were shut down.

In England, meanwhile, Teichová worked as a maid and a shop assistant. In 1940s Exeter she met Mikuláš Teich, a Czechoslovakian originally from Ružomberok. He too had fled the Nazis when they occupied Czechoslovakia. They shared a bond of love throughout their lives and a

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<sup>1</sup>Alice Teichova and Mikuláš Teich, *Zwischen der kleinen und der großen Welt: Ein gemeinsames Leben im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Gert Dressel and Michaela Reischitz (Vienna, 2005).

belief in Marxism. From 1942 she studied economics in the evening school at the University of Leeds, where Mikuláš was studying chemistry.

In 1945 Alice had no hesitations about following her husband back to Czechoslovakia during those three postwar years, as the country enthusiastically pursued its own path to Socialism. She was approaching the age of thirty. She learned the language, made new friends, and continued her studies. In 1952 she earned her PhD in history from Charles University in Prague and in 1960 the title of Candidate of Sciences (CSc). In 1952 she also began teaching general history at Charles University's Faculty of Education as an assistant, and in 1959 she became head of the Department of History. In 1964 she completed her habilitation in economic history. She also lectured in both East and West Germany at universities in Potsdam, Berlin, Leipzig, Braunschweig, Bochum, and Hamburg.

In 1968 Alice Teichová was on the edge of great success in her career: She had just submitted her habilitation thesis on foreign capital in Czechoslovakia to the Prague publisher Academia, which was to have been her first major academic publication. She and her husband had both been invited to spend a year lecturing at universities in the United States. Unlike Mikuláš, Alice did not accept the idea that when they left for the United States they would be leaving Czechoslovakia forever. As they walked from their home to catch the night train together, Mikuláš said to her: "Alice, this is the last time we'll be walking this way." "No, no," she countered.

That was in August 1968, just after the invasion of Soviet troops. The couple slipped through the Iron Curtain at the very last minute before it shut. But this was not yet emigration; she had traveled abroad to work, and she was still an employee of Charles University. Over the course of the next several years she lectured at twelve American universities, including Yale, Harvard, the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and the University of California at Berkeley. She also spent the summer of 1969 as a guest professor at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Teichová was close to Czechoslovakia then, but she did not take that extra step to the East. Instead, she and her husband headed back to Great Britain, which now became their permanent home.

In 1969 Alice began teaching political and economic history at Cambridge University. She spent a year as a Visiting Fellow at University (now Wolfson) College and three years as a Visiting Bye-Fellow at Girton College, where in 1989 she was named an Honorary Fellow. In 1970 she was appointed Senior Associate Member at St. Antony's College in Oxford for a year to work on a research project devoted to the economic history of Eastern Europe. Although she was later offered the opportunity to join Girton College and supervise students of German, she wanted to focus on teaching and researching economic history, and so decided to take the post as a lecturer in economic history at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in Norwich.

Teichová was fifty years old at the time, and starting again from the very bottom in the position of an assistant. In 1973 she advanced to the position of reader, and in 1975 she became the UEA's first female professor. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, she turned the UEA into a centre of European economic history. In the 1980s and 1990s Professor Teichová was a member of the Royal Historical Society, the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, and until 2003 a member of the Austrian Historical Commission for Compensating Victims of Nazism. She taught at the London School of Economics and Political Science, at the universities of Uppsala and Vienna, and at the Center for the Humanities at Oregon State University in the USA. The University of Uppsala and the University of Vienna awarded her honorary doctorates. Even after 1990 she and her husband actively took part in seminars on European history at Cambridge University.

Professor Teichová focused most of her research on the interwar period, which fascinated her in many ways. Her research in this area was perhaps mostly driven by her desire to shed light on

a historical truth: while in interwar Vienna she encountered very critical views of the Czech lands, but when she actually arrived in Czechoslovakia after the war she experienced something very different—a place of distinguished culture and education. The question of the true economic status of interwar Czechoslovakia was begging to be explored, and this remained her lifelong research passion. For ten years she traveled all over Czechoslovakia to do research in the business archives and put together a picture of the role of foreign capital in interwar Czechoslovakia. The monograph based on this research paper became the foundation for her successful completion of the habilitation process. Despite receiving a positive review from Prof. Kašík, however, the entire monograph was later scrapped at Academia for being the work of an emigrant. It was eventually published, in 1994, by Karolinum Press as *Mezinárodní kapitál a Československo* (International capital and Czechoslovakia), but by then it was a translation of a publication that had already become a classic historical work in the West. That book, *An Economic Background to Munich*, had been published in 1974 by Cambridge University Press. Five years after emigrating, Professor Teichová had finally attained full recognition of her work.

With the publication of her book and the appointment to a professorship at UEA, Alice Teichová entered the most productive period of her career. At the UEA she began to build an international network of economic historians across Europe and the United States, and she continued to pursue her primary research interests: Czechoslovakia and Central Europe in the interwar period and industry, banking, capital flows, foreign trade, cartels, multinational corporations, currency issues, the state of the economy, and economic thought in the region. In most of these subject areas, her books and articles were pioneering and became the foundation for other studies. She published six books and another eight in-depth studies. Of the more than a hundred articles she published in her life, half were written when she was over the age of 70, and only eighteen were written during her early twenty-year career in Czechoslovakia. She was the editor of eighteen other books, and the (guest) editor of twelve special issues of international journals. She always, however, went the extra mile as an editor. The evidence for this is the dozens of letters she wrote to coauthors, her revisions to submitted texts, and the seminars she organized to define and discuss the content of the books. Her work as an editor equally attests to how much she espoused openness and freedom of intellectual inquiry in research, both her own and that of her colleagues. In the books she edited, she would include contributions with which she did not agree, as long as the authors had properly argued and substantiated their point of view; she then explained her own opinion in the introduction or the conclusion. She collaborated with such outstanding figures as Michael Kaser, Gerald D. Feldman, Hans Ulrich Wehler, Jürgen Kocka, Harold James, Richard Evans, Richard Overby, Maurice Lévy-Leboyer, Helga Nussbaum, Patricia Hudson, P. L. Cottrell, Hans Mommsen, Paul Bairoch, Waclaw Długoborski, Terry Gourvish, and Herbert Matis, and Czech economic historians Jaroslav Pátek, Milan Myška, and Arnošt Klíma. After 1989, she opened the doors to an entire generation of Czech and Slovak economic historians in their thirties and forties to become involved in international research projects.<sup>2</sup>

Teichová's research reflected the influence of two traditions in economic history. She studied economics and naturally approached history from an economic perspective. To this she added grounding in positivism and a firm grasp on how to work properly with sources, which she had learned from her studies in history in Czechoslovakia. For this reason she was not interested in

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<sup>2</sup>Antonie Doležalová and Roman Holec, "Continuity and Discontinuity in the Czech and Slovak Historiographies," in *Routledge Handbook of Global Economic History*, ed. Francesco Boldizzoni and Pat Hudson (London, 2016), 230–41.

quantitative economic analysis alone; she looked for answers to questions about how economic activities are reflected in economic policy and how they influence the development of society as a whole. In her hands economic history became an integrated social science. She was critical of the administrative command-style economy that operated in state Socialist countries, and did not conceal her opinion that the system established in those countries had failed to fulfill expectations. She did not, however, alter her belief in the relevance of the Marxist interpretation of historical processes.

Professor Teichová transformed the field of economic history. For her, education was a commitment, work a gift, and collaboration with others a responsibility. Working with Professor Teichová was a privilege and an honor.

**ANTONIE DOLEŽALOVÁ** is an economic historian and Senior Lecturer at Charles University in Prague. In her research and lectures she focuses on economic history in the Czech lands and CEE at the end of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries within the following themes: (a) the history of economic policy, (b) the history of Czech economic thought, (c) the phenomenon of individual and group interest, and (d) the historiography of economic history. She is the author of numerous studies including “Continuity and Discontinuity in the Czech and Slovak Historiographies” (jointly with Roman Holec), in *Routledge Handbook of Global Economic History*, ed. Francesco Boldizzoni and Pat Hudson (London, 2016), 230–41. From 2007 she has managed the first Czech virtual library, “*Bibliotheca economica*,” which contains already over seven hundred books written by Czech economists before 1948.