

Recent Czech Sociological Publications in 1995

The number of Czech books on sociology (and here we are concerned only with books) is rising and is gradually providing an effective complement to the already wide range of translations of philosophical and sociological texts. Publications over the last few years (1990-1995) show certain distinctive features which are also evident in the works published during recent months:

1) There is still very little pure sociological literature, with most books lying somewhere on the boundaries between sociology and philosophy, aesthetics, history, political science or even theology.

2) There is still no systematic study of the process of transformation of Czech society (*Pavel Machonin*'s book on this subject has not yet been published). There is a lack of basic theoretical work and as yet there are no books dealing with the history of sociology as a whole, or with major figures in world sociology.

3) The demand for popular guides and simple works of introduction is gradually being met and there are many such works on the market; while the need for such works is undeniable, there are still no specialist monographs on the horizon.

4) There is a much needed move towards a greater variety of paradigms within the sociological community – the “monolithic” Marxism (to which most good authors paid only lip service) is giving way to more clear-cut theoretical and methodological approaches. (Indeed the polarized scientism once “standard” in the West – interpretation, value neutrality, political commitment, etc. – is now rather belatedly making itself felt in this country.) This process is, however, only marginally reflected in books produced and then generally only in aesthetic terms.

Back to Our Roots

In 1955 the path of the development of Czech sociology was forcibly disrupted when administrative limitations were placed on its existence. It is therefore easy to understand why a

certain part of sociological work is turning back to the *Czech sociological tradition*, and to its most noted figures, looking there for lessons and methods for developing *current discussions and debates*. This return to history is not just a self-seeking aggrandizement but rather a very functional return. Such sociology was always within the political *milieu*, Czech sociologists were generally *political* thinkers and some of them raised problems which have still not been solved and Czech society (in public debate) is once again confronting these same current problems. On the other hand nor is it an attempt to create an artificial mythology of some (non-existent) “great Czech sociology” which was destroyed by the evil communists and the insensitive Marxists. They “only” tampered with standard central European sociology, so that Czech sociology did have the opportunity to compete with Polish and Hungarian equivalents.

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937), the first Czech sociologist and the first Czech president, is quite understandably the primary point of reference for both the Czech sociological tradition and for Czech sociology today, and literature on him multiplies year by year, culminating in the publication of Masaryk's *Spisy* [Writings]. The T.G. Masaryk centre under the direction of Jaroslav Opat first released Masaryk's *Juvenilia* (Ústav TGM, Praha 1993), Masaryk's short studies from the 1870s and 1880s, in which the influence of Auguste Comte is evident but in which Masaryk (albeit under Comte's influence) formulated his ideas on the relationship between sociology and politics, his vision of “politics as practical sociology”. Their next publication was the third volume of Masaryk's “presidential writings”: *Cesta demokracie* [The Path to Democracy] (Ústav TGM, Praha 1994, 420 pp.) to follow on from the first two volumes released half a century ago. While most of the texts deal with the politics of the era, Masaryk's unfailing interest in developments in Russia and in all the fascist and fascistic tendencies of the period is very clear. As early as the 1920s Masaryk clearly identified the direction in which the world was moving and the overall danger to Europe. Was this because he was a sociologist? It should also be noted that Masaryk was a systematic

(anonymous) reviewer of works of literature which, to the end of his life, he saw as a basic source of sociological information.

A good example of works on Masaryk is *Filosof T.G. Masaryk: Problemové skici* [T.G. Masaryk the Philosopher: An Outline of the Problems] (Doplněk, Brno 1994, 156pp.) by the Brno philosopher Lubomír Nový. The most interesting section of the book is *Rusko a Evropa – K vnitřní logice Masarykova myšlení* [Russia and Europe – The Inner Logic of Masaryk's Thought], an excellently systematic overview of the question. Radim Palouš also looks at the young Masaryk in his study, *Masarykovo filosofické mládí* [Masaryk's Early Philosophy], published as part of a larger work entitled *Česká zkušenost (Komenský – Bolzano – Masaryk – Patočka)* [The Czech Experience (Comenius – Bolzano – Masaryk – Patočka)], published by Academia (1994, 176pp.). Palouš's study (originally written in 1948) is a noteworthy commentary on Masaryk's *Juvenilia*. It focuses on Masaryk's concept and description of suicide – a key theme in his thought at that time. It is a pity that Palouš's commentary could not take note of Anthony Giddens' very interesting preface to the English edition of Masaryk's *Suicide* (1970). Gordon Skilling's work *T.G. Masaryk: Against the Current 1882-1914* has been released in a Czech translation (Práh, Praha 1995, 245pp.). This is both a superb introduction to Masaryk's way of thinking in the context of his public and political activity, and an original view of the man in its stress on his so-called first life, i.e. his life prior to the first world war (his second life was during the war and his third the period of his presidency). Skilling's basic thesis is that even if Masaryk had died in 1914 or had not gone into exile, his ideas and writings would have been worthy of analysis in themselves. Masaryk's works are not valuable just because of his presidency – they were its logical culmination.

It seems that all theoretical sociologists and sociologically inclined philosophers in the Czech Lands still feel the need to in some way "compete" with Masaryk. This is the case with thinkers from the first half of the century, most of whom were studied under Masaryk or under his pupils. Three interesting monographs have

recently appeared, the first of which (a collection of texts) offers us a closer look at the highly inspirational and at the same time highly controversial philosopher and sociologist, Josef Ludvík Fischer (1894-1973). In *Hledání rádu skutečnosti (Sborník k 100. výročí narození Josefa Ludvíka Fischera)* [In Search of an Order of Reality (A Collection In Memory of the Centenary of Josef Ludvík Fischer's Birth)], published by the Masaryk University Press, the Brno philosopher Jiří Gabriel has collected a number of thought-provoking studies, showing Fischer as an analyst of the crisis of European culture (Holzbachová), as an analyst and critic of proto-fascism, fascism and nazism, (Kudrna), as a sociologist (L. Nový), and as a philosopher (Šmajc, Corduas, D. Machovec, Gabriel). Fischer's "structural philosophy" is in its way a precursor of Parson's structural functionalism, and his superb analysis of the lights and shades of democracy is one of the high points of Czech sociology, making a return to it seem both understandable and justified.

The same publishing house has released Jiří Sedláček's attempt at a monograph on the founder of the so-called Brno school of Sociology, Inocenc Arnošt Bláha (1979-1960). I use the word "attempt" since rather than focusing on an analysis of Bláha's sociological works (Bláha was a "pure" sociologist, unlike Masaryk or J.L. Fischer, who made no attempt to hide the philosophical roots, tendencies and interests), this is rather a memoir of a friend and a welcome selection from Bláha's work. The authors do not just claim but rather show how Bláha was not a "provincial sociologist" but rather a "national sociologist" in the spirit of his times (that is to say that he concentrated on real problems of his national or state community, e.g. the crisis of the family, the psychology of the city, the role of intellectuals in society, the process of secularisation, etc.). He also had a wide knowledge of world sociology (German, English-language and particularly French, but not ignoring Yugoslav, Polish, Italian and even Russian – he regularly reviewed books in all these languages for almost forty years). Finally, in 1994, Šimona Loewensteinová published *Filosof a moralista Emanuel Rádl (1873-1942)* [Emanuel Rádl, Philosopher and Moralist] (Klub osvobozeného

samizdatu, 115pp.). Many reviewers have criticised both the book and its young author, particularly for the failure to point out Rádl's debt to Masaryk, but the book is nonetheless more than welcome today when Rádl (unlike Bláha and J.L. Fischer) is once more being read. Although primarily grounded in philosophy, Rádl's work has a certain sociological dimension, particularly in his analysis of democracy, the nation and nationalism (anti-semitism and xenophobia) and particularly of the relations between Czechs and Germans. Rádl placed this major, traumatic and still relevant subject within a historical, philosophical and sociological context, something for which there is still a real need today.

One last work of fundamental importance is the massive collection of essays *Spor o smysl českých dějin (1895-1938)* [The Controversy Concerning the Sense of Czech History (1895-1938)] (TORST, 866pp.). The initiator, editor and author of the foreword Miloš Havelka opens with the sentence "It would be difficult to find another nation in Europe which would devote so much intellectual effort to philosophical-historical reflections on itself, one which would, even after a period of 150 years, search so deeply for the reason behind its very existence as do the Czechs". This volume is a "historical complement" to the more general discussion on the "Czech question", which is now drawing participants both great and small, penetrating and limited, open-minded and arrogant. From this whole spectrum, Havelka has chosen the liveliest, the most inspiring and sophisticated (the philosopher and sociologist Masaryk as a start, the historian Pekař as the counterweight, and a whole constellation of authors such as Kaizl, Herben, Nejedlý, Krosta, Rádl, Fischer, Šalda and Slavík, who have played a significant role in the cultural and political life of the Czech nation). The need for selection has taken away none of the drama of the dispute, nor lessened the value of this volume as a source of information. It is no exaggeration to say that without Havelka's important book (and without his inspiration and massive heuristic work, this book would never have come into existence) there could not be any serious discussions of Jan Patočka's question "What are Czechs?" It is barely necessary

to mention how such subjects of contemporary relevance as liberalism (the "textbook democrat" Masaryk as "anti-liberal") or the influence (on a theoretical level) of the here little discussed Max Weber and his thought. On Czech historical thought appear in a particular historical light.

Textbooks and Study Texts

Brno University lecturer Jan Keller is undoubtedly the most quoted Czech sociologist today. There is good reason for this – he is erudite, he has ideas and he knows how to write. While his latest books *Dvanáct omylů sociologie* [Twelve Errors of Sociology] (SLON, 1995, 167pp.) has not completely abandoned his primary interest in the environment (early made clear in his collection of essays *Až na dno blahobytu* [To the Bottom of Affluence], Doplněk, 1993), it concentrates more on his professional interests – sociology. He has taken a less common approach which Pitirim Sorokin and Stanislaw Andreski and recently Peter Berger have also adopted (as well as the small and wicked essays by Zdeněk Konopásek, who even founded the *Society for the Protection of Society against Sociologists*). He has attacked sociology with its own weapons and in the pertinent (although somewhat affected) attempt to show how far sociology has erred in its development, has rendered the readers an inestimable service by introducing them to some of the forms of sociological thought and showing that while as a discipline sociology may not be free from conflict, it is decidedly worthy of respect. Keller works with some key concepts and themes, particularly with the idea of inappropriate expectations, with the critically conceived idea of social life as one great marketplace where everything can be bought and sold, and with the somewhat provocative thesis that the way the world is today arouses not interest but a lack of interest in everything: people both close and distant, public matters and primarily of course the natural environment. Keller is something of a sociological warrior, a knight in today's world, fighting on two fronts: against the excessively enlarged state with its all-powerful bureaucracy (this undoubtedly reflects his "French" experience, both personal and intellectual) and against ex-

aggerated individualism with its arrogant self-centredness. Keller's book is disturbing, provoking and stimulating, but still awaits a critical reception. The most important thing, however, is that it is a good read and is not boring, something which is not only unusual within the bounds of Czech sociology, but is indeed almost a sin from the point of view of the "dominant paradigm"; sublime boredom has in some way become a synonym of the really "scientific". Here in the central European Czech burrow it has not yet fully dawned on us that things have already long been different "in the world outside". So Keller's *Twelve Errors of Sociology* has more to offer than the majority of standard textbooks (including those of Western provenance).

Keller's *Úvod do sociologie* [An Introduction to Sociology] (SLON, 1994, 250pp.) aroused considerable interest among the general public, more as a textbook than for its unusual format and overall highly original conception, and has already reached its third edition. The chapter titles alone are highly illustrative: Sociology as a Product of Crisis, Basic Problems for the Survival of Sociology, The Cultural Approach to Problem Solving, Basic Paradigms of Sociological Thought. Something of a final chapter to Keller's *Introduction* came with the publication of *Sociologické školy, směry, paradigmata* [Schools, Trends and Paradigms of Sociology] (SLON, 1994, 250pp.) which was conceived and largely written by Miloslav Petrušek for the series *Sociologické pojmosloví* [Main Areas of Sociology]. After the meta-theoretical introduction (what are the schools, trends and paradigms and their possible typologies) the book turns to an explanation of the major concepts that have influenced sociology (sociology as an exact science – neo-positivism, behaviourism and interactionism, society as a structure, system and order – structural functionalism, society as conflict and difference – critical sociology and neo-marxism, society as significance, interpretation and meaning – phenomenological sociology and symbolic interactionism, society as the everyday – ethnmethodology, dramatic and existential sociology, naturalism redivivus – sociobiology and the post-modern trend in sociology). The explanations are systematic,

forming a "dictionary" of contemporary sociology which well fulfills its aim of providing information.

Ivo T. Budil's work *Mýtus, jazyk a kulturní antropologie* [Myth, Language and Cultural Anthropology] (Triton, Praha 1995, 240pp.) bears a certain similarity to the above work, being an outline of the history of social and cultural anthropology in close connection with sociology. It provides detailed explanations of certain old and new concepts (semiotics, cognitive etc. anthropology). Another such dictionary-like work is *Sociální a kulturní antropologie* [Social and Cultural Anthropology] edited by Ladislav Hrdý, Václav Soukup and Alena Vodáková (SLON, 1993, 157pp.) in the series *Sociologické pojmosloví*. Budil's work is however more rigorous and contains some new information. Univerzita Karlova [Charles University Press] has published Václav Soukup's *Dějiny kulturní a sociální antropologie* [The History of Cultural and Social Anthropology] (1994, 225pp.), which is factually solid and well-informed about the most recent literature. It must be said, however, that work on the confines of sociology and social anthropology in this country unfortunately lags behind that in Poland (take, for example, Ewa Nowicka's textbook *Świat człowieka – świat kultury* [The World of Man – The World of Culture], 1991, or Marian Kempny's excellent and provocative work *Antropologia bez dogmatów – teoria społeczna bez iluzji* [Non-Dogmatic Anthropology – A Theory of Society without Illusions], 1994).

The SLON publishing house has done a superb job of public education with their study texts in the field of social work and policy, including, in 1994, Oldřich Matoušek's *Rodina jako instituce a vztahová síť* [The Family as an Institution and a Network of Relationships] (125pp.), Miloš Večeřa's *Sociální stát: východiska a přístupy* [The Social State: Starting Points and Approaches] (103pp.), Ivo Rezníček's *Metody Sociální práce* [Methods of Social Work] (75pp.) and Petr Mareš's *Nezaměstnanost jako sociální problém* [Unemployment as a Social Problem] (151pp.). In 1995 they published Martin Potůček's *Sociální politika* [Social Policy] (141pp.), Oldřich Matoušek's *Ústavní péče* [Institutional

Care] (140pp.) and Jan Gabura and Jana Pružinská's *Poradenský proces* [The Counseling Process] (145pp.) The original series of textbooks is virtually entirely sold out – it seems that society is more interested in practical guidance for action than in theoretical reflections. All the texts are well up to the European level and most take into account the specific features of Czech society at the end of the century.

Between Nature and Television

The next group of books do not fall into any simple category, either of subject or genre. Stanislav Komárek's *Sto esejů o přírodě a společnosti (Doudlebia a jiné fenomény)* [One Hundred Essays on Nature and Society (Doudlebia and Other Phenomena)] is published by Vesmír. It is a solid volume of 170 pages, comprising extremely creative reflections on all matters possible and impossible – from reflections on theories of development, through an analysis of the "Russian soul", to mini-studies on sociological science (on science as an institution and on the behaviour of scientists as "organisers"). Komárek's essays are both superb literature and a source of an inconceivable wealth of information, both general and detailed, about the environment, science, history and sociology, all offered with a dazzling degree of imagination and metaphor. It is a great and sometimes dangerous playground of wonderful ideas, analogies and parallels, which in true post-modern fashion show social life, inter-personal relations and the behaviour of major social systems in a quite unexpected light. It is not, of course, post-modernism par excellence, but rather a first book by a Czech author who has some real knowledge of sociobiology and the modern and "post-modern" forms of Darwinism, and even more of sociology.

The work of the Brno sociologist Ladislav Rabušic, *Česká společnost stárne* [The Aging of Czech Society] (Masaryk University in collaboration with Georgetown Press, 182pp.) falls into quite another category, in terms of both genre and content. He is concerned with the specific idea of the "aging society" in the Czech situation, and moves across the boundaries between demography and sociology, com-

bining the tradition of positivist methodology with a modern approach to explanation. Both the subject and the solid way it is dealt with are outstanding although not uncontroversial.

It would certainly be a transgression against good manners if sociology totally disregarded the most common form of our times – the interview. Josef Alan has collected his interview with important intellectuals and public figures from the Czech Lands or who have links with this country. The book is entitled *Dialogy o občanské společnosti* [Dialogues on the Civil Society] (SLON, 1994, 254pp.) and is divided into major thematic sections: Democracy and Power (e.g. Bělohradský, Cepl, Stráský), Political Culture (Kroupa, Bayer), History Today (Třeštík, Křen, Tigrid, Bútorá), The World Picture (Macura, Hvižd'ala), Economic Transformation (Večerník, Mlčoch), and Between East and West (Rupník, Křen, Dienstbier). While this is not "pure" sociology, the basic angle, the way the questions are asked and the subjects that are dealt with are sociological – and who today is going to quarrel about the borderlines between disciplines?

There is a particular sub-group of works by authors of Christian or directly Catholic persuasions which is worth considering as it is the best demonstration of the emergence of a world view and a theoretical pluralism. Two of the works that have appeared recently are particularly interesting from a sociological point of view: Petr Fiala's *Katolicismus a politika (O politické dimenzi katolicismu v postmoderní době)* [Catholicism and Politics (The Political Dimension of Catholicism in the Post-Modern Era)] published by CDK and Patriae (1995, 335pp.), and Vira a kultura (*Pokonciální vývoj českého katolicismu v reflexi časopisu Studie*) [Faith and Culture (The Post-Conciliar Development of Czech Catholicism in the Eyes of the Magazine *Studie*)] by Tomáš Halík (a psychologist, sociologist and Catholic priest) (Zvon, 1995, 207pp.)

The subject of time – social and historical – receives a very personal treatment in the work of the Czech historian, archaeologist, philosopher and literary critic Zdeněk Vašíček, now living in France, *Obrazy minulosti (O bytí, poznání a podání minulého času)* [Pictures of the Past (On Being, Knowledge and Explana-

tion of the Past)] which is the author's own translation of the closing section of a larger work *L'Archéologie, L'Histoire, Le Passé*. While this work does not fall simply into any one discipline, its theory and methodology undoubtedly have something to offer sociologists (and not only those concerned with history).

Last in this section there is *Bohuslav Blažek's* collection of essays *Tváří v tvář obrazovce* [Face to Face with the Television Screen] (SLON, 1995, 200pp.), the first original Czech contribution to sociology of the mass media. The book focuses on a subject that has received much attention from the Czech public – that of the filming and broadcasting of violence. Blažek has used all his sociological and journalistic erudition to write a highly readable work whose message should be easily grasped by the general public.

A Touch of the Post-Modern

There are certainly few of the flood of works which seek to reflect on the "post-modern turning point" in philosophy and sociology that are worth bothering with. Perhaps for this reason Stanislav Hubík's complex, well-grounded and informative book *K postmodernismu obratem k jazyku* [The Post-Modern Move in Language] (Albert, Boskovice 1994, 218pp.) is so welcome. Hubík is well-grounded in post-modern thought although he does present it from his own point of view, which may seem to have little relevance to sociology, even if we accept that it is not possible to understand anything of the post-modern without at least an elementary knowledge of what has happened with language (from Saussure and Wittgenstein to Derrida). The second work considered here comes from the pen of the geologist Jiří Krupička, who lives in Canada, and is entitled *Renesance rozumu* [The Renaissance of Reason] (Český spisovatel, 1994, 556pp.) and is an impassioned and well-argued defence of reason, a dramatic debate with the post-modern

infection, a major rejection of post-modern relativism, cynicism, the post-modern "fog of words" and the dangerous anti-scientific trend. The text is wise and balanced with a good foundation in the enormous literature available and in the writer's own research work in the exact sciences.

It is worth remembering that it was probably not by chance that President Václav Havel listed Jiří Krupička's book as his "book of the year" in answer to a question from the newspaper *Lidové noviny*. Havel's public statements and speeches from 1995 have been collected and published under the title *Havel 95* and represent a very Czech contribution to the debate on the state of the world and society. Havel belongs to the tradition of great Czech moralists, philosophizing politicians and sociologically influenced thinkers who can say even today that "politics is merely service to the community, practical morality. And how better to serve the community and practice morality today than for a politician to seek his global political responsibility in the global and globally threatened civilisation, that is to say a responsibility for the very survival of the human race?" It is far from unlikely that with the course of time it will become clear that one of the most important Czech sociologists of the end of this century was in fact Václav Havel. It is not the simple mastery of methodology that determines the value of a sociological statement, nor the grandiloquent theoretical rhetoric of the post-modern "fog of words", but rather the gravity of the subject and the individual way it is understood. The value of this idea is well demonstrated by Ernest Gellner's very serious comparison of Havel's and Masaryk's philosophical and sociological premises. But we will come back to Havel on another occasion.

Miloslav Petrušek