

A Survey of Post-World War II Works Concerning Social Historiography in Czechoslovakia

ONDŘEJ FELCMAN*

Institute of Historical Sciences of the Faculty of Education, Pedagogic University, Hradec Králové

DANA MUSILOVÁ*

Praha

Abstract: The survey shows the results of post-war historiography focused on social problems. Having overcome the dogmatic Marxism era, the historical science of the 1960s noted the expansion of objective and non-ideologized efforts to research social classes and strata including their standard of life. Features of that effort and important papers and works are mentioned herein. The text presented touches briefly a new wave of interest in knowing the so-called “state socialism” social face. At the end, the authors draw attention to new works on social history of the post-Communist time period.

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Problems concerning the social structure seen as a complex social organism, where individual classes, social strata and groups are interconnected with innumerable economic, social and political-ideological links, and as the position of these social components within the frame of the whole social system were one of the priority areas the historical research was focused on in post-war Czechoslovakia. At first, researching this area of historical reality did not raise a great deal of interest. Paradoxically, this theme was totally omitted by Czechoslovak historical science in the very first period of the dogmatic attachment to Soviet Stalinism based on a rigid class comprehension of the social evolution. It perhaps occurred because the establishment of the Communist rule brought a discontinuous disruption of the previous social structure and its forced transformation based on the Stalinist model.

Only the ascension of the objective, non-ideological historical knowledge supported by sources analysis and a non-dogmatic approach to Marxism, in the second half of the 1960s, led to many written papers and articles in which a relatively ample portrait of the post-war Czechoslovak society was created. An extraordinary attention was paid to the time period prior to February 1948 (attempts at interpreting the political evolution of this period in a new way, i.e. establishing an adequate framework for social history analyses), as well as the 1950s, when the groundwork of the so-called state socialism was built up by the Communist regime.

The late 1950s and early 1960s started to show historians' interest in these problems. Gradually, it became clear that the historiography saw social questions as a necessary and integral component of post-war historical research.

Marta Vartíková [1960] was one of the first specialists who tried to characterise the likeness of the working class – already with the ideological stress on the “leading”

*) Direct all correspondence to: Doc. PhDr. Ondřej Felcman, Institute of Historical Sciences of the Faculty of Education, Pedagogic University, Orlické nábřeží 356, 500 02 Hradec Králové.

role of workers – and its social modifications within the time period between the end of the war and the declaration of the “Socialist” Constitution in 1960. A bit later, Karel Jech [1963] chose the peasantry to be extensively analysed during the period of 1945-1948. Along with a conventional explanation concerning transformations of workers and peasants’ alliances during the struggle for the Communist power monopoly, he offered several impulses to research the peasantry more comprehensively. Věra Jarošová and Oldřich Jaroš [1965] also integrated into their papers the analysis of the social position and internal composition of the Slovak working class (on the background of the social structure of the Slovak society) and the role of this social group in post-liberation revolutionary processes. Thus, they stressed the significance of historical-social analyses for the understanding of historical reality – in spite of the fact that they mainly tried to justify the worker’s struggle for power by making full use of social facts. Analogous processes inside the intelligentsia were described regionally [Linhart 1965].

New authors became interested in researching the historical evolution of the social sphere in spite of being forced to use political approaches, notions and processes as decisive interpretation factors. New unused and unknown information emerged although it still had to support conventional explanations about the positive influence of political events on the metamorphosis of social groups. In his study, Zdeněk Deyl [1965a, 1965b] began to research various social categories both in the pre-February 1948 and post-February period. His work witnessed the gradual weakening of the narrow class view and the strengthening of objectively grounded approaches. In accordance with the tendency of some to see the 1945-1948 period as the so-called specific Czechoslovak way to socialism, Mr Deyl treated analogically the sphere of mutual relations between social classes and strata and social policy. He tried to explain the notions of socialism and democracy in a new way studying the issue in the light of the concrete relations between the working class and the small city bourgeoisie or city middle class as a whole.

The mid-sixties were a certain turning point for social history, bringing political liberalisation, reform attempts in economics and rapid expansion in scientific knowledge without the burden of dogmatic Marxism. The objective study of the previous development and of the current position of classes and groups within the state socialist society, the study of their character, social activity and social transformations was propelled by the works of the team of sociologists led by Pavel Machonin. During the late 1960s, various publications [Machonin et al. 1967, 1969; Deyl and Kerner 1967] showed the results of their extensive efforts. Starting with 1966, papers and studies by Czechoslovak historians were appearing to discover different aspects of the social life and activity of the working class, private farmers, small bourgeoisie, intelligentsia and also co-operative farmers and co-operative workers in other branches originated during the 1950s [Kalinová 1966, 1967a; Maňák 1967].¹ At least, some unnatural consequences of the political interventions into social processes and the life of original classes were being unveiled.

¹) Or the miscellany *K politickým a sociálně-ekonomickým proměnám v ČSR v letech 1948-1953*, Praha 1967 with papers by Z. Deyl [1967] a L. Kalinová [1967b], where basic modification trends are followed inside the working class after 1945 and transformations of small production as the consequence of post-February during the 1st Five-Years Plan.

Finally, even attempts at analysing structurally the social face of the Czechoslovak post-war society were made. As the first historian, Karel Kaplan [1967] made use of the structural analysis taking also into account social parameters, social composition and relations among various groups and classes to get a view on the complex post-war society. He developed fully this approach in his following work which became the first monography based on a thorough structural analysis of the Czechoslovak society and its individual social components. The impact of the nationalisation on social transformation and the post-war society structure grew into a linchpin of the analysis, supported by the analysis of new economic and property relations and their development under the so-called “economic democracy” conditions which still admitted the private initiative and market competition in the post-war period being renewed in spite of the dominant role of the nationalised sector [Kaplan 1968].

This method was being developed, completed in a deluge of new works crossing the February 1948 border. Their authors mostly co-operated on the basis of a common programme. They were strongly determined to discover actually existing social features of post-war transformations and – more and more frequently – post-February economic and social processes including the use of violent administrative means. This is documented by collections of papers that were published in various publications and special journal issues. A rapid expansion of the Czechoslovak reform movement following January 1968 created a positive political security environment for those scientific efforts [Kalinová 1968a, 1968b; Maňák 1968; Hanzel 1968; Jech 1968; Kalinová and Brabec 1968; Deyl 1968; Brabec 1968a].

The process of improving the historical research of the post-war Czechoslovak society after 1966 was characterised by several features. Firstly, historians working for the Communist Party scientific establishments took an active part in fighting for theoretical and practical reform approaches long before January 1968 (many studies presented were published in Party journals and publications). Secondly, their works enabled an overall and complex view on the social changes in the pre-February society, while analyses of class and social groups position during the 1950s remained rather probes, although some were rather enlightened. There was no overall historical synthesis for the post-February time period, which would be similar to the monography written by Kaplan. Neither the theoretical postulates and knowledge derived by Machonin’s team from the analysis of the 1960s social reality could become a spring-board for historic-social analyses of the 1960s because of the lack of historical time distance. Bibliographers of that time did not omit to make documentation on the extensive effort of historians and sociologists in getting acquainted with social transformations [Cejpková 1968].

Despite the Soviet invasion suppressing quickly the hopeful political development of 1968, new contributions to the theme were published in 1969 [Kalinová 1969a, 1969b]. Even the non-typical component of the Czechoslovak working class – the agricultural proletariat – was focused on [Lacina 1971]. Problems of the social structure and its components found its due place in the first synthetical Czechoslovak Economic History, when Václav Průcha and Rudolf Olšovský [1969] enriched their first attempt explaining the economical history up to the mid-1950s by adjoining brief explanations concerning social structure.²

²) V. Průcha also analyzed thoroughly the position of workers between 1918 and 1945.

Almost the whole of the following decade made historians silent as for the social history. The "normalisation" organised by Husák's Communist Party leadership limited rapidly or excluded completely possibilities of publishing such kind of works.

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During the late 1970s, some historians who had "survived" the persecution, along with the new generation of scientists tried to overcome the existing "normalizatory" politico-ideological apprehension of the contemporary history. They started researching extensive social processes of the post-war period. They really induced a new wave of interest in the issue of social structure changes. At the very first, attention was paid to the social structure as a whole, the working class inside being taken for the most important subject of the Soviet-type society according to the ruling Communist ideology and power. The interest in questions connected with classes and groups, their political profile, economic activity, internal class differentiation, social face and origin of class members, questions contingently connected with other special aspects of the historical research like professional qualification, working conditions and cultural level of individual classes and groups exceeded the pre-February period [Barnovský 1978; Vartíková 1978; Felcman 1984a, 1984b].

Slovak historians were particularly efficient in researching social questions, that is why the 1950s and the 1960s as well were given the due attention in Slovakia [Barnovský 1980, 1982; Vartíková 1980; Felcman 1980]. As for the last case, the steadily stronger or weaker stress on proving the justification for the working class leading role in society was "enriched" by looking for the causes behind the 1968 events within the social structure and inside the working class composition during the late 1960s [Gabal' 1977, 1981].

Out of the works mentioned, the papers of Barnovský and monographs dealing with time-conditioned social processes (e.g. post-war resettlement of borderlands) and their reflecting in social structure were particularly characterised with good methodology able to bring, in spite of the obligatory ideologisation, considerable number of new data which were analytically gained [e.g. Slezák 1978].

From the group of historians who overpassed limits of dogmatic Marxism in 1960s, only L. Kalinová kept on publishing papers concerning mostly economic questions or labour force qualification during 1950s-1970s [Kalinová 1977, 1980]. Karel Kaplan and J. Krejčí exiled abroad continued writing on social questions [Kaplan 1981, Krejčí 1972]. An important monography of Zdeněk Mlynář [1983], which was useful for understanding social-economic base of the Soviet system, was also published abroad. Jaroslav Kľofáč [1982a, 1982b] described the social structure evolution during the post-war period by means of the illegal "samizdat" (self-published) publications.

The interest in researching social structure of post-war Czechoslovakia maintained during the 1980s. Typically, it was being transferred from the whole of working class to individual professions or socially non-homogeneous strata [Hovorka 1985, Zdycha 1984] and, within the social structure, it moved from employees [Grešík 1983] to co-operative farmers. The analysis of this second social class within the state socialism social system was linked to an ample team task in researching the village collectivisation and the further productive and social evolution of rural areas. Collective efforts reached both nationwide and regional dimensions, during the 1980s, offering certain knowledge concerning

not only causes and course of both collectivisation waves, evolution of farmers' co-operatives (JZD) in the following decade, but also numerous facts on collectivisation impact on the rural social structure, everything being actually based on Marxist ideology. That research was focused both on private farmers in the eve of collectivisation and co-operative farmers and "state farms" employees.³

Papers on the urban petite-bourgeoisie appeared repeatedly, but only the Slovak's [Báľková 1983, 1986; Zelenák 1988] dealt with the post-February 1948 period. The structure of the post-war society also found its regional expression, the urban complexes were researched above all [Lukas 1986].

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Many papers from those mentioned above which come from both the 1960s and the following "normalisation" period were interested not only in the socio-economic position of classes and social strata, but also, in particular, in the social living standards level of their members. Some historians preferred this line of research by working out independent papers [Maňák 1969] along with keeping on being interested in social structure. Others followed questions of social and working conditions as an independent problem within both nation-wide and regional scope, almost without taking the contemporary social structure into account [Martínek 1980, Wysocki 1966, Zahradník 1979].

While browsing through individual papers, one can find out that there was no deeper accordance in delimiting the notion of "social problems". Some historians saw it particularly as the evolution of wages, others understood it within a broader context as a complex of wages, salaries, post-war ration supply system, housing, employment and working condition questions. The theme was mostly analysed using concrete manifestations and transformations of the relevant social phenomena. However, at the end of the 1960s, some historians tried to analyse the trends of the Communist state official social policy in a deeper way, being interested in political circumstances of forming the living standard of both the whole society and its individual parts. Different interpretations of historical facts and events to those published in the 1950s or to recent official standpoints expressed by the highest Party authorities started to appear. The most complex approach of this kind can be found in Václav Brabec's works [1968b].

In spite of the limiting influence of the "normalisation" ideology, social problems became a comprehensive part of the economic history and later on, in the mid-1980s, they were included into attempts at describing the complex evolution of the Czechoslovak history during the so-called state socialist era [Přůcha 1974, *K dějinám...* 1986].

A new view without an ideological burden and, above all, new interpretation approach is brought by the new post-November literature. Although the research is not conceived in a large-scale, it reaches substantial goals. A modest area of several smart publications show exactly which directions changes in the social structure (with the stress on researching not only past evolution, but also conditions of it), evolution of life style and standard of living and the development of the non-performance social system have taken. Such works have mainly been written by authors who belong to the genera-

³) The monography by S. Cambel [1972], was followed by almanacs [e.g. *Kapitoly...* 1982, *Formovanie...* 1984].

tion that contributed fundamentally to the development of the social historiography during the 1960s.

K. Kaplan presents such contributions in a wider temporal range [Kaplan 1993, *K proměnám...* 1993], P. Machonin [1992], within the context of the 1960s, using a sociological and social-historical approach, L. Kalinová [1993] stresses social-economic analysis of social structure development in the 1970s and 1980s system. Political elites begin newly to be researched as a specific part of the social structure [Koutská and Svátek 1994].

A contemporary research of questions mentioned is a completely new chapter in analysing post-war social reality. That reality is seen in close connection with recent political evolution, enabling the post-November historiography to have a thorough view on the bases and crisis factors of the so-called state socialism social system.

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