“ALL CHILDREN ARE OURS” – CHILDREN’S HOMES IN SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA AS LABORATORIES OF SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Frank Henschel

This contribution traces the ideological and institutional foundations of the system of children’s homes in socialist Czechoslovakia and its development between 1945 and the early 1970s. During the 1950s, efforts by the communist regime resulted in an enormous surge in capacity. From the mid-1960s onwards, some 20,000 places were available. However, they no longer served in the first place for accommodating orphans, but rather for children whose parents were unable, in the view of the regime, to adequately cater for and educate them. Criteria for categorization as “social orphans” were, on one hand, political and ideological notions of how a “socialist person” ought to be educated. On the other hand, pedagogues, pediatricians, and psychologists formulated criteria of how care should take place. Beginning with the late 1950s, however, long-term care in children’s homes, which was decidedly preferred over adoption and foster care, was submitted to an increasing criticism. In numerous studies, scholars and experts proved that collective education had detrimental effects, and demanded that substitute care in families be reintroduced. This was put into practice in several steps over the period 1958-1973 and resulted in several sets of tools being created which enabled social engineers from the fields of both politics and science to intervene in family life and childcare.

“SCHOOL INSTILLS THE SPIRIT OF SOCIALISM”

Objectives and Limitations of the “New School” in Stalinist Czechoslovakia

Jan Randák

This article deals with education at schools in communist Czechoslovakia in the period 1948-1956, focusing on history instruction. According to contemporary thinking, schools should become a place where the new, socialist person was formed. School was thus regarded as an institution where politically relevant values and norms were imparted along with concrete knowledge. State authorities were interested not only in the mind of a pupil, but also in his body, as is witnessed by curricula and internal documents laying great store by physical fitness and premilitary training. History instruction aimed at shaping historical awareness of the members of the younger generation, their world view, their political identity, and at enhancing patriotism. In all these respects, the medieval Hussite movement was a preferred topic which was presented as the moment when a national revolutionary tradition was born which allegedly continued from the 15th century through the communist takeover of 1948.