

FORTY YEARS OF HISTORIOGRAPHY UNDER SOCIALISM IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Continuity and Change in Patterns of Thought

By Eva Schmidt-Hartmann

There was in Eastern Europe a great deal of "Russification" under Stalin; but now the East European régimes are as keen on underpinning their legitimacy by reinterpreting the national past and harnessing it to Communist ends as is the Soviet government¹.

This observation was recently made by George Urban, a knowledgeable analyst of Soviet and East European developments. It corresponds to a widely shared attitude toward some developments with respect to history in Eastern European states. While the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe had attempted to suppress national traditions in favor of imposing Soviet examples during the 1950s, recently they are said to have been increasingly referring to their own national histories, misusing the references as a means of legitimating their own power. This view does not stand up to a closer examination of developments in the field of East European historiography. In Czechoslovakia, the attitude of the Communist regime towards history, both in the past and in the present, has proven more complicated than the statement above would suggest.

In contemporary Czechoslovakia, public disputes about history, as about other topics, have rarely been permitted. Official propaganda statements concerning the past have changed little since the 1950s and historiography, like other public activities, has remained the victim of political supervision. Following the temporary collapse of the ideological framework in the late 1960s, the official Communist vocabulary and basic structure of statements were restored after 1970. If one surveys not only academic historical publications, but also the spectrum of popular books, journals, and other publications presently available to the Czechoslovak public, and compares them with the selection of the 1950s, one must conclude that the range of topics considered has significantly increased. In view of this fact as well as of the officially promoted idea that "history must be the helper of the party in forming the socialist superstructure,"² George Urban's above cited assessment of the situation might appear justified. Closer examination, however, prompts questions as to the ways in which historiography is

¹ George Urban: *Language & Power in Soviet Society. A Conversation between Alain Besançon & George Urban*. In: *Encounter* (London) May 1987, p. 6.

² Václav Král: *Myšlenkový svět historie* [History's World of Ideas]. Prague 1974, p. 157. This and all other translations in this article are by the author.

implementing the task it has been ascribed by the ruling party on the one hand, and the degree of its success in influencing the developments of historical consciousness on the other.

Traditionally, there has been a particularly intense relationship between historical consciousness and politics among the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe which has thus far not received sufficient attention from Anglo-American historians and political scientists³. Tales of the distant past have played an important role in the nation-building process there and, to the present day, historical disputes often seem to provide a sort of *ersatz* for fundamental political discussions⁴. With the "historical rights of the Bohemian Crown" as their focus of reference, Czech political developments since the mid-nineteenth century provide as good an example of the force of historical consciousness as any other historical developments in Europe. Disputes among historians that attracted wide popular attention prior to 1938 continue to do so today as does the Czech-Sudeten German dispute which, while lacking political significance, is still carried out on both sides with striking intensity.

Today the Czechoslovak Communist Party controls historical publications as it does other publications. Yet, there are indications suggesting a large degree of independence in the development of public historical consciousness as it differs in direction from that which the ruling elites would like it to take. In their study of Czechoslovak political culture, Archie Brown and George Wightman have observed and analysed the significant changes in Czech and Slovak historical consciousness which took place between 1946 and 1968⁵. The changes were particularly important because the inquiry was concerned with popular attitudes in areas in which "official" publications could have been of great influence (such as popular assessment of various pre-Second World War politicians)⁶. Similarly, recent secretly-conducted polls have shown a significant change of popular attitude with respect to the expulsion of Czechoslovakia's German population after 1945, which contrasts sharply with official statements on the matter⁷.

³ The best examples are the two recent books, both of which deal with questions related to historical consciousness without, however, discussing the issue in any depth. Compare Archie Brown / Jack Gray (eds.): *Political Culture & Political Change in Communist States*. London and Basingstoke 1977 and Paul G. Lewis (ed.): *Eastern Europe: Political Crisis and Legitimation*. New York 1984.

⁴ The recent case of the so-called "controversy among the historians" in West Germany provides the most appropriate illustration concerning this tendency even in conditions of unlimited liberty for political disputes. A selection of the main contributions to this controversy can be found in: *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*. Munich 1987. — For a brief report in English compare Josef Joffe: *The Battle of the Historians. A Report from Germany*. In: *Encounter* (London) June 1987, pp. 72–77.

⁵ Archie Brown / Gordon Wightman: *Czechoslovakia: Revival and Retreat*. In: Archie Brown / Jack Gray, *Political Culture & Political Change*, pp. 159–197.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 159–170.

⁷ Zdeněk Strmiska: *Výsledky nezávislého průzkumu současného smýšlení v Československu* [The results of an independant survey of contemporary thinking in Czechoslovakia]. In: *Svědectví* 20 (1986), pp. 265–334, here pp. 300–303.

Both Czech publications abroad and Czechoslovak *samizdat* publications demonstrate the dynamic in developments of historical consciousness independent of the official propaganda with undeniable force⁸. Discussions of certain historical developments have recently been taking place with unprecedented intensity. Topics include the history of Catholicism and of the Habsburg rule in the Bohemian Lands, Czech-German relations in Bohemia, including the expulsion of the latter, and various legal and political practices in both the First Czechoslovak Republic and the period 1945–1948. In addition, the very notion of “the nation” has been widely questioned in recent years. The impression that Czech historical consciousness had undergone greater changes during the last ten years than in previous generations therefore appears justified. This would suggest that the seeming increase in the scope of popular historical literature permitted by the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia corresponds to inherent changes in Czech historical consciousness although these changes do not directly follow the dictates of the regime. As in other spheres, there is obviously a discrepancy between the theoretical proclamations of the regime and its capacity to translate them into reality.

The question then arises as to what extent historical consciousness is of significance at all in terms of political legitimacy in today’s socialist states. Scholars interested in this problem have recently been questioning whether an unqualified application of the concept of legitimacy as commonly used with respect to the liberal democratic systems is even meaningful in studies of contemporary socialist states:

In view of the concentration of political power in communist systems and the extent of resources available to the elite to retain and exercise their authority it might indeed be questioned whether the issue of legitimacy is one of any great importance or relevance to the maintenance of the political order in Eastern Europe⁹.

This approach, while stressing that “due attention should be paid to the different contexts and groups involved,”¹⁰ denies the significance of popularly-based legitimacy

⁸ There are numerous publications of this kind. For an introduction see the last ten years of the Czechoslovak journal *Svědectví* published in Paris. In English, the following documentation of Charter 77 is most informative: H. Gordon Skilling: Charter 77 and Human Rights in Czechoslovakia. London 1981. – On historiographical works see the informative survey of *samizdat* publications concerning history by H. Gordon Skilling: Independent Historiography in Czechoslovakia. In: Canadian Slavonic Papers 25 (1983), pp. 518–539. – H. Gordon Skilling: The Muse of History – 1984: History, Historians and Politics in Communist Czechoslovakia. In: Cross Currents. A Yearbook of Central European Culture (1984), pp. 29–47. – For materials in German see the journal *Bohemia*. – The most informative account of the recent discussions on the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans is given in Leopold Grünwald: Wir haben uns selbst aus Europa vertrieben. Tschechische Selbstkritik an der Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen. Eine Dokumentation. Munich 1985. – For an analysis of discussion concerning the same topic see Eva Schmidt-Hartmann: Menschen oder Nationen? Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus tschechischer Sicht. In: Wolfgang Benz (Hrsg.): Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten. Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen. Frankfurt 1985, pp. 143–158.

⁹ Paul G. Lewis (ed.), Eastern Europe, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 6.

and restricts the concept to elite alone. Correspondingly, this article focuses primarily on observable tendencies among members of a small group of the population who articulate their views in forms accessible to the foreign observer: historians and other intellectuals concerned with history. If we accept the previously-mentioned concept of legitimacy according to which attitudes among elites matter more than those of the general population in socialist countries, then the tendencies discussed here do speak to the immediate political development of socialist Czechoslovakia. This imminent significance is nevertheless limited by the fact that the intellectuals concerned with history are not among those who control political power. The present analysis should be seen as providing the basis for a careful assessment of some long-term trends rather than as a commentary on the immediate situation.

Communist Politics and Historiography

After the Czechoslovak Communist Party seized political power in 1948, the Marxist-Leninist notion of social science was to dominate all scholarly work in the country:

The task of the objective science is allegedly to make statements. But the Marxist-Leninist science does not want to make only statements, it also wants to change the nature and the human society, to replace what is bad by what is better. This is what the reactionaries do not want and call, therefore, for "objectivity". This tie, taken over from the past, has therefore to be broken first of all ...¹¹.

In these words the most influential Czechoslovak historian of that time, Zdeněk Nejedlý (1878–1962), described the new notion of historical science in Communist Czechoslovakia. This approach was, however, by no means new. Nejedlý himself presented similar ideas as early as 1918 and, more generally, they had often been discussed in the context of Marxist concept of knowledge¹².

The transformation of Czechoslovakia into a Communist-dominated society after 1948 resulted in such major changes in all spheres of social life that historiography could hardly have been spared. Andrew Rossos, the author of a recent study on Czech historiography, seems justified when he writes:

In conclusion, it might be said that the development of Czech historiography since 1948 does not represent just another phase in its evolution. The elevation of Marxist historiography to an official and monopolistic position under the Communist regime constitutes rather a break in its modern history and a radical departure from some of its fundamental traditions. To be sure, certain steps that would appear beneficial were taken under new regime ... On the other hand, and

¹¹ Quoted in Král, *Myšlenkový svět*, p. 140.

¹² For Nejedlý's criticism of Czech historiography see Zdeněk Nejedlý: *O smyslu českých dějin* [On the meaning of Czech history]. Prague 1952. On the basic attitudes of the Czechoslovak Communist Party toward science and its organization see Věra Eisnerová / Luboš Nový: *The Communist Party and the Advancement of Science in Independent Czechoslovakia*. In: *Historica. Historical Science in Czechoslovakia* 18 (1973), pp. 181–258.

more importantly, Czech historiography lost its free and independent position and was transformed into an instrument of the Communist Party and its government; it was forcibly isolated from outside influence; and it was deprived of its right to free and unhindered investigation¹³.

Nejedlý would probably have agreed with the author, had he been alive to read his judgment, changing the wording slightly and explaining why this development was fundamentally beneficial to the new socialist Czechoslovak historiography and, thus to the nation.

We know, however, that many of the historians who had adopted Nejedlý's attitude in their academic work participated significantly in the reformist efforts which shook the country some years after his death during the Prague Spring. Subsequently many lost their positions and are today among the most pronounced critics of Czechoslovak historiography. This indicates that the Communist historians themselves have not managed to fulfil the task which the party officially bestowed upon them and which initially they voluntarily undertook to fulfil. The grip of the ruling elites has obviously proved too loose to control even party members. The question then arises, as to what extent have the ruling elites really succeeded in controlling the Czechoslovak historical writing in general. Applied in practise, this approach caused innumerable losses to Czech historiography and historians. Yet the knowledge of what has been destroyed, however, does not provide sufficient information about what has replaced it. *Gleichschaltung*, to borrow the German term often used in this context, has been used to describe the subordination of all intellectual activities within a state to Communist control. The difficulty with this term is that it only describes the intent to eliminate "disallowed" ideas and does not usually include the next step, the study of what is left after the successful completion of *gleichschaltung*. In fact, Czechoslovak historiographical production offers a far more complicated picture of the postwar development than has generally been assumed¹⁴.

To be precise, a significant break in the continuity of Czech historiography had already occurred during and immediately after the Second World War. Although historians were able to publish their works to some degree during the years of the German occupation, both censorship and the closing of the Czech universities disrupted the continuity of Czech historiography. Historians were also among the members of the Czech population who suffered the most significant losses of life

¹³ Andrew Rossos: Czech Historiography. In: Canadian Slavonic Papers 24 (1982), pp. 245–260 and 359–400, here p. 384.

¹⁴ In the examination of Czechoslovak historiographical publications after 1945, this article relies heavily on the studies of German historians who have been studying these developments intensively. The numerous Czechoslovak publications on this topic have proved useful primarily with respect to the theoretical and methodological discussions in Czechoslovakia. They scarcely use the standards of contemporary Western historiography as a frame of reference and, consequently, reflect the achievements of the Czech historians in a somewhat isolated space. For the most detailed survey see Ferdinand Seibt: *Bohemia. Probleme und Literatur seit 1945*. Published as a special issue of the journal *Historische Zeitschrift*, Munich 1970. – So far English-language historians have only exceptionally paid attention to the developments in Czechoslovak historiography.

during the war¹⁵. In addition, seven leading prewar historians died between 1943 and 1951¹⁶. It seems obvious that, at least initially, postwar Czech historiography could hardly have maintained its high prewar standards. The severe political impairments, after 1948, of course, only made the situation worse¹⁷.

In the early 1950s, most prominent surviving Czech historians fell victim to the reorganization of Czech historiography¹⁸. Yet at the same time a few "non-Marxist" historians were able to continue publishing their works during and after the 1950s – František M. Bartoš was the most prominent – and could do so with hardly any concessions to the official ideology in their scholarly pursuits. The distinction between "Marxist" and "non-Marxist" historical studies was visible to foreign observers even during the 1950s¹⁹, and the "failure" of the attempted *gleichschaltung* cannot be overlooked in any serious analysis of the relationship between the Communist system and historiography. In addition, a number of historians not sharing Marxist or Communist attitudes were able to work if they were prepared to make political concessions of varying degrees. Clearly, "socialist historiography," the "helper of the party," was represented by a rather colourful assortment of individual scholars.

The majority of works which appeared after 1948 did, however, show traces of the political demands placed upon them. Books were published under the rubric of

¹⁵ Victims included the following prominent historians: Josef Matoušek (1906–1939), Bedřich Mendl (1892–1940), Vladimír Helfert (1886–1945), Josef Kudela (1886–1942), Bedřich Jenšovský (1889–1942), Jaroslav Papoušek (1890–1945), Arnošt V. Kraus (1859–1943), Alexander Markus (1913–1945), Kurt Konrad (1908–1941), Hugo Traub (1879–1942), Josef Fischer (1891–1945), Evžen Stein (1902–1943), František Groha (1895–1941). Compare Peter Heumos: *Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik in der Tschechoslowakei. Entwicklungstrends der zeitgeschichtlichen Forschung nach 1945*. In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Ost-europas* 26 (1978), pp. 541–576, here p. 543. – On Czech historiography during the Second World War see Josef Tomeš: *Historie v letech zkoušky* [History during the years of the trial]. Prague 1985.

¹⁶ Gustav Friedrich (1871–1943), Karel Krofta (1876–1945), Josef Šusta (1874–1945), František Hrubý (1887–1943), Vladimír Klecanda (1888–1946), Josef Prokeš (1895–1951) and Václav Chaloupecký (1882–1951).

¹⁷ For a detailed survey of the personal and organizational aspects of continuities and discontinuities in Czech historiography during the late 1940s see Otakar Odložilík: *Modern Czechoslovak Historiography*. In: *SEER* 30 (1951/52), pp. 376–392, and Heinrich Felix Schmid: *Entfaltung und Nachklang. Ein Nachwort*. In: Richard G. Plaschka: *Von Palacký bis Pekař. Geschichtswissenschaft und Nationalbewußtsein bei den Tschechen*. Cologne 1955, pp. 91–106. – Kurt Oberdorffer: *Wege tschechischer Geschichtsschreibung heute*. In: *Bohemia* 2 (1961), pp. 493–510.

¹⁸ Vladimír Kýbal (1880–1958), Josef Borovička (1885–1971), Jan Slavík (1885–1978), Jan Hanuš Opočenský (1895–1961), Karel Kazbunda (1888–1982) and Karel Stloukal (1887–1957) were among the most prominent victims. Others, including Otakar Odložilík (1899–1973), could only continue their work in exile. On the results of the reorganization of academic historiography during the 1950s according to the official view see Josef Macek: *Pět let Historického ústavu ČSAV* [Five years of the Historical Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science]. In: *Československý časopis historický* 6 (1958), pp. 603–608.

¹⁹ A detailed report on Czech studies on Hussitism was divided in two parts distinguishing between "non-Marxist" and "Marxist" research: "Die bisherige Übersicht zeigte Johannes Hus im Urteil der neueren nichtmarxistischen tschechischen Forschungen ..." Compare Ferdinand Seibt: *Hus und die Hussiten in der tschechischen wissenschaftlichen Literatur seit 1945*. In: *Zeitschrift für Ostforschung* 7 (1958), pp. 566–590, here p. 572.

"historical studies" which in no way deserve the name if measured by standards common to mid-twentieth century European scholarship, yet studies were also published which presented more or less solid new research in their fields. All publications varied greatly in the extent to which they indicated political constraints within which historians had to work. Prior to 1948 only a few historians besides the influential Nejedlý were "Marxist"²⁰. Immediately after the Communist takeover, it was primarily in the propagandistic speeches of the politicians and in the mass media, that a certain set of propagandistic statements about the Czech past was presented as only valid one. Yet even after a new generation of historians was educated in the "desirable spirit", the attempted implementation of particular political prescriptions in academic works created problems. The "favoured" topic of the time, Hussitism, illustrates this point.

Initially, there was a limited choice of scholars. Correspondingly, a number of new monographs, articles, and editions of previously unpublished sources on Jan Hus' life and work were published between 1948–1952, mainly by the "non-Marxist" historians, including Bohumil Ryba, Josef B. Jeschke, and Anna Císarřová²¹. Two of the most influential historians of the new regime, Josef Macek and František Graus, became the most prominent authors on Hussitism²². Although both apparently tried to present Hus and the Hussite wars according to the official guidelines as the first significant Czech and European precursors of "socialist efforts," their methods of making this point differed²³. At the same time, a number of Hussite studies by other authors appeared, which focused on aspects clearly unrelated to the predominant interest of official guidelines – the economic aspect of historical developments²⁴. Examination of Czech historical publications from the 1950s on questions related to Hussitism thus

²⁰ Václav Husa (1906–1965), Jaroslav Charvát (* 1905) and Jan Pachta (1906–1977) were the most prominent scholars. For the history of Czechoslovak Marxist historiography before 1948 compare František Kutnar: *Přehledné dějiny českého a slovenského dějepiscetví* [Historical survey of Czech and Slovak historiography]. Vol. 2. Prague 1978, pp. 469–480.

²¹ This passage is based on the above-cited survey of historiographical studies on Hussitism by Ferdinand Seibt (Note 19), whose academic approach toward the topic differs fundamentally from the predominantly political perspective of other observers. See for example Václav Mudroch: *The Age of John Hus in Recent Czechoslovak Historical Literature (1948–1961)*. In: Miloslav Rechcigl Jr. (ed.): *Czechoslovakia Past and Present*. Vol. 1. Political, International, Social and Economic Aspects. Paris 1968, pp. 581–606. – For information on the evaluation of the Czechoslovak Hussite studies since 1945 in contemporary Czechoslovakia compare Miloslav Polívka: *Současný stav bádání o husitství: problémy a perspektivy* [The contemporary state of research on Hussitism]. In: *Jihočeský sborník historický* 54/3 (1985), pp. 128–142.

²² For details compare Seibt, *Hus und die Hussiten*, p. 570 f.

²³ This observation is related to studies by young Communist historians during the 1950s: František Graus: *Městská chudina v době předhusitské* [The urban poor during the pre-Hussite period]. Prague 1949. – František Graus: *Dějiny venkovského lidu v Čechách v době předhusitské* [The history of the country folk in Bohemia during the pre-Hussite period]. 2 vols. Prague 1953–1957. – Josef Macek: *Husitské revoluční hnutí* [The Hussite revolutionary movement]. Prague 1952. – Josef Macek: *Venkovský lid v husitské revoluci* [The country folk during the Hussite revolution]. Prague 1953.

²⁴ Compare bibliographical notes in Seibt, *Hus und die Hussiten*, p. 582 f.

offers valuable insights into the difficulties encountered in trying to implement propaganda in historical research. The most striking are dependence on scholars with at least minimal qualifications, the difficulties encountered in attempts to apply simplistic "official" terminology to the complexity of historical reality, and finally the lack of "qualification" of the censors making decisions about conformity of subtle topics relating to the distant past.

It was only in 1954 that an authorised survey of Czech history was published in the form of a "preliminary thesis"²⁵. It resulted in the three volume "Survey of the Czech History" published between 1958 and 1960²⁶. Even then, after guidelines for "socialist Czech historiography" had been elaborated in some detail, the problems encountered by the attempts to subdue historiography to political control were not resolved. To illustrate: František Matějek's study on the great feudal estates of Moravia and their subject peasants (1959), and Antonín Míka's study on the serf population in Bohemia during the first half of the sixteenth century (1960), each mirrored serious difficulties with respect to applying general propagandistic statements to concrete historical research²⁷. According to the authoritative guidelines of 1954, the general deterioration of the position of the subject population due to increased exploitation, was to explain the emergence of the so-called second serfdom after the Hussite wars, and the manorial economic forms of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were to be described as "early capitalism." Both authors, although undoubtedly indebted in the selection of their topics as well as in their approach to the political intentions and power of the ruling party, presented studies of "fundamental significance for European economic history" which in several ways contradicted the "authoritative" guidelines for interpreting the developments in question, according to the German reviewer at the time²⁸.

Obviously, one could argue, the more remote the subject of historiography from the existing political reality, the less the concern that could be expected from the politicians who influence and control the work of historians. Nineteenth century history can be seen as a grey zone between the historiography thus far discussed and historiography concerning periods which are of eminent interest to Communist politics. Numerous studies have been published on this period which are, for obvious reasons, particularly concerned with social and economic history as well as with the history of

²⁵ Přehled československých dějin I. do roku 1848. These [Survey of Czechoslovak history until the year 1848. Part I. Thesis]. In: Československý časopis historický 2 (1954), Supplement.

²⁶ Přehled československých dějin [Survey of Czechoslovak history]. 2 parts in 3 vols. Prague 1958–1960.

²⁷ The volumes referred to in this passage are: František Matějek: *Feudální velkostatek a poddaný lid na Moravě s přihlédnutím k přilehlému území Slezska a Polska* [The great feudal estates and the subject peasants in Moravia with reference to the adjoining areas of Silesia and Poland]. Prague 1959 and Antonín Míka: *Poddaný lid v Čechách v první polovině 16. století* [The subject population in Bohemia in the first half of the 16th century]. Prague 1960.

²⁸ Ferdinand Seibt: *Gutsherrschaft und Grunduntertanen im böhmischen Ständestaat. Neue tschechische Forschungen zur Wirtschaftsgeschichte des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts*. In: *Bohemia* 3 (1962), pp. 225–238. For this citation see in the English summary of the article, *ibid.*, p. 599.

working class movements. Other areas, for example political history, previously a preferred topic of Czech historians, have been neglected. The majority of the studies which have appeared, however, can in no way be said to provide purely propagandistic information. The most knowledgeable observer in this field, the German historian Peter Heumos, has devoted a detailed analysis to the relationship between politics and historiography in this field of Czechoslovak historiography between 1950 and 1975²⁹. He has noted a number of studies published throughout this period which are a genuine contribution to our knowledge. Heumos demonstrates the continuing refinement of applied scholarly methods even following the purges among historians and the ideological tightening that occurred after 1970. Heumos' analysis is particularly instructive because of his subtle examination of methodological aspects and problems which arise from attempts to grasp complex realities by using simplistic predetermined categories. He focuses on the alternative ways in which Czech historians have been trying to resolve these problems rather than on the political attitudes underlying various historical approaches.

In addition to the influence of the authorities, the changing political attitudes of the Czech historians themselves can clearly be discerned in their work. For example, Heumos found in the years preceding the reformist movement in 1968 apparent tendencies to justify reformist ideas through interpretations of the past:

The search for a new socialist model which took into consideration the national specifics of Czechoslovakia resulted historiographically in new interpretation of the history of the working class movement which, then, was seen as oriented fully toward a "national way to socialism" and dominated by the national consciousness of the workers³⁰.

Changes during the 1960s in the interpretations of the working class political movements of the nineteenth century illustrate this point. Whereas in the 1950s the emphasis lay in the so-called "proletarian internationalism" and distinctions were made between the "correct" policies and the "incorrect" deviations in respect to the plurality of groupings, later interpretations stressed the nationalist efforts on one hand and the pluralist character of the Czech socialist efforts on the other, clearly in parallel to the formation on contemporary reformist political attitudes within the Communist Party. So it happened that the social democratic journalist and politician František Modráček (1871–1960), described as the "typical representative of petit bourgeois consciousness in the Czech Social Democracy before the First World War" in 1961 had, by 1969, become in the eyes of the same author the "creator of the Czech socialism on a cooperative basis with a clear knowledge of the danger of socialism organised by the state"³¹. This and other examples indicate that the reformist historians working in this field were in no way "unpolitical" in their new approaches and interpretations, that their

²⁹ Peter Heumos: *Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik in der Tschechoslowakei: Forschungen zum 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhundert in den Jahren 1950–1975*. In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 30 (1982), pp. 575–601.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 587.

³¹ Compare *ibid.*, pp. 586 f.

call for the liberation of historiography from the tenets of politics cannot be unduly simplified into the alternatives of "political" versus "non-political" historiography.

The Communist regime's attempt to influence the work of historians has concentrated on the field of contemporary history: as understood in Czechoslovakia the history of the period after the "Great October Socialist Revolution." Politicians demanded that this field receive the greatest attention from historians³², and it was in this field that Communist propaganda most penetrated the work of historians. The worst examples of propagandist abuse of history came from this area, and it is here that the concept of the Communist "reinterpretation" of the past is justified³³.

Historians working in this field were among those most involved in implementing Communist propaganda under the cover of historiography during the 1950s. They also belonged to the outspoken protagonists of the reform movement in 1968, and consequently among the hardest-hit victims of Gustáv Husák's "normalizing" regime after 1970. In fact, among the 145 historians listed as purged at the fourteenth International Congress of Historical Sciences in San Francisco in 1975, fewer than twenty worked in fields other than contemporary history and only fifteen had not been listed as members of the Communist Party³⁴. And yet, while the personal changes resulted in an interruption of developments taking place during the 1960s, this break did not lead to a return of Czechoslovak historiography to the simplistic methods of the 1950s³⁵. Studies on the pre-Second World War period published since 1970 are indebted to valuable earlier research of the purged historians³⁶. The politization of historiography has been the greatest in the field of contemporary history, but even there one observes a degree of development independent of the authorities³⁷.

This brief report on developments in Czech historiography since 1948 is meant to illustrate that the widely-held opinion which continues to interpret Czechoslovak historiography simply as an instrument of the Communist regime is unjustified. The regime cannot be said to have succeeded in imposing "an ideological construction which future research was expected merely to refine and fortify," nor is the assess-

³² Compare *Rudé právo* 29 May 1951.

³³ Numerous publications could be cited here. To illustrate the point: Jan P a c h t a: Pekař a pekařovština v českém dějepisectví [Pekař and Pekařism in the Czech historiography]. Prague 1950. – František Nečásek / Jan P a c h t a (eds.): Dokumenty o protilidové a protinárodní politice T. G. Masaryka [Documents on T. G. Masaryk's policies against the people]. Prague 1953. – František Nečásek / Jan P a c h t a (eds.): Dokumenty o protisovětských piklech československé reakce [Documents about the anti-Soviet intrigues of the Czechoslovak reactionaries]. Prague 1954.

³⁴ *Acta Persecutions. A Document from Czechoslovakia*. Presented to the XIVth International Congress of Historical Sciences. San Francisco, August 1975.

³⁵ Compare Heumos, *Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik* (1978), p. 572.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 570–575.

³⁷ The similarities in the developments of the Czechoslovak and Hungarian historiography which can be observed despite the different political developments in the two countries particularly around 1956 and 1968, strongly support the hypothesis. On Hungarian historiography compare Holger Fischer: *Politik und Geschichtswissenschaft in Ungarn. Die ungarische Geschichte von 1918 bis zur Gegenwart in der Historiographie seit 1956*. Munich 1982. – Gerhard Seewann: *Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik in Ungarn 1950–1980. Die Historiographie zu Mittelalter und Neuzeit*. In: *Südost-Forschungen* 41 (1982), pp. 261–323.

ment correct that "in effect, the results of any future research were thus predetermined"³⁸. The Czechoslovak historians have neither rewritten the country's history, nor have they exclusively used the past in order to justify the present³⁹. The worst propagandist statements on history have found only a limited echo in historiography, primarily in the field of contemporary history. In the development of methodical approaches, in the variety of topics, in interpretative frameworks as well as in evaluation, academic historiography as a whole has shown a certain amount of resilience⁴⁰.

To be sure, this does not excuse the damage the Communist regime has done in all aspects of Czechoslovak historiography, personal as well as scholarly. The above survey does, however, indicate a weakness in the concept which considers historiography in Communist states simply an instrument of politics. Several conclusions from the close examination of developments in Czech historiography can be summed up as follows:

- The regime has not necessarily prevented the publication of historical works which did not clearly serve the official ideology in any way and which bore no traces of political pressure upon their contents.
- Communist historians themselves, having originally acted on behalf of the new regime, in due course came into conflict with one another as well as with the authorities and should not be viewed as a politically controlled, monolithic group.
- The implementation of Communist doctrine in historical research has not resulted in a consensus on the interpretation of historical reality.
- Historical research shows traces of interpretative developments reflecting the political views of both the political authorities and of the historians themselves.

Taking these findings into account and rejecting the commonly held view of Communist historiography as simply serving as an instrument of the ruling power, we must not overlook the fact that the Communist regime does not allow historiography to flourish free and that it is making an effort to use national history for its own purposes. Following a brief review of developments in Czech historiography the attitude of the ruling Communist Party towards history will be examined in detail.

³⁸ Stanley Z. Pech: *Ferment in Czechoslovak Marxist Historiography*. In: *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 10 (1968), p. 502. Cited in Skilling in *Cross Currents* (Note 6). Both Pech and Skilling present good examples of an approach towards Czechoslovak historiography which assumes a dichotomy between "official" and "autonomous" scholarship, distinguishing publications in Czechoslovakia of the pre- and post-reform period on one hand and those written either during the 1968 reform period or unpublished in Czechoslovakia on the other.

³⁹ Joseph F. Žáček: *Palacký: A Marxist Portrait*. In: Miloslav Rechcigl Jr. (ed.): *Czechoslovakia Past and Present* (1968), pp. 594–606, here p. 594 and Mudroch, *The Age of John Hus*, p. 58.

⁴⁰ An important indication supporting this hypothesis can be found in the plurality of regional journals presently published in Czechoslovakia. The large degree to which they differ from each other in their scholarly qualities as well as in the extent to which they take the liberty of using Western historical literature surely indicates a scope of liberty available to the editors and used by them according to their own interests and abilities. In any case, the domination of centrally-controlled instruments for submerging historiography to politics must be rejected on the strength of this case alone.

Political Intentions in Respect to History

After 1948 the new regime presented its own interpretation of the Czech past, justifying the Communist system as the outcome of long-term historical development. The point was made in numerous publications which were similar in form and content; it can be illustrated by analysis of the brief but influential pamphlet by Zdeněk Nejedlý, "Komunisté – dědici velikých tradic českého národa" [Communists – the Heirs to the Great Tradition of the Czech Nation]⁴¹. In this pamphlet Nejedlý discussed the following topics: Communists and nationality, the people as the representatives of the nation, democratic attitudes, progressivism and revolutionary attitudes in Czech national tradition, cultural traditions and the Communists, Communists and the Czech national morals and, finally, Communists and the accusations of heresy in the Czech nation. The message of the pamphlet was simple: it provided a defence against widespread accusations that the Communist credo of proletarian internationalism did not allow for patriotism. Nejedlý claimed that both the Soviet Bolsheviks and the Czech Communists had contributed to the preservation of the Czechoslovak national heritage by their struggle against "alien, bourgeois tendencies." He asserted that only the lower strata of society was the true bearer of national history and its traditions, and that the Czechs were particularly lucky among the European nations because their national traditions had coincided with the struggle for democracy since the fifteenth century. As the history of Czech culture supposedly indicated, the creators of Czech culture, particularly the writers, had always shared Communist ideals and their interpretation of Czech traditions were similar to those of the Communists. This was meant to indicate that the ideals of Czech people, above all their ethical ideals, were identical to those of Communists. Criticism of the Communist movement, according to Nejedlý, only indicated a fate it had in common with many great Czechs of the past who were often misunderstood and attacked by their contemporaries.

Nejedlý presented a simplified and in many ways distorted picture of the Czech past. Given that the pamphlet was not meant to be a historiographical study but a propaganda statement, this is not surprising. The pamphlet is significant only because of the political power at the disposal of the author. Because these ideas should become the credo of all Czech historians who were to implement them in their scholarly work, they deserve a close examination. Several points are of particular interest.

Nejedlý's opinions are based on the distinction between historical "realities" and what he considered "real": "We do not consider each and all to be the nation and national people ... we know, that the bearer of the Czech national traditions has always been the popular strata [lidové vrstvy] and not the noblemen [panstvo]"⁴². In this highly restricted interpretation of the term "nation," Nejedlý defined a commonly-

⁴¹ Zdeněk Nejedlý: *Komunisté – dědici velikých tradic českého národa* [Communists – the heirs of the great traditions of the Czech nations]. Prague 1950. This essay was originally presented as a lecture on 18 February 1946. Compare Jaroslav Kládiva: *Kultura a politika 1945–1948* [Culture and politics 1945–1948]. Prague 1968, p. 146.

⁴² Nejedlý, *Komunisté – dědici*, p. 15.

used term in an arbitrary way in contradiction of scholarly practise of modern historical science. On another occasion, Nejedlý asserted that what "history" tells us and what we believe it to be might differ⁴³, and he chose a criteria of historical truth different from that common among historians. Nejedlý's truth is that of the common man: "The common man does not allow himself to be puzzled by the labyrinth of Hussitist figures. He sees Hus ..." ⁴⁴. Hus thus became the sole bearer of the "real" Czech history of Hussitism, in contrast to the complex and thus complicated pictures historians offer⁴⁵. For Nejedlý, "real" was only what a few chosen people believed it to be.

Nejedlý's highly selective notion of reality did not, however, attempt to "create" a new picture of the Czech past. His "revolutionary" interpretations advanced numerous stereotypes which had long been popular among certain groups of the Czech population. Nejedlý himself disclosed his source: the novels of Alois Jirásek (1851–1930). With their glowing praise of the Hussite period and condemnation of the so called *temno* [the age of darkness] this interpretation of the Czech past is the popular story of the Czech nationalists from the nineteenth century. Nejedlý also adopted the common populist attitudes towards history that saw the "little man" as the true bearer of ethics and wisdom, contained strong anti-intellectual features, and promoted petit bourgeois ideals such as "blooming villages, blooming towns, the efficiency of the peasant, the worker, and the artist" ⁴⁶ as patriotic ideals. It praised the Czechs for having proved themselves particularly suited for realizing these ideals because in the past the "little man" had allegedly influenced Bohemian history more than other social strata.

Nejedlý was not critical of his once-admired university professor Thomas G. Masaryk (1850–1937) whom he mentioned several times in his pamphlet. At this time, Masaryk was praised as a leader of the Czechs who had often been misunderstood⁴⁷. Although the Communists including Nejedlý later condemned Masaryk, some of Nejedlý's attitudes toward the Czech past are similar to those of Masaryk. His pamphlet is no more than a simplistic imitation of Masaryk's approach to the Czech past with the introduction of a few changes, including the idea that the concept of "hatred of one's enemies" is part of "Czech national ethics" ⁴⁸.

The shared features of popular Czech national consciousness and Communist interpretations of Czech history require further examination⁴⁹. Remarks thus far should

⁴³ Ibid., p. 74.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 98.

⁴⁸ For an elucidation of this point in respect to Masaryk's approach to Czech national aspirations see my forthcoming essay *The Fallacy of Realism: Some Problems of Masaryk's Approach to Czech National Aspirations*. In: Stanley B. Winters (ed.): *Prelude to Greatness. Selected papers from the Masaryk Conference, organized by the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London in December 1986*.

⁴⁹ Eugen Lemberg is one of the few who has paid attention to this topic. Compare Eugen Lemberg: *Voraussetzungen und Probleme des tschechischen Geschichtsbewußtseins*. In:

indicate that the Communist interpretation of history in Czechoslovakia after 1948 was not a new one. The Communists adopted certain elements of Czech historical consciousness to legitimize their political rule rather than attempting to impose new, alien ideas. Criticism of the Communist interpretation of the Czech past would therefore have to challenge popular Czech historical consciousness rather than use it for inspiration to criticize Communist views.

In 1974 Václav Král (1923–1983), probably the most influential politically of the Czech historians of the period, wrote a book entitled “*Myšlenkový svět historie*” [History’s World of Ideas]⁵⁰. The focus was Král’s criticism of the “revisionist tendencies in the development of our historiography” which fills more than the half of the book. The other half is an attempt to define a “positive alternative in historical methodology.” Although lacking in style and without a recognizable structure for its ideas as well as inconsistent in detail, it is not altogether without merit for the student of the Communist approach to historiography. Clearly, the author feels more at ease in criticising his colleagues than in discussing ideas of history. The two parts of his book serve as a dichotomous frame of reference: “revisionist” views are used in theoretical considerations as the main tool for definitions of “correct” terms and concepts on the one hand while the criticism of “revisionist” ideas is based on establishing where they differ from the “correct” ideas on the other. Apart from two alternatives, the “correct” and the “incorrect,” Král’s concept of historiography does not seem to be aware of any other premises, methods or arguments. Král’s concept of the “correct” approach to history differs greatly from that of Nejedlý but it also includes a number of ideas common among past and present Czech intellectuals.

According to Král “history must help man to find his place in society and in the contemporary world”⁵¹. The development of historiography, its influence on and status in society as well as the material preconditions for historiographical work were, in his opinion, dependent on historians’ conception of “their role in the socialist society and [in the] consequences they deduce from it for their work, above all in respect to theory and methodology”⁵².

His comments contain two points of interest to the argument of this article. Firstly, Král suggests that historiography neither exists nor has the right to exist independently of the social tasks which it fulfills. Secondly, he establishes an indivisible relationship between historians and their discipline when he defines the “fate” of the discipline as the result of the political views of historians. Whereas the simple definition of

Ernst Birke and Eugen Lemberg (eds.): *Geschichtsbewußtsein in Ostmitteleuropa*. Marburg/Lahn 1961, pp. 94–103. For further studies by Lemberg related to the topic see bibliography of his work in: *Lebensbilder zur Geschichte der böhmischen Länder*. Vol. 5: Eugen Lemberg. Ed. by Ferdinand Seibt. Munich 1986, pp. 297–300.

⁵⁰ Václav Král: *Myšlenkový svět historie* (Note 2). – For more background information compare Juraj Křížek: *Některé problémy současné československé historiografie* [Some problems of the contemporary Czechoslovak historiography]. In: *Československý časopis historický* 20 (1972), pp. 4 and 21 (1973), pp. 411–429.

⁵¹ Král, *Myšlenkový svět*, p. 154.

⁵² *Ibid.*

history as "the helper of the party in the formation of socialist superstructure"⁵³ can be viewed as representing a particular political demand, the concept of historiography as a social task is neither new nor unique in modern European thought. Further, it is not unusual to judge the work of historians according to their personal political attitudes. Král's notion of the societal needs which historiography is to satisfy takes on a somewhat new character if compared to statements made by Nejedlý on this issue during the 1950s. Král is the more sophisticated of the two, vague in some respects and more precise in others. He does not attempt to define the contents of "desirable" interpretation which historians should provide. He is critical not only of "objectivism" or "empirism" in the social sciences but also of many features of post-World War II historiography that his "revisionist" colleagues have criticized, such as dogmatism, simplification, and generalization based on insufficient empirical foundation. He condemns both the "revisionist," and the Czechoslovak "Marxist" historians⁵⁴. Without mentioning names, his detailed discussion of the required contemporary standards of "Marxist" historical studies gives the impression that socialist historiography has achieved little in Czechoslovakia.

Král formulated the task of historiography as "helper of the party" in seemingly less concrete political terms than did Nejedlý. He perceived it more as a general technocratic principle which could appeal to many among the public who might otherwise be openly hostile towards the regime:

Socialist society has a rational order and plan ... The complexity of research demands conscious goal-orientated guidance if one is not to waste means and energy. No one can demand that society support unplanned, unguided, uncontrolled and therefore insufficient activity⁵⁵.

Correspondingly, Král's notion of "historical science" is strictly monistic: it does not know any separation of research, teaching and popularization of scholarly knowledge; it does not allow for "partial" results in scholarly work, but considers only so-called "synthetic" studies as truly "scientific": it rejects "subjectivism and voluntarism" and allows only for "scientifically objective" studies⁵⁶. At the same time, Král's criticism of "revisionist" historiography is dominated by political condemnation of opponents rather than by analysis of their work. He offers many examples in which his opponents also presented their views in political terms although their aims differed from his. After all, nearly all of the historians purged after 1968 were members of the Communist Party and were to a large extent political actors as well as historians⁵⁷. Král makes clear that call for "freedom in historical research" made by members of Communist Party is a political demand. That this or any other political attitude does

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵⁴ Král, *Myšlenkový svět*, pp. 156–181.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 125–133.

⁵⁷ At the same time, the Czechoslovak historians were intensively involved in political developments through their publications. Among the 836 significant publications listed in the 1968/69 period, 125 were written by historians. Compare Heumos, *Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik* (1978), p. 557.

not necessarily say much about the quality of a historian's work is a point Král failed to consider. It seems that in Král's concept of "advanced Marxist historiography" as he called the contemporary stage of development it does not matter so much what a historian writes as who he is⁵⁸. Adjustment to particular rules of political conduct and the use of a specific code of language appear to be the ticket to his world of Czech historiography.

Král dedicated an entire chapter to the concept of national history, proposing a "synthesis of national history" as the main task of contemporary historiography⁵⁹. His criticism of earlier work by Czechoslovak historians prompted him to suggest that a "new concept of national history" was desirable, and he set a three year time-table for completion of the "new concept." He claimed that with respect to the Communist system of planning, it would be possible to finish such a work during the five-year plan of the time⁶⁰. He failed, however, to inform his readers precisely what kind of work he meant or how such work was to be conducted. He dealt solely with a pretentious "theoretical" framework:

The concept should be internally homogenous [vnitřně jednotná] with definite and clear judgements, with a sober, factual and critical presentation of the historical process in all its contradictions and complexity, with all victories and failures, and complicated reserves which have marked the path of popular masses throughout history⁶¹.

As in the rest of his book, Král's vision here remained somewhat vague; his main message was the desire for a "scientifically correct" interpretation of the whole of Czech history. Once again, the adherence to a monistic notion of knowledge and of historical development is striking. It is surprising, however, that the Marxist Král deals extensively with the issue of a "concept of national history" at all. Even more surprising is his allegation of attempts by the "revisionists" to destroy the fundamental concepts of national history⁶². Since he expressed concern as to which interpretation of the Czech past was "correct" and which was "incorrect" – and he did not hesitate to admit this – Král actually engaged in the traditional dispute in Czech historiography over the "concept of Czech history" [pojetí českých dějin]. Although critical of Nejedlý's attempts to formulate a "concept of Czech history" in Marxist terms, Král considered them to be the point of departure for the new formulation of the desirable concept⁶³. "The social responsibility of a historian begins with the question of the

⁵⁸ Vilém Prečan, one of the most knowledgeable scholars of the contemporary working conditions of the Czechoslovak historians clearly expresses this when he explains why the publication of certain works is prevented: "What is objectionable are circumstances pertinent to a different sphere of activity than the study of the past. The author himself can be such an obstacle, ... The author is 'objectionable' simply because he belongs to a group of people ostracized by the regime." Compare: Vilém Prečan (ed.): *Acta creationis. Independent Historiography in Czechoslovakia 1969–1980. Supplement*. Hannover 1980, p. XLIX f.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 181.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 74 f., 110 ff.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

meaning of history as a whole"⁶⁴ writes Král as he enters the field of traditional Czech debate still popular among Czech intellectuals. This point best illustrates how heavily indebted Communist historiography is to popular national traditions: the details have been occasionally changed, but the basic structures for thinking about history have remained the same.

In summary, Král's book offers in addition to the simple message that Czechoslovak historiography is to be controlled by the Communist party, some interesting insights into the present regime's attitudes toward history:

- The Communist regime in Czechoslovakia does no longer seem to impose concrete prescriptions by which the conformity of a historical study can be measured as it attempted to do after 1948. Although allegedly "historiography discovers the historical mission of the working class" and "provides historical legitimation for the struggle of the working class and its party," it has now been admitted that "universal laws of the historical process" usually take different concrete forms⁶⁵. No prescriptions can be made to historians concerning what "concrete forms" they study or which conclusions they reach⁶⁶. Certain conditions should be fulfilled by the historian as person and certain code of language not rejected if a work is to be acceptable to the regime.
- There is a marked, observable adherence to the older monistic traditions of viewing reality and knowledge as a definite entity capable of being grasped by particular categories.
- Using a nationalist framework as developed in the second half of the nineteenth century, history continues to be primarily viewed as "national history."
- Self-criticism by modern historians and their epistemological doubt in regard to human knowledge in general seem to be considered in contemporary Czechoslovakia as the main threat to historiography.

Thus not only in practise but also in theory the situation of historiography in Communist Czechoslovakia differs significantly from the suggestions implied by the simplistic concept of the "Communist rewriting of national history." It is beyond the scope of this article to present a comprehensive survey of Czechoslovak historiography so that we can examine the practical implications of contemporary policies of the Communist Party on the discipline. Instead, a brief look at Ferdinand Seibt's extensive review of the first volume of the most recent 'synthetic' study published in Czechoslovakia and envisaged by Král, "Přehled dějin Československa" [Survey of the history of Czechoslovakia], will serve as an example⁶⁷.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 154 and 166.

⁶⁶ According to Prečan, "especially in cases when historical problems did not directly concern power political interests (ancient history, most medieval problems, and even topics of general history in the 19th century), a number of works were published which, either not at all or only to a very limited degree, were affected by ideological regimentation". In: Prečan (ed.), *Acta creationis – Supplement* (1980), p. LVIII.

⁶⁷ Ferdinand Seibt: *Summa historiae?* In: *Bohemia* 27 (1986), pp. 360–373. For further detailed reviews of comparable Czechoslovak publications see for example *Bohemia* 28 (1987), pp. 173–182.

The *Přehled* is intended to fulfil two functions: to present the newest state of historical research to the professional historian on one hand, and to provide a handbook for the educated public on the other. Each of the eleven sections was written by a group of authors, the text contains no reference notes as is common to scholarly studies, although each chapter does have bibliographical information. The *Přehled* represents a unique publication of its kind in Czechoslovakia, which also accounts for the size of the first edition – 30 000 copies.

Seibt considers it a work of scholarship in the accepted sense of the word. With some exceptions, the book takes into account earlier relevant scholarly studies including research done in the West. Disregarding the occasional errors which are to be found in any academic work of this dimension, Seibt has no fundamental objections to the scholarly qualities of this work. He points out occasional insufficiencies in interpretations which are apparently due to the effort of the authors to make past realities fit into Marxist categories. Seibt does not cite a single point where incorrect information is found or historical reality is unduly distorted. His major criticism is directed instead at the lack of comparative evaluations of specific Czech or Slovak phenomena within a broader European context. On the whole, Seibt's criticism concerns minor rather than fundamental aspects of the work.

Independent Historiography

Czechoslovak historiography has diverged widely from what might have been expected, given both propagandistic statements of the late 1940s and 1950s and the vast political power at the disposal of the new regime. This divergence is illustrated not only in numerous works published in Czechoslovakia but also by the existence of an "independent" Czechoslovak historiography⁶⁸.

For the last ten years or so, publications available at major international historical conferences draw attention to historians, working in Czechoslovakia, other than those officially representing the country. According to some calculations more than thirty percent of all active historians were purged in Czechoslovakia after 1969⁶⁹. Some emigrated, others, deprived of their livelihoods, ceased working in their field. Still others have continued under difficult conditions to publish their work as manuscripts made accessible, in the form of *samizdat* publications, to the public. Their work has been occasionally also presented at conferences or published abroad. The work of the "independent" historians has become an inseparable, and not all negligible, part of contemporary Czechoslovak historiography. The impact of their publications has surely been limited due to the distribution of the manuscripts within a small circle dominated by intellectuals. Their work has found an echo in Czech periodicals

⁶⁸ For information on the usage of the terms "official" and "independent" historiography see Prečan (ed.), *Acta creationis – Supplement* (1980) XLVII-L and *Independent Historiography in Czechoslovakia 1969–1980*, p. XXI–XXV f.

⁶⁹ Vilém Prečan: *The Interdependence of Politics and Czech Historiography in Communist Czechoslovakia*. Paper presented at the III World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies in Washington, D. C. in 1985.

published in the West and have inspired numerous public discussions which, in the long term, certainly cannot be overlooked by analysts of developments in Czech historical consciousness.

A bibliography of 180 historical studies published in *samisdát* was compiled in 1980. This bibliography provides a brief description of these publications (although the number of these publications has increased since that time):

The majority of these works, numbering about 150, are all concerned with problems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including more than seventy which focus on contemporary history from 1938 until the present. The number of works concerned with earlier periods (up to the end of the eighteenth century) is slightly over twenty, and only ten titles pertain to the history of philosophy, methodology, etc. . . . More than two-thirds of the titles, numbering about 130, are concerned with questions of Slovak and Czech history, the history of the Czech Lands and of Czechoslovakia during various historic periods⁷⁰.

Most of the works deal with those aspects of the past which have been neglected or completely suppressed by censorship in Czechoslovakia.

In 1984, an anonymous group of "independent" Czechoslovak historians published a document under the auspices of Charter 77 concerning contemporary Czechoslovak historiography and the state of historical consciousness. This text gave rise to lively discussions among the dissidents in Prague, particularly among historians. The major contributions to these discussions were published in two *samisdát* volumes compiled by Milan Hübl, and they cast an interesting new light on the questions concerning the interdependence of politics and history in a socialist country⁷¹.

The 4000 word document entitled "Právo na dějiny" [Right to history] was addressed to the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. It was formulated in protest of a state of affairs described as follows:

For decades our nation has intentionally been deprived of its historical experience both by the fact that the state power permits only the publication of such works of historiography which suit the present official ideology, and by the active

⁷⁰ For the bibliography see Prečan (ed.), *Acta creationis*. For the cited summary see Supplement, p. LIII. – Further valuable general information on the *samisdát* publications on history can be found in H. Gordon Skilling's publications cited in note 6. For an annotated bibliography compare this issue of *Bohemia* pp. 481–500.

⁷¹ *Hlasy k českým dějinám. Sborník diskuse* [Voices concerning Czech history. A collection of contributions to the discussions]. Prague 1984–1985 (Here cited as *Hlasy I*). – *Hlasy k českým dějinám II – Pokračování diskuse* (Sborník) [Voices toward Czech history II – The continuation of the discussion (Collection of contributions)]. Prague 1985 (Here cited as *Hlasy II*). Manuscripts used in this paper were made available by Dokumentationszentrum zur Förderung der unabhängigen tschechoslowakischen Literatur in Scheinfeld/West Germany. The Charter 77 document, "The Right to History," which inspired these discussions has also been published in various Czech periodicals in the West. This paper has used the edition from the above cited volume. An abbreviated version of the document in German can be found in *Ost-europa-Archiv* 36 (1986), pp. 370–384.

manipulation of fundamental historical facts and traditions. This taking possession of history as a whole is followed by tabuization, or occasionally even falsification of central periods of our history⁷².

The document is a critical survey of the present state of historiography dealing with archives, editions of sources, the institutional organisation of Czechoslovak historiography and its achievements and policies of spreading historical knowledge. The last section of the document discusses the contemporary approach to Czech history in general and of the "concept of Czech history" [pojetí českých dějin] in particular. It concludes that the present state of Czechoslovak historiography is "catastrophic" and calls for criticism and discussion of the presented ideas claiming the confrontation of differing standpoints as the best means for improvement.

The language of the text is emotional and the authors did not hesitate to use strong words to make their point. Soon after publication the document was criticised by four prominent historians who, however, clearly expressed their agreement in respect to the "unsatisfactory state of present historiography"⁷³. They noted eight points to indicate mistakes and unqualified judgements found in the document, disagreeing with what they considered a too strong and too general condemnation of contemporary Czechoslovak historiography. They accused the authors of the document of favouring one particular approach to history – "Christian" – thus contradicting the principle of Charter 77 as a movement representing all philosophical attitudes. Finally, they objected because they, as professional historians, had not been asked by the Charter 77 spokesmen to participate in the preparation of the document. Further criticism followed, to which one of the authors of the original document responded in a longer anonymous essay. The entire issue was discussed during the following months by many in Prague and in exile.

The two volumes published in *samizdat* in Prague were compiled from the writings of people usually considered "independent" because of their refusal to be in the service of the regime. Yet the lack of external constraints did not necessarily lead to an independence of mind. The following will draw attention to a few of the observations made in these discussions that indicate some long-term impact Communist ideology has had upon the part of the public which presently opposes it politically.

Only one of the contributions touched upon the focus of the document *Právo na dějiny*. This is surprising given that the idea of formulating a "right to history" as a universal human right certainly is a new and complicated one. Although Petr Pithart was prompted to ask "what, I beg you, is the 'right to history'?", he spent little time searching for the answer. Only in one remark did he mention the concept of "right" as something that cannot be demanded or rejected, "as it is impossible to 'grant' freedom,"⁷⁴ and suggested that the concept "right to history" be interpreted as something that could not be claimed but only lived and argued that "we began losing this right by a selective approach to history long ago"⁷⁵.

⁷² Hlasý I, p. 21.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 45.

⁷⁴ Hlasý II, p. 212 f.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 214.

The lack of interest in the basic idea of the document is surprising. Even the most obvious questions raised by the concept were not discussed: Is the right to history meant to constitute a separate individual human right or is it to be understood as the collective right of a group or society? What are the justifications for formulating a specific right to history which were not covered sufficiently by the realisation of universal human rights in the common sense of the word and specifically, what does the term 'history' represent in this context?

In contrast, the legitimacy of the original proclamation, as a Charter 77 document, was widely discussed. Disagreements with various statements contained in the original text combined with accusations of its lack of objectivity, lack of expertise and the fact that numerous historians belonging to that movement were not consulted prior to publication, provided grounds for disputes about the right of the spokesmen of Charter 77 to publish the document⁷⁶. There seems to be an agreement that Charter 77 is not to represent any specific philosophical, ideological or political ideas and it has been generally understood that the document does not conform to this principle. Surprisingly, the question of the procedures by which this principle is implemented drew little attention from the critics.

The limited attention given to questions of formal procedures was also indirectly reflected in the widespread tendency to personify problems. For example, there was much discussion of the statement in the original document that took the liberty of passing moral judgements on the so-called "official historians" by arguing that they included only a few "honest" people. Little attention was paid to the actual historical studies. It is striking how often the discussants themselves used personal characteristics as the means of argument, often reverting to simple invectives and insults⁷⁷.

Naturally, a discussion which does not retain the logic of an argument but concerns itself with the persons putting forth the arguments, rarely avoids interpretations of intentions. Thus the disputes became personal rather than formal arguments about positions. Repeated explanations and reinterpretations of personal standpoints tended to divert attention from the focus of discussion. The contribution by Petr Uhl "About three dishonesties of the authors of the *Právo na dějiny*" can be cited as the most illustrative example⁷⁸. Logical consistency and argumentative coherence are not qualities to be ascribed to the debate over the document *Právo na dějiny*.

The so-called Catholic notion of Czech history [katolické pojetí českých dějin] became the central point of the discussion. This was prompted by remarks in the original document that stressed the significance of Christianity in European civilization and of the Catholic Church in Czech history. Statements like "we are – whether we acknowledge it or condemn it – heirs of Christian culture," "history without man and without God naturally cannot have any meaning" or "the Catholic Church, which

⁷⁶ This point has been touched upon by many discussants in various depth. Compare Hlasý I, pp. 45, 50, 57–60, 94, 95 and Hlasý II, pp. 10, 29 f., 198–200, 210–212.

⁷⁷ Highly emotional arguments can be found particularly in contributions by Milan Hübl, Petr Uhl and Luboš Kohout.

⁷⁸ Petr Uhl: O třech nepoctivostech autorů Práva na dějiny [About three dishonesties of the authors of The Right to History]. In: Hlasý II, pp. 138–156.

was of fundamental significance for the Czech history up to the modern times ...”⁷⁹ aroused a great wave of disagreement. With Jan Křen raising some questions in respect to this aspect of the document, which he described as “biased Catholic orientation,”⁸⁰ and Hübl’s emotional and simplistic attacks not only against the document itself but also against the Catholic Church and its past⁸¹, the issue of “Catholicism” and its role in the Czech history was placed into the forefront of the discussions.

Thus the discussions over the *Právo na dějiny* gave the old concern over the “notion of Czech history” a new intensity. Not only did the original document blame the “official” historiography for not having such a concept [*pojetí*] but most of its critics seemed to have focused their contributions on issues related to *pojetí* rather than on specific issues raised in the original text. A new collection of essays entitled “*Pojetí českých dějin*,” and introduced as the first volume of a planned series was inspired by the above discussions and published in January 1986 in Prague⁸². Together with Král’s book mentioned above it can be cited as further indication of how intense the present concern with this issue is. This aspect of the Right to History debate indicates more than anything else how deeply indebted the present “independent” historiography is to the older Czech approach to history, and how little it has reflected the theoretical and methodological developments of modern historiography. For example: questions concerning the “sense” or “meaning” of a national history, understandable at a period when a society is striving to establish itself as a nation, become obsolete when this process is argued to have been successfully completed as is the case in present day Czechoslovakia. Apart from that, the authors disregard problems involved in any global approach to the history of a nation since it is conceived of as a unique process of inherently consistent development from its inception up to the present. The distinction between empirical and evaluative statements is neglected in these discussions. Finally, it is not clear to what extent the issue of *pojetí* concerns statements requiring compliance with the criteria of scholarly work or to what extent it is just searching for statements of subjective tastes and preferences in respect to various historical epochs.

In contrast to the *pojetí* topic, the present situation of Czechoslovak historiography has not been given sufficient attention in the discussion. Apart from general statements of condemnation of the present state of Czechoslovak historiography hardly any consideration has been given to particular works of Czechoslovak historians. Only Jaroslav Mezník made occasional statements in this respect but even he contented himself with vague comments. Disagreeing with the original document which criticised that editions of primary historical documents are not being published in Czechoslovakia, Mezník remarked “I am not precisely informed, surely there will be some editions”⁸³. On another occasion, in support of his defence of one of the historical institutes, he seemed content with the vague statement that “from the institute a

⁷⁹ Hlasý I., pp. 20, 39.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 91.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 9–11.

⁸² *Pojetí českých dějin. Sborník I* [Notion of Czech history. Collection of essays I]. Prague 1986 (Ms.).

⁸³ Hlasý I., p. 119.

number of good or even very good studies have emerged"⁸⁴. Mezník openly admitted that he "typed most of the text without a draft,"⁸⁵ that is, he did not intend to present a systematic analysis but rather his spontaneous comments. In spite of that, Mezník comes across as one of the best informed discussants with respect to historiographical literature in Czechoslovakia and it is surprising that neither he nor anyone else in the discussion presented any systematic information and analysis of the original focus of the debate: the state of historiography in present day Czechoslovakia.

Conclusion

The examination of historical writings in socialist Czechoslovakia shows that the intention of the ruling party to subjugate historiography has not been fulfilled. Moreover, the Communist Party has attempted to a great extent to take possession of national traditions rather than to impose new interpretations, to "rewrite history." The inherent and practical difficulties in political attempts to control historiography have been discussed and there are numerous indications that in practise it is almost impossible to fully control the work of historians. Analysis of theoretical explications of the premises of the "advanced Marxist historiography" has further shown that the ruling party has for the most part ceased attempts to present definitive sets of statements meant to be used by the historians as guidelines for their work, as it had originally attempted immediately after the takeover in 1948. Instead, the Communist Party now appears to be content with preventing certain people from publishing and certain topics from being discussed rather than making prescriptions about what is to be written. At the same time there are numerous indications that the impact of Communist control on historiography and on public historical consciousness has not been very strong. The lively discussions of a wide range of topics previously neglected document this clearly.

The firmly established "independent" historiography illustrates best the limited success of political efforts to control historiography. But it also provides an indication of the kind of long-term impact Communist politics have had upon the public. The theoretical approach toward history used both by the historians working within the political system and by the "independent" historians discloses the isolation from contemporary developments in the West. It often follows a model of historical representation that was very popular in the late nineteenth century and during the first decades of this century. Earlier Communist interpretation of the Czech past had used a number of perspectives already popular among the Czechs that can be described by the German term *romantisch-völkisches Geschichtsbild* (loosely translated, a populist romantic interpretation of the past)⁸⁶. Although this concept was later dismissed by Král, the debt of his "advanced concept of Marxist historiography" to older approaches in history is obvious and it is precisely here where many of the "independent" historians share some of Král's premises.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 143.

⁸⁶ See Ernst Birke / Eugen Lemberg: *Geschichtsbewußtsein in Ostmitteleuropa*, and Heinrich Felix Schmid: *Entfaltung und Nachklang*.

They consider historiography to be primarily a function of national identity and are concerned with the search for a *národní koncepce dějin* [national concept of history], for a "synthetic" scholarly interpretation of the whole of Czech history with its "highest" moments and developments [vrchol] finally determined⁸⁷. A monistic and teleological notion of history and historiography as a continuous process towards a better future continues to underlie this approach⁸⁸. Occasional historical relapses are considered to be the outcome of negative forces and the distinction between "good" and "bad" is sought in each period of history. The differences between various "notions" amount to differences of choice in ascribing the qualities of "good" and "bad" to various historical forces⁸⁹. The lack of interest in concrete reality and the preoccupation with abstract notions is also reflected in the very nature of their criticism: neither Král nor the participants in the disputes among dissidents have examined the scholarly work under discussion and both seem to use exclusively dichotomic categories in their assessments, be it "revisionist-Marxist" in case of the former or "official-independent" in the case of the latter. This approach to reality also leads to the intensive personification of the realities under scrutiny with all its negative effects upon the quality of any intellectual dispute⁹⁰.

The above observations illustrate the predominant influence of tendencies popular in Czech, as well as in European, historiography in the past and rejected to a large extent by scholars at the present time. Clearly, the limited possibility for discourse as well as the lack of foreign literature in Czechoslovakia perpetuate the imposition of the past as the main framework of reference for both "official" and "independent" historiography. Marx and Lenin fulfil the same function with the former as Masaryk and Pekař do with the latter. In the long term this means a high degree of stagnation in scholarship and in the general framework of historical consciousness⁹¹. Historical contexts are neglected and actual historical situations obliterated on one hand while, on the other, the present is perceived in a distorted way by having categories borrowed from the past superimposed on it⁹².

Although "independent" historical writing most clearly demonstrates the limited success of the Communist Party's attempts to use historiography for its own pur-

⁸⁷ See Král, *Myšlenkový svět*, p. 193. – Hlasy I, p. 19. – Hlasy II, pp. 61 ff.

⁸⁸ Král, *Myšlenkový svět*, p. 132, 185. – Hlasy I, p. 38.

⁸⁹ Note the similarities in the attitude of Král toward the so-called "revisionist" notion, and those of Milan Hübl, Petr Uhl, and Luboš Kohout toward the so-called "catholic" notion as well as Ladislav Jehlička's toward the "Hussitic" notion.

⁹⁰ Another noticeable similarity concerning the rationalist-functional concept of scholarly work can be seen in the similarity between Král's hope that the "great synthetic work" on Czech history would be completed during the present five-year plan, and the criticism of the "official" historians by the Charter 77 document for not fulfilling this plan.

⁹¹ Both the "official" and "independent" historians seem still to be very much caught up in the tradition of the so-called "political historiography" of the nineteenth century. Compare Jaroslav Werstadt: *Politické dějepisectví devatenáctého století a jeho čeští představitelé* [The political historiography of the nineteenth century and its Czech representatives]. In: *Český časopis historický* 26 (1920), pp. 1–93.

⁹² Here, Herbert Butterfield's criticism of the "Whig" interpretation of history can offer valuable inspiration for a deeper analysis of contemporary Czechoslovak historiography of both

poses, it also indicates the success of the Communist regime in preserving certain archaic intellectual frameworks. Communist historiography has not rewritten Czech history nor, as analysis shows, is it striving to do so. Instead the Communist Party builds its claim of historical legitimation on numerous traditional elements of Czech national consciousness and gradually seems to have recognized that dealing with single issues previously considered tabu is not dangerous (note, for instance, the recent "rehabilitation" of Masaryk in the Communist daily *Rudé právo*⁹³). To preserve the existing structures of Czech historical consciousness while relaxing the control over factual details seems to be the present official policy towards history. In the long run this approach certainly serves the political legitimation of the regime well.

kinds, the "official" as well as the "independent." See: Herbert Butterfield: *The Whig Interpretation of History*, London 1931.

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