

CHRONICLE

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF CZECH-SLOVAK RELATIONS*

The professional seminar Economic and Social Aspects of Czech-Slovak Relations was held as part of the regular meetings of the Commission of Czech-Slovak Historians, at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava in Ostrava, on 11 October 2023. The partner institutions in organizing the event were the Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and the University of Ostrava in Ostrava. The main goal of the conference was to bring together selected examples from the economic and social history of the Czech lands, Slovakia and Czechoslovakia in the period from 1867 to the present. It was aimed, against this background, to discuss their character, scope and dynamics, which gained importance in the observed period and significantly contributed to the discourse on the organization of Czech-Slovak relations. When selecting the presentations, the emphasis was placed both on contributions conveying the current state of research and on the results of current research in the given field. Six lecturers actively participated in the seminar and their presentations were divided by chronology, from the end of the nineteenth century to the 1990s.

The first block was opened by Mgr. Lukáš Patera from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava in Ostrava. The paper "Export networks of iron ore exports from the Spiš-Gemer mining area to Central European ironworks in the years 1867–1914" was focused on the regional and supra-regional importance of the metallurgical industry in Slovakia. In addition to the industrial segment itself, the author paid attention to its anchoring in the broader context of a series of industrial laws, which were gradually implemented within the framework of the Hungarian economic policy as a stimulus for the starting of industrialization. At the same time, they foreshadowed the onset of the so-called "greenhouse economy", which as a result of its protectionism, to a large extent reduced, for example, the competitiveness of enterprises. In addition to metallurgical production and the balance of export quotas and volume, Lukáš Patera's contribution also touched on the transport infrastructure, primarily the Košice-Bohumín railway and its connections, which, as a key transport artery, significantly magnified the economic importance of several cities lying on its line.

Significant intersections between economic and cultural history were presented in the presentation of Mgr. Mikuláš Jančura, PhD. from the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Pavel Jozef Šafárik University in Košice. His paper, entitled "The role and function of representations in the tourism industry and their influence on the formation of Czech-Slovak relations in the interwar period. Outline of theoretical starting points", opened up the issue of tourism in interwar Czechoslovakia. He paid particular attention to the importance of representations and their possible influence on the formation of Czech-Slovak relations in the observed period. He set out the basic theoretical starting points and formulated research questions for the first phase of ongoing research on the issue. Central was the concept of mobility of things, used mainly by German and Anglo-American historiography and historical sociology of tourism. He presented the concept against the background of the leisure definition of tourism, targeting the mobility of things (including visual representation) as an example of the cultural construction of the "identity" of a place. One of the key questions was what the "Czechoslovakness" of Czechoslovakia was as presented when creating the image of Czechoslovakia as a tourist destination. It was also relevant to formulate the question of how, in terms of content, individual parts of the republic were presented to each other. The represented content offered an insight into the effort to "find" a balance between avant-garde and tradition, primarily through visual representations of urban and rural environments.

After the presentations of both papers, a general discussion was opened and a short break followed.

The second block was opened by PhDr. Pavel Dufek, PhD. from the University of Economics in Prague, with the paper "Infrastructure construction in Slovakia in the 1930s: A tool for overcoming the economic crisis, a means of defense, support for industrialization?" The starting

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point of the contribution was the characteristics of industry in Slovakia in the 1920s and the relationship with the Czech lands. The author highlighted the mutual disproportion, but also competitiveness and the non-negligible factor of transport accessibility as special points that had significant political influence in the Czech-Slovak region during the observed period. In the case of infrastructural constructions, the author touched not only on the functioning of industrial giants and their influence on Slovakia, but also on transport infrastructure and electrification. The main issue of the contribution was the functionality of these buildings in the social context, but also, for example, on the military-strategic level. The contribution emphasized the social level mainly in connection with the effects of the economic crisis. In this context, the author interpreted these buildings as a compensation tool for the increase in unemployment. He also touched upon the problematic issue of project financing, which had been dynamic in Slovakia's favour since 1933, once again affecting the nature of Czech-Slovak relations, especially in the case of South Bohemian regions with weaker industrialization. The paper relativizes the historical stereotype developed by predominantly nationalistic Slovak historiography about the targeted "dismantling" of industry in Slovakia.

The period of existence of the Slovak State was presented by prof. Peter Mičko, PhD. from the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. The paper, entitled "Slovak workforce in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in the years 1939–1945" emphasized the social level of the problem of unemployment in Slovakia and its compensatory tools in the context of the operation of authoritarian regimes in Slovakia and the Czech lands. The starting point of the contribution was unemployment in Slovakia as one of the more deeply rooted social problems that persisted even after the creation of the Slovak state. The author described the range of compensatory tools, such as the construction and concentration of industry or the construction of transport infrastructure. Central was the research example of the departure of workers for work in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The paper emphasized several levels. The first was the aforementioned unemployment compensation by job creation. At the same time, the level of economic demands of Nazi Germany, amplified by the outbreak of the Second World War, was strongly present. However, the author drew attention to the need to distinguish between regular and forced labour and presented the Protectorate as a space for labour in the context of the economic needs of Nazi Germany and the nature of the relationship between its individual "vassals". As a result, the control over many matters was concentrated at the centre of the protectorate respectively organizational mechanisms for hiring workers, cross-border travel and returns, organization of social security and health care and, last but not least, financial transfers of salaries, subject to Slovakia's economic relations with Germany.

Both papers were followed by a general discussion followed by a break for lunch. The last block approximated the economic aspects of the socialist regime, with an overlap into the post-revolutionary period, the beginning of the 1990s. In the last block, two papers were presented, focused on specific issues of social relations between workers and the contemporary elite and transformative economic processes after 1989, using the example of a specific company and its internal structure.

The block was opened by PhDr. Jakub Šlouf, PhD. from the National Archives Prague and the Institute for Research on Totalitarian Regimes Prague, with the paper "Workers' antagonism towards elites as an important driver of Czechoslovak history (1945–1989)". The starting point of the paper, focused on social history with a strong influence on politics, was the "national cleansing" after 1945 and the definition of moral criteria of guilt in relation to Nazi Germany (and the Protectorate). The transfer of these criteria to the period after 1948 is relevant, and against the background of changed state legal conditions, the author presents the breakdown of established hierarchies, the definition of oneself in relation to the capitalism of the first Czechoslovak Republic, the definition of the relationship of subordinates, or workers, to the factory itself and, last but not least, the re-defining of the relationship of subordinates to the newly created industrial elites. On this basis, the author identifies the authentic anti-elitism of the workers and the significant role of propaganda in this process, in the context of the class radicalization of the system after 1948. At the same time, the author pointed out the

paradoxical nature of this anti-elitism in the worker–supervisor relationship. The paradoxical nature of anti-elitism was shown, for example, during the social crisis and the resulting strike wave in the summer of 1948. According to the author, the conflict was purposefully politicized by the Communist Party, also from the point of view of the workers as the basic propagandist pillar of the system. The reaction was to prosecute the managers and not the workers. During the 1950s, the repression was also turned inside the party. Criticism focused on the adoption of a “bourgeois” way of life by the new elites and the adoption of capitalist management methods. Against this background, the author approached the internal conflict between so-called “anarchic socialism” and the state socialism. Criticism of the system came from the ranks of “anarchist” positions. The author traced this antagonism in a timeline to the 1960s, when there was a turn within the working class itself, within which a certain kind of democratization took place. This is demonstrated at the level of the relationship with the elite, through the election of working company councils in 1968–1969, which marked a significant turn compared to the end of the 1940s.

The block and at the same time the conference was concluded by Mgr. Vítězslav Sommer, Ph.D. from the Institute for Contemporary History of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, with the contribution “Production geography of the Svit footwear concern in late socialism and in the economic transformation after 1989”. The central line of the paper was de-industrialization from the beginning of the 1990s on the example of the Svit company in Zlín in the context of the post-socialist economy. In particular, the author focused on the analysis of the geographical distribution of the company under the influence of the transformation process of the 1980s and 1990s. As a starting point, he defined the term “production geography” as the physical distribution of capital within the selected enterprise. In the contribution, he also followed the transformation of the regional economic structure in the city of Zlín, using the example of the Svit company, which functioned as a centralized large-scale production entity, copying the original infrastructure of the Baťa company. In the context of Czech–Slovak relations, the author also presented the expansion of the production network with centralized management. He put forward the socialist model of subcontracting, which led to several problems, such as increasing costs and making production more expensive. Technical problems, competition between companies and disruptions in logistics were also shown to be associated. He identified 1989 as a significant milestone, which led to the destabilization of corporate structures. Although decentralization was a priority for more efficient functioning, its side effects were fragmentation and financial problems, which intensified the results of the company’s privatization. The paper can primarily be viewed through the lens of the centrally controlled economy and its transformation processes from the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. Against this background, however, the example of the Svit Zlín company is also relevant in connection with urban history, as it has the economic structure of a regional company, with a concentration in the city, with nationwide reach. The production geography itself actively affected the physical space of the city of Zlín and, last but not least, its socio-economic structure.

Both papers were followed by a general discussion. A discussion reflecting on the overall success and progress of the event concluded proceedings.

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MEETING OF YOUNG HISTORIANS XIII: POWER IN THE HISTORY OF HUMAN SOCIETY

The Department of History of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik in Košice organizes an annual scientific conference of PhD students with international participation under the name of the Meeting of Young Historians. The thirteenth edition took place on 24 October 2023 and was devoted to the theme “Power in the History of Human Society”.

The central theme of the scientific event was the phenomenon of power as a constant that has been present in human society since its beginning and is an inherent part of human existence. The participants managed to highlight and analyse this issue across different historical epochs, from the Middle Ages to the period of normalization in Czechoslovakia. The conference was co-organised – as usual – by the State Archive in Košice and the Slovak Historical Society at the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

The meeting of young historians was officially opened by the Head of the Department of History of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik, prof. PaedDr. Martin Pekár, PhD., and the Director of the State Archives in Košice, Richard Pavlovič, PhD., who welcomed the guarantors of the individual sessions, participants and spectators.

Nine participants from Slovakia and the Czech Republic presented their papers. The conference was divided into three blocks – according to the historical periods on which the papers were focused. Each block included a discussion in which PhD students received professional questions, insights and constructive criticism from academics.

Experts from the Department of History of the Faculty of Arts of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, the Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in Prague, the Institute of Memory of the Nation, the Department of Legal History and Legal Comparative Studies of the Faculty of Law of Comenius University in Bratislava and the “home” Department of History in Košice were the chairs of the sessions.

In the first session, devoted to power in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, four papers were presented: on the urban patriciate in Kutná Hora, on the administration of estates by Judith Balassa, on the manorial–subaltern relations in the context of the history of the Radvanszky family, and finally on the role of the university grand master in the monopolization of education during the First French Empire. A paper on political power as a tool for the creation of the political elite in the Rožňava region opened the second block – on the history of power in the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic and the Slovak state. This was followed by papers on the political power of the Czechoslovak National Democracy in the interwar period and the crisis of railway transport in the southern territory of Slovakia after 1938. The period of communism in Czechoslovakia was the subject of the last two papers: on the activities and disappearance of Catholic associations in Košice after 1948 and on judicial rehabilitation in eastern Slovakia between 1968 and 1971.

The conference contributed not only to the enrichment of the scientific knowledge of the participating PhD students, but also deepened the international exchange of experience. The festive conclusion of the event was an informal gathering of the participants over a glass of wine, during which they made new acquaintances and enriched each other with further knowledge of history.

Despite the fact that the conference took place during consultation week, several students were present among the audience - alongside colleagues from the archives and other institutions. The organisers and participants of the conference now have two tasks remaining: incorporating the comments from the testimonials and discussion into their studies and then compiling the conference proceedings.

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REMEMBERING WORLD WAR ONE: NORTHEASTERN SLOVAKIA'S MILITARY CEMETERIES EXHIBITION

On 10 November 2023 in the Platón building at the University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik took place the opening of an exhibition on military cemeteries from World War One in the region of northeastern Slovakia. The author of the exhibition, PaedDr. ThLic. Anton Liška, PhD. is an expert advisor of the Regional Monument Office in Prešov. Anton Liška briefly explained the history of the origin and repairs of the hundreds of military cemeteries in northeastern Slovakia. Their guarantor, doc. ThDr. Peter Borza, PhD. opened the exposition and pointed out the significance of remembrance of both the victims of World War One and the horrors that conflicts bring. The exhibition included several photographs of cemeteries, their blueprints and information about their developers. They were built both during World War One and the First Czechoslovak Republic. It gave a picture of the locations of the known military cemeteries and those that have not yet been found, but about the existence of which we know from archival documents. The presentation is also dedicated to the topic of monument protection, their evidence and conditions for their repair and upkeep. The event was also visited by journalists from national television (RTVS). After the opening followed a small gathering. The exhibition will be available at the building of the Faculty of Arts for students and visitors until 15 December 2023.

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