

Colloquium "Industrial Workforce and Political Regimes 1938–1948"

Opava, Czech Republic, 25–26 November 2015

The colloquium took place in Opava from 25th to 26th November 2015 and was organized by the Faculty of Public Policies of the Silesian University in Opava which is one of the project executing organisations. This colloquium followed the first workshop which was organized in 2014.

The first day was devoted to the topic of workforce and the system of forced labour from 1939 to 1945. The first speaker was Stanislav Kokoška who focused on the system of the forced labour in the Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia which represented crucial issue for the functioning of Nazi Germany. In 1939 a ban of strikes was enacted and the worker became a worker of one specific factory, the number of workers was set by a directive and the new phenomenon is a woman working in a factory. In 1942 first labour education camp occurred. Their educational principles were stressed. These camps were designated for women and youth and the most often recourse were due to breaking of the employment contract or when a worker did not come back from holiday.

The next paper was presented by Jiří Pokorný. He dealt with the beginnings of the National Head-office of the Trade Unions of Workers (Národní odborová ústředna zaměstnanecká). It was a big organisation functioning 1939–1945. Antiliberal tendencies may be noticed in the end of 1930s and after the Conference of Munich as a way how to find answers on the breakdown of economy which was felt by normal people, hence it was necessary to saturate a wide spectrum of people. This organisation was an association of socialist head offices and trade unions in bigger corpus. Agrarians, who opposed this organisation, built up their own organisation. The National Head-office of the Trade Unions of Workers defended its independence during the era of the Protectorate, but it formally entered the Národní souručenství. The paper prepared by Dalibor Státník was rather a scientific argumentation on the topic of work's committees during the Protectorate. He mentioned that analogy with post-war era is very important research question because the position of work's committees was similar to work's committees of the Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (ROH).

The last speaker of the first section was Martin Jemelka who focused on manufacturing towns of the Baťa trust in 1938–1945. Shoes production was on the decrease, since the end of 1930s machinery production was slowly increasing. New plants in Sezimovo Ústí, Otrokovice, Třebíč, Ratíškovice, Napajedla or Zruč nad Sázavou were supposed to be used in machinery industry. Changes in organisation of production, changes in investments and Baťa's housing estates were connected with it. The increase of economy housing may be observed in this era.

The second part of the colloquium titled "Social Changes and Political Orientation of the Workforces from 1945 to 1948" was opened by Jiří Kocián who dealt with social policies of political parties during 1945–1948 with focus on Czech National Social Party and partly on

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Social Democratic Party. Political parties were, of course, interested in social policy before WW2. The National Social Party was interested in crisis events and their possible solutions. After WW2 the above mentioned parties were interested in work's committees, economic problems and housing. A lot of their proposals were not accepted.

The following speech was held by Jiří Pernes who focused on the Czechoslovak Communist Party and its relationship towards workforce during 1945–1948. Industrial workforce was still the main group which supported the party. After elections in 1946, which were won by the Communist Party, the idea of establishing of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia became actual. The party aspiration was gaining more than 50 % in upcoming elections. In 1947 the Communist Party undertook a campaign and aimed to get more members coming from intelligentsia, peasants, women and also owners of small firms, teachers and white collars. This campaign resulted in massively increased number of party members. This fact led to suspicion in the Soviet Union. The social structure of the party was changing and industrial workforce was less represented.

Ryszard Kaczmarek and Kazimierz Miroszewski discussed several aspects of the Katowice region. He compared social classes in the region with Poland and stated that the main social class were labourers but peasants were dominant in Poland. The problem of strikes represented his second topic. He said that qualified labourers took part in strikes. The group which did not strike were holders of Volksliste, for they were afraid of expulsion. Generally said, strikes were not often in 1945. Different situation was in the next year when people strike because of lack of the food. In 1948, seventeen strikes happened. Reason for them was the shortage of the food. The third topic was focused on shock-workers. It was easier to find shock-workers among younger labourers because a lot of workers were not able to fulfil the norm. Another fact connected with shock-workers are falsified statistics. Shock-workers profited from their job performance. They were given new flats, more food etc. Ryszard Kaczmarek also mentioned that both leftist parties had 140,000 members in the Katowice region but the Polish Worker's Party lost members during the antizionism campaign.

Peter Heumos presented the last conference paper of this section. He concentrated his speech on some aspects of protest behaviour of labourers in Czechoslovakia from 1945 to 1968. In the beginning of the post-war era labourers strike in Škoda plants because their working hours were risen. Then in 1946–1947 protests were caused because of new wage plan and introduction of new job norms. The role of work's committees in forming of protests was slowly increasing. Since the second half of 1950s the work's committee was entitled to call a strike and the role of the Communist Party in case of solving conflicts was weakened.

The first conference day finished in Dolní Vítkovice.

The following day was divided into two sections – "Social Situation of Labourers 1945–1948", and "Social Conditions of labourers 1938–1948 –sources and research methods". The first speaker was Dušan Janák who discussed social conflicts and strikes in the Ostrava region in summer 1948. He divided strikes as political phenomenon and specified their differences in 1945–1948. Till 1946/1947 political strikes were prevailing and were organized artificially. We do not know how many strikes happened because the press of Trade Unions was not interested in this topic. Since 1947 directives are debated and 103 strikes occurred

but it was a marginal topic, therefore, only short reports were in newspapers. After the national strike in February 1948 political strikes stopped. The last represent strikes which were connected with the first regime crisis and bad situation of food supply. Janák named strikes in Slezské bavlnářské závody which was a German company during WW2. This strike spread massively during one day. Trade Unions denied this strike and had the role of real government speakers. This strike was suppressed.

The next speaker was Jakub Šlouf who focused on social and political conflicts in the Plzeň region from 1948 to 1953. The key question was currency reform connected with protests in Czechoslovakia. In June 1953, there occurred strike in the V.I. Lenin plant. This strike attempted to weaken the regime which was a new phenomenon.

Zdeněk Jirásek discussed the evolution of workers in textile industry in the Czech lands 1945–1945. The key character of the after-war period was the continuity with the interwar period and the Protectorate. The only different regions were bordering areas which were negatively influenced by the expulsion of Germans and new settlement. A lot of women started to work in the textile industry after WW2. Following conference paper was presented by Alžběta Čornejová. She debated the topic concerning food supply of labourers and the Central Trade Union Council (ÚRO) which played important role in the establishing of rationing. Rations were distributed by the Central Committee of Workers (Ústřední rada pracujících) – mostly grain, shoes, clothes etc. UNRRA also distributed rations. Some of their products were unknown for Czechoslovak people. Nevertheless, some products were lacking – fuel, vehicles, and sanitary goods. Very bad situation was in the Opava region. Bad crops in 1947 caused severe problems in food distribution and black market was booming. This section was completed by Jiří Knapík and his paper on cultural policy in the second half of 1940s. A labourer was not only a blue collar employee, he was considered as an important representative of the nation. Culture should have been free for masses of people after WW2. New collectives of profane culture were set up. These collectives tried to organize attending of cultural events. They also attempted to liquidate the system of season tickets in theatres which caused a crisis of attending cultural events. Trade Unions had a new form of cultural policy which was organized by workshop clubs of Trade Unions, labourers should have become objects of art, labourers judged movies etc.

The first paper of the second section was held by Mečislav Borák who discussed the criterion of family background of workers who became victims of the blood bath in Katyn. Most of them were normal citizens; some of them were soldiers from the Těšín region. Based on personal questionnaires we can find that people had different occupations during interwar period than during the war, e.g. engineers, teachers or policemen. A lot of policemen from the interwar era worked as labourers. Nevertheless, they were shot.

Mečislav Borák was followed by David Hubený who based his paper about labourers on his research in Police Department in Prague. He found that authorities had information about labourers and concentrated on all important events in factories and labour movement. Some examples from the press, information on merging of labour unions, advertising campaigns and strike preventions may be found there.

Second to last presentation was prepared by Richard Przeczek. He discussed the survey which was conducted by Inocenc Arnošt Bláha in Brno in 1947. Bláha collected more than twenty thousand of personal questionnaires from inhabitants in Brno. They had to answer

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a broad spectrum of questions related to their family, housing standards or free time. The research project investigates questionnaires which were filled out by students and pupils. Richard Przeczek visualised some project outputs after his theoretical introduction.

The last speaker was Lubomír Hlavienka who presented results of the project which was based on newspapers survey. His team searched for articles in *Práce* and several newspapers which were printed for industrial sectors. He focused on collected data from these newspapers. These information corresponded to content of the book which is about to be published as output of the project called Industrial Work Force in the Czech Lands 1938–1948.

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