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## Introduction

This issue is the first one of the planned biannual English versions of the *Sociologický časopis* (Sociological Review), published by the Institute of Sociology of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences in Prague on behalf of the Czech sociological community. The Sociological Review has appeared bimonthly from 1965. After November 1989, its editorial board, publishing policy and manner of production were completely changed, in order to be more critical and flexible.

Comparing with the other Central European countries, Czech sociology was perhaps the most devastated by the communist regime. Mistrustful Stalinist leaders had very good reasons for doing this, indeed. Both of democratic Czechoslovakia's prewar presidents were respected sociologists. The habilitation thesis of the first of them, professor Tomáš G. Masaryk, was concerned with suicide as a sociological problem (several years before Durkheim's *Le suicide*). The second of them, Edvard Beneš, was habilitated at Prague's Charles University as a docent of sociology and continued his courses even after he became the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Pre-war Czech sociology flourished in the Brno school - headed by Arnošt Bláha in a Durkheimian style and the rather more empirical Prague school of Zdeněk Ullrich, Otakar Machotka and others, most of whom emigrated after 1948. After a short continuation of this tradition in the post-war period, teaching and research in sociology were strictly prohibited in 1950.

It was only in 1965 that sociological research started to regenerate itself, but only for a short period lasting until 1969. In these years, the Institute of Sociology was established and the Sociological Review begun. A large survey on social stratification was collected and analyzed, several working teams were activated and some classic sociological books were translated (but never published). After 1970, sociology was "normalized" like the society as a whole, i.e. it was subordinated to ideological principles and party control. The Institute of Sociology became part of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology and research was concentrated on such themes as *The Rapprochement of the Working Class and Intelligentsia* or *The Cultivation of the Socialist Style of Life*. Only a few individuals tried to maintain some continuity, either pursuing seemingly neutral topics in the official institutions (e.g. urban sociology, educational mobility, wage differences), or publishing the samizdat quarterly *Sociologický obzor* (Sociological Horizons), oriented mostly toward political problems and the sociology of literature.

Lack of continuity and the coerced lowering of the prestige of sociological research caused the greatest problem we face after November 1989, when communist power was overturned in Czechoslovakia: the lack of qualified and motivated people. Moreover, due to the weight of political criteria in the student selection process, whole years of students who studied sociology in the 1970s and 1980s have virtually disappeared. Therefore, the renewed institutions can hardly find promising young people, especially as they are in competition with the private sector and state administration. Nevertheless, new studies in social and political

sciences were established (e.g. the new Faculty of Social Sciences of the University Charles, studies on the Central European University in Prague) and we can expect real improvement in a few years.

Challenges of the new Czechoslovak democratic era for sociological research are immense. First, due to absent freedom of research, the development of society in terms of social structure, national character, value system, way of life etc., remains mostly undescribed in the whole period after 1945. Second, the current transformation of society is conceived in the political and economic terms only and the sociological point of view is almost missing. Third, economic transformation causes formerly unknown social problems which should be described and analyzed. Czechoslovak sociology could only cope with these challenges in a close cooperation with Western scholars. Therefore, we are searching for possible contacts and synergy and this is also the reason the first review is being published in English.

This issue is a collection of articles mostly published in the Czech version of the Sociological Review. Without any intention, a majority of them were written by researchers of the Institute of Sociology in Prague. J. Musil's (director of this Institute in 1990-1992) article is about some general features of the Czechoslovak transition. The following four articles which stem from the 1991-1992 monothematic issues of the Sociologický časopis, focused upon areas of the political change (L. Brokl), social stratification (P. Matějů), welfare policy (J. Večerník) and local development (M. Illner). The last two articles present other sociological institutions, the Bratislava's and Brno's research centers. The first is oriented toward key political issues, the second is connected with sociological theory and family studies. In brief reports, we present commented data about recent development in Czechoslovakia. In the information rubric, we add some useful facts about the main institutions of sociological research.

We hope the Czech Sociological Review will find interested people and, through them, incentives to continue further.

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