

## A French-Czech Dialogue on the Family

On March 24, 1992 the Commission for Historical and Social Demography conducted a discussion on the European family's past, present and future as a part of the congress "The Heritage of J. A. Komenský and the Education of Twentieth Century Man," the reports of which have been published in book form. French specialists also participated in the discussion, for which Jacques Dupaquier, a leading historical demographer, delivered the initial remarks. He asked questions which dominated the whole discussion: "Should the present-day crisis of nuptiality be considered a family crisis or a nuptiality crisis?" and "Is it really a crisis, or only a phase of historical evolution in which the Christian type of marriage cedes to other forms of marriage with us witnessing a historic change?" Dupaquier also devoted his attention to the relationship between the state and family. He said that it is ambiguous: the state does not want to suppress the family entirely because then it would have to assume the family's role in caring for children, as well as the ill, disabled and elderly. On the other hand, it is striving to strip the family of its political power in order to control and exploit it. In all regimes the state exerts a considerable influence on the creation of the family's future. Irrespective of whether the state admits its official population policy or not, its primarily implements its will indirectly through the tax system.

In her lecture "The Family Crisis" the sociologist Evelyne Sullerot sees the essential dividing line in the evolution of the family in the events of the Second World War. She asserts that the family unit was considerably fortified by the hardships of war and that in fact the foundation was laid for favorable developments lasting another generation, that is, until 1964. She underlined the positive and almost idyllic features of that epoch in which nuptiality and fertility were, indeed, at a very high level. She attributes the causes of this to a continuously low living standard and to the influence of educational and popular scientific literature, which endorsed the traditional

family. The second (crisis) epoch in post-war family evolution lasted from 1964 to 1984. The decline in nuptiality and fertility and the concurrent increase in divorce across the whole of Europe was, according to Sullerot, caused by transformations in value scales and public morality. Marriage was generally entered into by two individualistic persons who cared especially for their rights: the couple was preferred to the family, and sexual union to the family bond. At present the third epoch is underway, and in it we can see some signs of change. In Sweden, always a pioneer of later universally adopted patterns of population behavior, both nuptiality and fertility are again on the increase, traditional moral principles are being strengthened and the AIDS issue is forcing greater sexual continence -- in short, the sexual revolution of the 1970s is over.

While Sullerot's entire paper is very well written and includes a number of remarkable comments, as a whole, however, it gives the impression of an educational lecture the primary aim of which is to capture the audience's attention. There is, in fact, a series of quite disputable assertions, due to the fact that Sullerot prefers the impressive paradox to the verified, but less spectacular statement. The time division presented awakens the impression of a well-arranged, clear and adopted scheme in the layman, but when it is more closely investigated it is scarcely defendable, primarily because Europe is too heterogeneous an entity and population trends cannot be in such widespread accord. Finally, both nuptiality and fertility in Eastern Europe followed a considerably different evolution. Sullerot overrates the role of marital advisors and educators, as well as that of professional and popular "family" literature. She presented many quotations from it and used it as support for her more general statements (e.g.: "How could they not have been seduced by the life with two roles and two phases, as suggested by Myrdal and Klein in their famous book 'Women's Two Roles?'") It is doubtful that the mass media exerts such an essential influence on individual behavior in such an important sphere of life. Sullerot also overestimates the revolt of

the late 1960s: "In 1968 many young people believed that they were revolutionaries and even collectivists; out of hatred of capitalism and consumer society ... the communes of young people were flourishing." I do not think they were so numerous. This ephemeral excess never amounted to anything more than passing entertainment for a handful of eccentric intellectuals. No demographic data reflect the slightest influence of this fashion on the behavior of the basic strata of European population.

A different topic was addressed by Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux in her paper "From the Family to the Household in Pre-Industrial Europe (From the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century)." She pointed out that the composition of the family household evolved in accordance with more or less regular cycles (usually thirty years in length), with stages of increase and decrease. Among those factors influencing family structures, it is necessary to call special attention to the inheritance system, the diversity of which caused the rise of a variety of family types in Western Europe at that time. Generally, however, it is accepted that in terms of household size social differentiation was more visible in the countryside than in the cities. This theme was taken up by Pavla Horská, whose short paper "The Family Group in Czechoslovakia as Seen Through the Eyes of Historical Demography" focused especially on the age of those entering marriage. She says that 17th-century Bohemia, with more than 60% of females married between the ages of 20 to 24 years, represented a dividing line between Western Europe (with a prevalence of later marriages) and Eastern Europe, where women married quite early. In her "Household Structure in Bohemia in 1651" Eliška Čáňová takes advantage of research at the Vamberk and Luby manors. In these localities she found features typical of the Western European family type. In his lecture "Young Families in Czechoslovakia in Light of Data from the 1980 Census" Milan Kučera directs our attention to the fact that the Czech family is in a crisis situation; the nature of the crisis is, however, different than that of the crisis in

Western Europe. He devotes his attention to the housing issue, which he sees as the key factor for the foundation of a family. He describes a paradoxical situation in which conception was, in fact, purely purposeful behavior, because it increased the chances of getting an apartment. Even after the acquisition of the apartment, however, the young couple was not able to remove itself from their dependency on parental assistance, with this becoming a disintegrating factor. He sees the way out of this unfavorable situation as being connected to the implementation of a market economy and the intensification of the economic responsibilities and independence of young people. This should also lead to a desirable increase in marriage age.

In her methodically elaborated paper "The Current Czechoslovak Family in the European Context," Jitka Rychtaříková analyzes demographic indicators from the view point of family evolution. She shares the opinion voiced by Sullerot and calls the two post-war decades "the golden age of the family." Through factor analysis she sets Bohemia's and Slovakia's populations among European family types. The result is that the two populations are very similar. However, when Rychtaříková leaves the safe domain of narrowly conceived demographic analysis, she finds herself on rather thin ice. Regarding the impact of the politics of the past regime on the family she states: "the effort to install the eternal social order ... was projected on the immobility of the family form at the beginning of which was the marriage." This may have been true in the 1950s, but at least in the last two decades the situation was fairly different: e.g. the former GDR, one of the most Stalinist regimes, did not care at all for formal and legal marriage; consensual unions were pushed through with ample state support as an entirely equivalent type of partnership. If we do not take into account official rhetoric (in past decades almost silent), the state in other Eastern bloc countries did not invest much time or energy in upholding the institution of marriage either. Especially in Czechoslovakia, the regime in the final period had only one objective --

mere survival -- and did not much care for this or that form of population or family policy. Rychtařková also mechanically repeats some clichés which (if ever valid) must be investigated more deeply. She claims that "almost 50% of marriages are forced by the pregnancy of the woman." This figure really relates to the proportion of marriages entered into by a pregnant bride. In most cases, however, it can hardly be the result of a casual affair quickly camouflaged by a wedding, as it was (perhaps) in times past. It is more probable that young people have routine sexual intercourse, and reckon with the risk of the woman becoming pregnant. If the woman becomes pregnant, one can hardly say that the marriage was forced; it is probably better to say that this is an acceleration of what had been, in fact, expected.

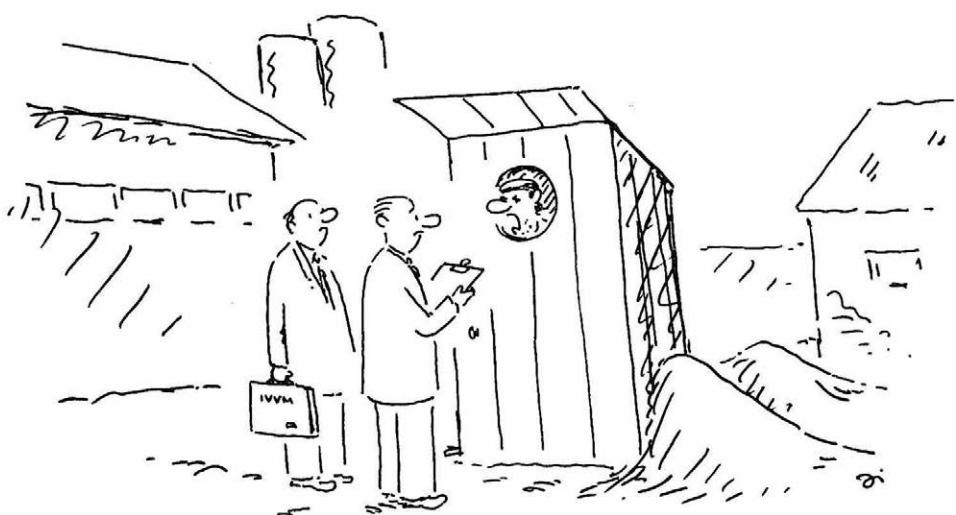
Jiří Langer also turned to the past. In his paper "The Family Form Between Two Household Types of Pre-Industrial Society in the Western Carpathians" he too investigates the differences between Western and Eastern family types. In Western Europe the major role was played by non-relative components working in the household while in the East purely blood relations were found. Lumír Dokoupil and Ludmila Nesládková elaborated on their regional study "Population Developments in the Ironmongers' Center in the Ostrava Region at the Turn of the 20th Century." They observe the extreme differentiation of population development in this region which was caused by rapid industrial development. They present the little-known fact that the community of Vítkovice was the fastest expanding settlement in Cis-Leithania in the second half of the 19th century. Industrial development thoroughly mixed the national composition of the region: it brought about the immigration of a Polish population and locally also encouraged Germanization.

In her final report "The Evolution of Nuptiality in Czechoslovakia from 1918 to

1988," Ludmila Fialová summarized prior knowledge on this issue. She emphasizes, as did Rychtařková, that during the existence of the common state the population behavior of the Czech and Slovak population (very different at the state's beginning in 1918) ran parallel. Her observation that this trend was interrupted during the war is very interesting. Under the Protectorate nuptiality was encouraged (especially by the fear of forced labor in Germany), while in Slovakia the effect of this factor was not felt. Fialová also points to a very important phenomenon that existed under the Communist regime: the total homogenization of the society, which had an impact also on demographic behavior. This probably reached the highest degree in the Eastern European bloc in Czechoslovakia. She presents an interesting comparison in her conclusion: she cites the pre-war Czech demographer Boháč, who considered those marriages in which the groom was younger than 25 and the bride younger than 21 to be premature. Fialová suggests that the Czech and Slovak populations will adopt forms from West European family patterns, in particular that of the consensual union.

The whole of this interesting discussion is another result of cooperation of French and Czech demographers spanning more than three decades. It survived, especially thanks to professor Pavlík and dr. Horská, even during periods that were not very favorable for this kind of scholarly contact. This discussion not only transmitted information and suggestions but, at the same time, compared two different scientific approaches. The French school is based on a consistent sociological approach, in which demographic data serve merely as an aid. The Czech participants are, by contrast, first of all demographers. It is important to note that "pure" Czech sociologists were missing from the discussion on this very important sociological topic.

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I WOULD LIKE TO CHAT WITH YOU ABOUT OUR AGRICULTURE, BUT I THINK IT'S  
A WASTE OF TIME...