This monograph is certainly an outstanding work in the Czech context. However, it can also stand a severe evaluation from the point of view of wider European standards. It means not only a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge concerning a country undergoing an interesting course of transformation. By its subject, conception, complexity of contents and methods, and theoretical and methodological level it fits well into the European context, being able to complete and correct the hitherto dominant influence of the knowledge accumulated and presented by German, Polish and Hungarian sociologists, by the general theoretical and methodological insights this work brings.

There remain several comments with regard to problems, the exposition of which may evoke new incentives for further consideration.

As far as the labour market in the Czech Republic is concerned, for the time being, only the first steps have been taken towards its full emergence. The same goes for the assertion of meritocratic principles, which are usually seen as an attribute of developed labour markets. Among the factors which hampered these processes – along with other connections (e.g. when analysing the earnings differentiation) – the deliberate policy of the Czech government should be noted. The government clearly – and to some extent justifiably – preferred to avoid the possible dissatisfaction of the lower classes rather than (a) a more rapid increase of competition among enterprises (with inevitable consequences in the form of bankruptcies, unemployment and decline in living standards), (b) concurrent adequate investments and wage increases in the quaternary sector of the budget sphere. On the other hand, it allowed (in this case less justifiably) an inadequate improvement of material conditions and earnings in directly or indirectly state-controlled finance and insurance, and in a section of the administration. All this is partly discussed in the text but a clear and direct statement concerning the main reason for these phenomena is lacking.

In the otherwise very good and informative part dealing with privatisation there is not to be found an explicit analysis of the very important issue of the illegal and/or immoral acquisition of capital, which might raise the question of the class-ascriptive and meritocratic aspects of the emerging social and economic differentiation.

The interesting and inspiring chapter on the middle class could be formulated more distinctly in connection with the lagging of the part of this class employed in the budget sphere behind the social and economic position which the 'new middle class' should attain in an advanced society. This is actually the most important deviation of the Czech transformation from the liberal-meritocratic model with significant consequences for political behaviour.

Generally speaking, all such reservations and suggestions represent only a mention of certain points to be discussed in connection with an outstanding work, one indisputably enriching the Czech sociological literature and contributing to the cognition of both Czech and other similar European societies under transformation.

Pavel Machonin

Jaroslav Krejčí, Pavel Machonin: Czechoslovakia, 1918-1992. A Laboratory for Social Change

Houndmills and London, MacMillan Press Ltd., St Anthony's Series 1996, 266 p.

The 1992 division of Czechoslovakia, historically still a fresh event, has not only given political scientists the task of accounting for the immediate circumstances, impulses, and consequences (actual or potential) of the split. With some distance, it has also presented historians with the challenge to reflect upon the relatively brief lifetime of the Czechoslovak state. This challenge is all the more compelling, if we consider all the kinds of historical turbulence that the state went through during the short period of its existence. Krejčí and Machonin's book takes up this challenge, and it does so from a particular point of view.

As the subtitle suggests, the viewpoint is that of social science. Yet it should be noted from the first that this treatise is not based on a particular sociological theory or paradigmatic

explanatory model, neither does it aspire to building any new one. Although neither of the authors is a historian by profession, their text – while pursuing sociologically relevant issues – still retains the character of rather a historical account. It builds on what are called 'hard facts', which are presented without being filtered through or subject to a general and systematic sociological concept. The information is conveyed to the reader in a text that is not overburdened with theoretical sociological terminology we might expect from such authors as Giddens or Sztompka, the latter representing one of the major figures in the field that Krejčí and Machonin address in their book – that of the problem of social change. In other words, Krejčí and Machonin do not take Czechoslovakia just as an illustration – i.e. as a historical case through which to test the explanatory power of a theoretical sociological paradigm. Their primary subject is Czechoslovakia itself and certain important aspects of the country's development, not the theory of social change.

It is necessary to mention the sociologically relevant issues the authors pursue in their book. The basic orientation is provided by the formal arrangement of the text, which is divided into three major parts: the first two ('Ethnopolitics' and 'The Economic Context') are written by Jaroslav Krejčí, and the third ('Social Metamorphoses') by Pavel Machonin.

The first part looks at the 74-year history of Czechoslovakia from the viewpoint of the nationality issues. Here the exceptional character of the Czechoslovak 20th century 'experiment' becomes particularly apparent. It is demonstrated that various sorts of national tensions and attempts at their resolution significantly marked Czechoslovak history and politics from its creation in 1918, to its end in 1992 when the state was divided as a result such tensions. The text starts with a sketch of the complicated ethnic or national composition of the East Central European region before 1918, as the historical context from which the country arose. It then focuses upon classifying and characterising the major inter-ethnic and inter-national relations (tensions) within the multinational state. Here the country's development is followed predominantly through its political history. Occasional remarks on differences in social conditions and cultural backgrounds of different national and ethnic groups serve especially to explain the motives and consequences of political measures taken (by various kinds of political actors and in various regimes) in order to re-form relations, that is to cope with actual or potential tensions, among those groups. From the sociological point of view, this part of the book not only grounds its argument in a great many relevant statistical figures. It also points to some differences in status – both political and social – that the different 'minorities' (Slovak, Hungarian, German, Jewish, Gypsy, etc.) acquired in various stages of the Czechoslovak state.

To some extent, the national issue is extrapolated into the second part of the book as well. This part deals with the issue of the economy, accentuating different starting positions as well as different courses of economic development particularly between the Czech and the Slovak parts of the country. (A special chapter is devoted to 'the role of the economy in Slovakia's nation-building.') On the other hand, the description of the economic development shows the country's embeddedness in a wider international context along a somewhat different line than the previous part. It reflects upon the high credit that socialist ideas enjoyed in this part of the world after both World Wars, and which affected the ways in which the economy was consolidated after these wars (with some liberalising tendencies towards the end of the 1920s). The events that disrupted these consolidating processes – the world economic crisis of the early 1930s, the German occupation of 1939-1945, and the Communist take-over of 1948 – all represent more direct (and also powerful) political impacts on domestic economic development coming from the international environment. Besides providing a concise account of the economic policies implemented in and by various political regimes, this part of the book also provides basic information on the developments in incomes, growth or decline of production, the changing character of industry, and so on. In doing so, it prepares the ground for the last part, discussing the changes in social structure that accompanied – as both consequences and sources – the national tensions and economic developments.

Machonin's contribution – which represents more than half of the whole text – thus stands as a kind of sociological consummation of the preceding parts of the book. Again firmly anchored in available sociological and statistical data, it describes the dynamics of "class structure and/or stratification, and other social factors influencing or attending the changes in vertical structures in the Czech and Slovak republics." (p.114) Class structure or stratification is then followed predominantly along the social-economic criteria and characteristics of various social groups of the population. Thus, for example, when the text speaks about lifestyle patterns (p. 179ff.), it rather describes the structure of Czechoslovak society according to patterns of material consumption (which of course can more easily be grounded in 'hard data': how much people spend and on what). It is social-economic characteristics (e.g. the distribution of the economically active population among the major sectors of the economy) that also serve in the description of differences in the class structure and social stratification dynamics among different national communities, particularly between Czechs and Slovaks. In this line, egalitarian tendencies between 1948 and 1989, as well as the counter-egalitarian movements after 1989 are also brought up in the text.

To conclude, a general observation is that readers seeking reliable historical information will probably be more satisfied than those eager for more speculative sociological interpretations. The text is sober, disciplined, and the sociological explanations of national, economic, and social events or tendencies are well aware of their limits, which are drawn by attainable relevant sociological information.

Radim Marada