

lican parties, since without doubt it is an extreme right-wing (or extreme centre) party of the type that can be found, for example, in Austria (Freedom Party) or France (National Front). The programme of this party contains elements of isolationism (from West European structures and international organisations), nationalism (against Germans), ethnic hate (against Gypsies) and economic and political populism.

Along with the question of extremist parties another very topical issue that is widely discussed in the book is the electoral system. Two chapters recall the process of the selection of the proper electoral system for the new democracy. The problem of whether to apply the majority principle or that of proportional representation in the first elections were the most controversial and the most discussed question within Civic Forum. Finally, it was the proportional system that was established, partly because of its tradition in the First Republic and the strong national cleavage in the two nations of Czechoslovakia. The main arguments against the majority system were that it could result in the absolute victory of one party and halt the evolution of other political parties. There was also the fear of a victory for the Communist Party.

The book tells us that President Havel belonged at that time among the defenders of

the majority system or at least some combined system, over proportional representation. He was inspired by his idea of non-political politics and believed in a system that could lead to the electoral choice of personalities rather than political parties. The idea of personalities rather than parties was to awaken again at the time of the first Senate elections in 1996, but turned out to be a false dawn. Politics have become an affair of parties, not isolated personalities. Despite this, many reasons have been put forward in favour of modifying the electoral system such as the dominant socio-economic issue, the national and language homogeneity of the country, the equal power of the two biggest parties and main competitors – right-wing ODS and left-wing ČSSD, the inability to create any majority government, and the problem of irresponsible and obstructive extremist parties.

With the exceptions of those parts mentioned previously, the book gives a true and colourful picture of a short historical period and the first stage in the development of the political systems of the contemporary Czech Republic and Slovakia. It describes both the ideas and events, and shows the possible roots of the positive and negative features of the political systems that have evolved in both countries in the subsequent years.

Klára Vlachová

Czech Germans, or German Czechs?

Biograf 1997, No. 10-11.

Number 10-11 1997 of the Prague sociological magazine *Biograf* (subtitled the Magazine for Biographical and Reflexive Sociology) is devoted to qualitative research of German ethnicity with a language puzzle in the title 'Czech Germans, or German Czechs?' (Čeští Němci, nebo němečtí Češi?). When reading *Biograf* one must remember that this prestigious magazine has its beginnings in the early nineties, beginnings comparable with the famous *samizdats*. A group of sociologists using qualitative research methods (Josef Alan, Jaroslav Kapr, Zdeněk Konopásek, Olga Šmídová, Eva Stehlíková) founded a little non conform (the first subtitle of *Biograf* was 'the Magazine for

Defense of People against Sociology'), but a very vivid and intellectually attractive medium, an open space for the presentation of qualitative sociological research, methodological discussions, and early presentations of students of sociology – whether believers or non-believers in qualitative sociology. Thanks to Zdeněk Konopásek and Eva Stehlíková this magazine met high standards of scientific discourse, though up until today it has lived a little behind scenes of the mainstream of Czech sociology.

'Czech Germans, or German Czechs?' is a shortened presentation of a substantial and long-lasting research into those German people who lived in Czechoslovakia and have continued to live in the Czech Republic all of their lives regardless historical 'offers' such as the

transfer in 1945, the possibility to emigrate in the late sixties, or when the iron curtain disappeared in the early nineties. The authors (Eva Stehliková, Olga Šmídová, B. Trávníková, J. Nekvapil) have transcripts of interviews with 22 Czech Germans, 7 of their Czech neighbours, 5 Czechs living in Germany, and 6 Germans living and working in the Czech Republic. Interpreting this data was aimed at:

- describing Czech-German relations in a historical perspective leading up to the present state
- studying not only ethnicity but also the biographies of those who live like foreigners in their territory
- providing empirical data for minority-majority interrelation in frames of political and power interventions (e.g. Nazi, communist, post-nazi, democratic conditions)
- reformulating (newly formulating) questions relevant for Czech-German relations and their perspectives (pp. 11-12)

The authors believe that the transcripts and emphatic interpretations of propositions and attitudes that were presented enable them to reveal natural stereotypes, or even hetero-stereotypes of Czech-German behaviour, and also allow them to separate ideological proclamations from the living world, beliefs from *Erlebnisse*. This aim is very noble and the members of the research team have striven to achieve it. I do not doubt that their interpretations are reliable, and that the transcripts are very sad as regards the relations of the post Second World War majority (Czechs) with the minority (Germans). It is also true that it is difficult to identify history, or even historical data in the living world. Furthermore, the descriptive and interpretative texts are very persuasive, not to mention quotations from the transcripts. However, it should be asked whether the aims of study are not too ambitious, whether the metonymical transfer from personal views to ethnic coexistence are not too courageous. My objections are partly theoretical, partly methodological, without reference to the transcripts and the enormous effort behind them.

From the theoretical point of view Czech-German coexistence on the same territory has

features that can be covered by the umbrella term *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. I am afraid that 'community' relations can be and usually are the object of interview. All those golden and co-operative times when language, nationality, political views were not distinctive, may be interpreted as features of a community structure of coexistence. The modern state, division of work, common market, intensive national and political life are features on the other hand which define 'society', and are reflected in interviews indirectly, transformed into a person's fatal happiness or disaster.

It is necessary to interpret the birth of Czechoslovakia, the Munich Agreement, the expulsion of Czech people from border territories, the Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren, the Second World War, the Transfer, the end of the Cold War, and the end of Soviet Union as societal modernisation on this territory, which continues and is still open. In this view Czech and Germans are competing nations and their positions are dependent upon the status quo in Europe. In the same frame, it is true that Germans are mostly active, and Czechs passive subjects of history. Neither the best community relations, nor the generalisations from transcripts of interviewed persons can change this determination. The logical question then follows: How restricted are the aims of research?

From the methodological point of view it is necessary to stress (I am strongly persuaded that the authors are of the same opinion) that the interview is a co-operative speech act. Grice's maxim of relevance, maxim of quality and especially maxim of manner rule over the researcher's and interviewed person's interaction (even more than language skills). And therefore so called shared information has the same value as propositions and attitudes that are mentioned in conversation. During the speech act there are meanings present in communication that are not mentioned and without the chance to be part of the transcripts, in spite of their importance. All that which is not mentioned has equal value, thanks to the good manners of the people involved in communication. Every speech act has its pragmatic presuppositions, which should form part of the research and interpretation. If we pretend that

pragmatic presuppositions are out of our scope, the result is incomplete.

Rather more different is the article of Jiří Nekvapil dealing with the interrelation of language and ethnicity (*K nesamozřejmým vztahům jazyka a etnicity, aneb jak Němci mluví německy a Češi nemluví česky*). At the beginning of his study there are four items (Czech, German, Czech language, German language) integrated into the mechanical combinations: Czech speaking the Czech language, Czech speaking the Czech and German languages, Czech speaking the German language, German speaking the German language, German speaking the Czech and German languages, and German speaking the Czech language, which is frame rich enough to follow how this theoretical combination became reality over history and in evidence with the interviewed persons. The sociolinguistic status of the Czech and German languages is not mentioned at the beginning and so it seems that all combinations are equal. Even the historical fact that both

languages were connected once with the winners at war and once with the losers at war is not mentioned. The resulting interplay is to my view partly artificial and partly denying the dominant position of the German language, which has its consequences in the sociolinguistic behaviour of the interviewed persons. Also, sociolinguistic presuppositions are part of the research. Nevertheless the study of Jiří Nekvapil is prepared as an independent article-like text that thoroughly explains its results within its frame.

In spite of these two remarks, I must commend the many qualities of the presented texts. They raise many important questions connected with Czech-German relations, they present many authentic views from transcripts, and they interpret the presented views as correctly as it is possible. I can recommend that those who are interested in taboo Czech-German relations should read the articles and acquaint themselves with the transcripts.

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