

Vladimír Rys: La sécurité sociale dans une société en transition: l'expérience tchèque. Quels enseignements pour l'Europe?

Lausanne: Réalités sociales 1999, 254 pp.

The debate on social policy is one of many that started only after November 1989. The communist regime contented itself with stale sloganising about social welfare and only rarely surprised its citizens by raising pensions and child benefits, or the introduction of maternity benefit – moves always kept secret until the last minute. The real debate started in 1990, rather surprisingly set off by an out-of-the-blue burst of rhetoric about the social safety net (“Your ears do not deceive you, it really is William Beveridge once again addressing Central Europe after half a century”, writes Rys on p. 47). Since then, of course, discussion has been in full swing. The Czech Sociological Review has been one of those to contribute, for example in an issue wholly devoted to the theme in 1993. Today we have a range of books on the subject at our disposal, notably those by Martin Potůček and his colleagues. Essential contributions have also come from the Brno sociologists Možný, Rabušic, Mareš, Sirovátka and Musil. The journal *Social Policy*, published by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, has been devoting itself to the theory and practice of this important field very systematically.

While our sociologists had to wait until the establishment of a free state to teach themselves the vocabulary of social policy, their once unknown colleague Vladimír Rys had long been fully equipped. After emigrating from Czechoslovakia in 1948, he studied at the London School of Economics and the Sorbonne and has devoted most of his life to work in the field of social welfare in international organisations, most recently as General Secretary of the International Association for Social Security (ISSA). It is nonetheless a pity that he has not entered the Czech debate more frequently and urgently. He has lectured in comparative social security at the Law faculty of Charles University, and has occasionally expressed himself on topical questions in the daily press. He has also followed events in the Czech Republic from his Swiss retreat near Geneva, where he wrote the publication under review here, with the support of a Swiss research fund.

According to the author, the aim of the book is not to describe the structure and functioning of the institution of social security, but to answer the question of why it has developed as it has. The account is therefore guided by this aim, and is for the most part chronological. After a short chapter on the social policy of the communist era, it deals first with developments in the years 1990-1992 and then with the social reforms of 1993-1995. This is followed by a consideration of the individual determinants of social reform. The historical account ends with ‘an epilogue instead of a conclusion’, devoted to the end of the Czech economic miracle in the period after 1996, but the book does not end here, since there is an additional chapter on post-communist experience as a ‘lesson for Europe’, and a postscript by P.Y. Greber on the need for social security in the Europe of tomorrow. An appendix presents a detailed description of the reformed social security system in the Czech Republic.

Rys does not see the communist system of social security as in any way idyllic. He is well aware that ‘social protection served to lull to sleep the political consciousness of society’, and of the ‘machinery that led from legitimate interest in the social situation of workers to the violation of human rights’. He shows the trap into which the regime fell as its own increasing social obligations were in ever more stark contrast to the stagnation of economic performance (pp. 31-33), but he moves quickly from this still under-described period to the period after November 1989.

Here I cannot omit Rys’s telling parallels as he defines individual years in post-totalitarian development – the first of the main chapters is devoted to 1990 (the year of mercy), 1991 (the year of searching for identity) and 1992 (the year of truth). The author describes the individual measures and the difficulties in getting major changes through in the hectic period before the division of the Czechoslovak federation. He records the “progressive sliding away from the scenario of 1990, which had been closely linked to the reform efforts of the Prague Spring, to a more liberal conception” (p. 84). He claims a complete absence of public discussion of social policy, which he attributes to the inexperience of citizens, journalists and politicians. He draws attention to the problem of drawing on the past,

since it is not clear which traditions from the preceding republics should be revived.

The years 1993 (the year of scepticism), 1994 (the year of the neo-liberal offensive) and 1995 (the year of reform and compromise), represent the next phase. The author describes Klaus's hostility to the concept of social justice and his pushing through of a policy of targeted social benefits, with no attention to the prevention of poverty. Rys characterises the formulation of government measures as 'fumbling' and criticises the neglect of corporative mechanisms (employers' pension funds) in the new system of provision for old age. This essentially checkmated important future social actors in advance – a theme the author considers crucial and to which he devotes the most detailed treatment in his analysis of clashes between the government and the unions. Here as in all chapters he also deals with the reform of a health-care system hanging 'over a precipice'.

The answers to the question 'why' are summarised in a further chapter divided into treatments of internal demographic, economic, sociological, and political factors, with short references to a series of external factors. Some conclusions from the historical account are systematically presented here, with all the 'hard facts' subjected to political assessment: the author does not believe demographic structure (including socio-demographic structure) to have been a fundamental influence on social policy during the period, as compared to economic factors, which were for example crucial to the decision to leave pension insurance payments in the state budget rather than set up a social insurance company. He naturally devotes the most attention to the 'sociological factor' by which he means above all the social actors, who were unfortunately conspicuous in their absence. While the beginnings of reform were entirely in the hands of the bureaucracy, with the arrival of the Klaus government the unions appeared on the scene. Rys notes the emergence of other interest groups (employers' associations, chambers, pensioners' associations), nevertheless he concludes that in post-communist societies only the major political parties have the power to influence social legislation (p. 170).

In the epilogue the author does not hide his disagreement with the 'aggressively implement-

ed neo-liberal doctrine' and shows the reactions to it that that inevitably led to the strengthening of social democracy. The unfavourable economic trend once more brought the economic factor in social policy to the forefront. This has not, however, essentially changed the 'liberal' approach which has left untouched some residua of communism, such as tax-free pensions and state payment of insurance for persons not in economic activity. In the end, Rys claims, the required 'normalisation' of social standards to adjust to the EU, including the reduction of benefits, will paradoxically be implemented by a left-centre government (p. 192).

With an appeal to Pierre Laroque, the author claims that social policy always involves finding a balance between individual freedom and the limitations imposed by society. He therefore rejects the idea that it is excessive social welfare that produces mass unemployment in European countries. It is not social but economic policy that has taken the brakes off the globalisation process without introducing the necessary adaptation mechanisms. Social protection in both the reforming and advanced countries lacks a consistent conception and consensus that would be economic, political and social at the same time. Economics does not provide a complete understanding of reality, claims Rys, thus aligning himself with the critics of the 'Washington Consensus', which has reduced economics to a few macro-economic indicators.

Vladimír Rys brings an experienced and erudite view of the past development of our social policy, and his analysis is enhanced by a certain distance and broader perspective. I regard it as a great pity that the author did not participate in drawing up the changes in this field, since his ideas and approach to the problems are informed by deep understanding of the 'European dimension'. In his book, passages of pure description alternate with pragmatic criticism of individual politicians and with a general overview of (mostly absent) concepts, actors and consensus. The fact is that sometimes he moves too quickly from one level of the account to another, and this makes considerable demands on the attention of the reader. The book's aim of identifying all aspects of 'why' the contemporary social system of the Czech Republic is as it is could not, however, be fulfilled. One reason

might be that it is not only under communism that social legislation is forged in the twilight of party offices. The book is, however, valuable for its reflective insights and is also an abundant source of information. It definitely deserves a wider audience than can be addressed in its French version.

Jiří Večerník

Jean-Michel de Waele: *L'émergence des partis politiques en Europe centrale*

Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles 1999, 354 pp.

This important book is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation the author defended at the Free University in Brussels. It deals with the emergence and further development of political parties and party systems in Poland and Czechoslovakia, and also, after the division of the latter, in the separate countries of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The book is based both on thorough research of theoretical literature, and on a serious understanding of the individual countries involved in the research. One of its strongest traits (and what distinguishes it from the majority of publications devoted to this subject in English) is that the author is fully aware of the relatively fast and substantial transition over the course of only several years which the parties and party systems in these countries have had to undergo. The author is loosely inspired by the idea, stressed in particular by Terry Lynn Karl and Philippe Schmitter, that the means behind the transition are able to considerably influence the resulting type of democracy that emerges. However, the author correctly points out that transition typologies worked out in other contexts (southern Europe, Latin America) cannot be precisely applied to the countries of Central Europe. He also correctly includes analysis of the influence of the differences between the 'communist legacies' of the individual countries.

De Waele distinguishes between three types of political transition: (1) negotiated transition, which includes, among others, Poland (this corresponds to what Guy Hermet referred to as 'managed transition'), (2) implosion transition,

which includes East Germany and Czechoslovakia, and finally (3) forceful transition, an example of which is Romania. Unlike some Western political scientists who know very little about Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Schmitter), de Waele has not contented himself solely with working on data drawn from the Eurobarometer polls and from the elections in the individual countries, but has thoroughly submersed himself in the historical and social development of these countries, and has accurately grasped (as has the Polish sociologist Jerzy J. Wiatr) that Czechoslovakia, and the Czech Republic especially, should not be tossed into the same category as Poland.

The author has also attempted to periodise the formation and stabilisation of parties in the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe: (1) the formation of anti-communist fronts for democracy (in the Czech lands - Civic Forum), (2) the break-up of these umbrella political institutions, (3) parliamentarisation (this phase being characterised by the formation of parliamentary groups or clubs over the course of the legislative term and not as a result of the elections, which leads to strong volatility), and finally (4) the consolidation of the party system (in the Czech lands it is possible to speak of the beginning of this phase from the time of the 1996 parliamentary elections).

De Waele has also devoted a great deal of attention to the issue of cleavages. Unlike some other authors, who do not sufficiently distinguish between temporary 'issues' and more lasting 'cleavages', this book has avoided this mistake. The author recognises the following cleavages: (1) urban/rural, (2) maximalist/minimalist (this term has been borrowed from D.-L. Seiler and involves the matter of a liberal/social division; at the beginning it is related to the rhythm of economic reform and gradually it crosses over into the classic right-left dimension of owners/workers), (3) centre/periphery, (4) authoritarianism/democracy (this cleavage is particularly strong in Slovakia).

In the conclusion to this valuable book, the author emphasises that the lessons of failure to be had from post-party organisations such as Civic Forum in the Czech lands are important even for Western democracies in connection with what is usually and exaggeratedly referred to as the 'par-