

On the 70th Birthday of Professor Ivo Možný

Ivo Možný is an outstanding personality of contemporary Czech sociology. Forged as a sociologist/journalist in a courageous radio station in the city of Brno during the happy period of the late 1960s, he survived honestly – and yet actively – as a lecturer in sociology at the University of Brno. With full energy he began after 1989 to write and teach, and to build what would become an important institution – the current Faculty of Social Studies of the University of Brno. His book, *Why So Easy... On Some Family Roots of the Velvet Revolution* is probably the most quoted work since 1989, and ‘his’ Faculty (of which he is still Dean) appeals even to young people living in Prague, who leave the capital to go and study in Brno.

Among other events, Možný’s birthday was commemorated in a special issue of ‘Social Studies’, a journal published by the Faculty of Social Studies, which on this occasion was sub-titled ‘Sociology as the Art of the Possible’. This title is a play on the meaning of Možný’s name in Czech, which means ‘possible’ – one can thus read it as ‘the art of the possible’ and ‘the art of Možný’ at the same time. One can also find in this special issue a full biography and other details of Možný’s rich life and work.

The brief interview below features a slightly rhetorical tone, which follows from the close cooperation and friendship between the CSR Editor-in-Chief and the jubilant. This is also why the old title for the autonomous Moravian Viceroy – *markrabě* – is jovially employed here. To conclude the celebration on a more serious note, we have added a list of Možný’s main books, all of which have been published in Czech only – which is certainly a pity.

J.V. In jest you refer to yourself as the Viceroy of Moravia, a title that is certainly your due. I’d like to ask you to comment, from your noble heights, on some basic questions. Before the war, two schools of sociology evolved in this country, each with its own luminary and its own periodical, one in Prague, one in Brno. What about today? Are there still two schools of sociology? Or at least one nursery school?

I.M. One might be inclined to say that the less coffee there is in the cup, the easier it is to mix. But! Each of these two schools reproduces incestuously. I have discovered that in this country you cannot even pursue doctoral studies at a different school, which everywhere else is quite the norm. German universities, if I am not mistaken, are forbidden to accept their own doctoral students as assistants. We could of course make a similar arrangement, but just try suggesting something like that! Prague students don’t apply to doctoral programmes in Brno because, well, Brno’s just not Prague, and Brno students...well, Prague’s just not the right quality. There are of course exceptions, those studying for their doctorates at foreign universities. And thank god, otherwise we’d have at best two nursery schools.

J.V. In the entry on modern Czech sociology in the Unabridged Dictionary of Sociology, you wrote of the little use that was made of the space that was opening up in the 1980s.

The space that opened up in the 1990s was understandably incomparably larger. Now, ten years after the dictionary was completed, has enough time passed to assess how this space was used? What's your view?

I.M. The 1990s will, I'm afraid, be cited as an example of intellectual inertia. The void of ideas has been filling up more slowly than a fully loaded oil tanker moves. But I see things in an optimistic light, the crisis has, I think, already peaked. For now, it rests on the growing resolve of the younger generation not to let things go on as they are.

J.V. Your distinctive publications include an explanation of the enigma of the 'velvet revolution' of the early 1990s, and a qualitative assessment of the state of Czech society in recent times in a work reviewed in this issue. I don't want to ask what you intend to surprise us with next, because then it wouldn't be a surprise. But more generally put, what do you consider to be the biggest shortcoming in Czech sociology?

I.M. Above all I feel the lack of a more significant number of specialised monographs, even ones of average or poorer quality. We haven't been able to get over the basic reflex of historical materialism: subconsciously we continue to be drawn to the big screen. And the misguided decision to publish only great works. It was I think in '53, when the ever brilliant Soviet leader Stalin decided that it was unnecessary for Mosfilm to make two hundred films annually, when one hundred and fifty of them would turn out to be grey, dull, and average. Instead, they're only going to make great films! So, the next year, only five films were selected for filming - and of course all nothing but bullshit. It wants a little more humility: Work on it, complete it, publish it! Not clips but a book, even if it's a short one. Let the context of changing public discourse decide what good it was - let's leave the recognition of quality to it. It needn't happen right away: Marcuse lived until he retired as an unsuccessful author, at times I think even on welfare benefits, and in the end Norbert Elias only discovered that his writing had been of some good because he lived into his nineties.

J.V. The Viceroy of Moravia, which indeed you are, has founded a new faculty, and it must be said that it's a richly diversified, full-blooded and active one. What about your successors - and I don't mean only formally in terms of your position? Won't the Viceroy's active charge turn to dust in the hands of the Diadochi? You devote a good deal of attention to the family and generational problems, so tell me, has the next generation matured yet, so that the 'lost' generation can quietly close the door behind itself?

I.M. Naturally it's not going to be the same without me as it was with me; at least for me it won't! That generation hasn't matured yet, but they're stomping at the door; that's the way things are. I would be thrilled to live to my nineties just to see whether today I've correctly picked out who among the current protagonists will be the future princes and kings of our sociology, beaten for so long!

Thank you for your responses. My warmest wishes on your birthday.

Jiří Večerník

Bibliography of the main books of Ivo Možný

- Rodina vysokoškolsky vzdělaných manželů* [The Families of Post-Secondary Educated Spouses]. Brno, Spisy FF UJEP, G 26/1982, pp. 43–67.
- Moderní rodina: mýty a skutečnost* [The Modern Family: Myths and Reality]. Brno, BLOK 1990.
- Proč tak snadno... Některé rodinné důvody sametové revoluce* [Why So Easy... On Some Family Roots of the Velvet Revolution]. Praha, Sociologické nakladatelství 1991.
- Sociologie rodiny: její vývoj, teorie a základní problémy* [The Sociology of the Family: Its Evolution, Theory, and Basic Problems]. Praha, Sociologické nakladatelství 1999.
- Česká společnost: nejdůležitější fakta o kvalitě našeho života* [Czech Society: The Most Important Facts on the Quality of Our Life]. Praha, Portál 2002.

Political Parties after Communism Developments in East-Central Europe

TOMÁŠ KOSTELECKÝ

Woodrow Wilson Center Press
and The John Hopkins University Press 2002, 213 p.

Political Parties after Communism reviews the development of political parties during the post-communist period in four Central and Eastern European countries: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The book looks at historical and cultural factors and their underlying role in the development of the present-day party systems and studies the relationship between the party system, social cleavages, and electoral rules. The author also searches for general patterns in the evolution towards party politics and in the current political culture in these four countries and presents his hypothesis on the move towards more rational and interest-based voter choices and towards greater political stability.

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