

Prof. PhDr. Miloň Dohnal, CSc. (14 June 1924 – 30 March 2004)

In 2024, we commemorated the centenary of the birth and the twentieth anniversary of the death of Professor Miloň Dohnal, a man who was one of the leading figures in the Department of History of the independent Faculty of Education in Ostrava for nearly four decades and, from 1992, also in the newly established Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava.

Miloň Dohnal was born on 14 June 1924 in Hukvaldy as the second son of the local longtime head teacher, Jindřich Dohnal (1868–1939), and his second wife, Josefa, née Červenková (1889–1968). He started school in 1930, then went on to the Příbor *Realgymnasium* in September 1935. After the occupation of Příbor by Nazi Germany, he transferred to the *Realgymnasium* in Místek; however, already on 7 October 1941, the school was forcibly closed by the Nazis, and the students were prevented from studying further at any secondary school. From 2 August 1943 to 10 April 1945, Dohnal was forced to join the postal service as an unskilled labourer. After the liberation of Czechoslovakia, he soon completed his secondary education with a secondary school-leaving examination, backdated to 1943, and already in 1945 he enrolled at the Faculty of Education at Charles University in Prague to study the teaching combination of history and geography for secondary schools.

The teacher closest to him was mainly Professor Karel Stloukal, and he also became close to Professor Otakar Odložilík through the Rychaltice Unity of Brethren tradition. It was surely encouraging that during his Prague studies he was accompanied by the love of his life, Irena Grossmannová (* 2 September 1925), whom he married even before graduating on 21 August 1948. In the same year he successfully passed both the first and second state exam, and on 29 September 1950, he received a certificate of competency to teach history and geography at grammar schools with the Czech language of instruction. Even before graduation, he became a secondary school teacher at the Higher School of Social Health in Šumperk, which changed its name to Secondary Medical School in 1950. Already in 1949, a daughter, Jindra, was born to Dohnal and his wife, and three years later a son, Miloň.

As a teacher in a border region with little representation of the intelligentsia, he was soon widely involved in public activity. Yet he also found time for academic work – the study of literature and archival research. Already during his university studies, two

problem areas took shape, which then accompanied him throughout his entire life: he dedicated his thesis to the Hukvaldy dominion, while the development of the labour movement in the Ostrava region was the subject of his upcoming but eventually, due to legislative changes, undefended dissertation. During his time as a secondary school teacher in the 1950s, he published his first studies focused on the issue of textile manufactory production and the status of the working class, especially in the Šumperk region.

His life's watershed was in 1961, when he became a lecturer in the Department of History and Geography of the Pedagogical Institute in Ostrava. As a university lecturer, he achieved quick career advancement. As early as 1964, he defended his candidate dissertation at the then Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Brno and at the same time received the PhDr. [MSc] academic degree; in the same year, he was also appointed head of the newly established Department of History during the transformation of the Pedagogical Institute into the Faculty of Education in Ostrava. In the following year he was awarded the degree of senior lecturer at the Faculty of Arts of Palacký University in Olomouc and on 1 January 1966 he was appointed associate professor for the field of Czechoslovak history. Furthermore, he was appointed a member of the committee for the Advanced Master's State Examination in the field of Czechoslovak history at his workplace, as well as a member of the committee for the defence of candidate dissertations at the Faculty of Arts of Palacký University in Olomouc. He was also invited to join the editorial board of the Severní Morava [North Moravia] anthology of national history, and became a member of the editorial committee of the Profil [Profile] publishing house in Ostrava.

The 1960s ranked among the most successful stages in his life in academic work as well. He made use of his preparation from his time as a secondary school teacher, primarily his diligent heuristic activity in the Šumperk archive, and in a short time published a number of studies, mainly on the development of the Šumperk linen production and on the status of the working class in the Ostrava region in the 19th century. He was also quickly able to prepare a candidate dissertation called "Původní akumulace a vznik manufaktur v severomoravské plátenické oblasti" ["The Initial Accumulation and Establishment of Manufactories in the North Moravian Linen Region"] (Prague 1966), acclaimed by reviewers, in which he set himself the task of "exploring the socioeconomic issues of the transitional period from feudalism to capitalism and of shedding light on the conditions and prerequisites of the establishment of capitalist manufactories". From the mid-1960s, he was also a member of the team that, as part of the state's basic research plan, addressed the issue of the genesis and initial development of the Ostrava industrial region, coordinated by the ČSAV [Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences] Silesian Institute in Opava. He participated in the preparation of the project "Vliv industrializace na vývoj demografických, sociálních a sídelních poměrů v ostravské průmyslové oblasti" ["The Influence of Industrialisation on

the Development of the Demographic, Social and Settlement Conditions in the Ostrava Industrial Region”], where he focused mainly on the study of the life and status of the working class, especially miners in the Ostrava-Karviná coal district. In the first volume of *Studie k vývoji ostravské průmyslové oblasti* [Studies on the Development of the Ostrava Industrial Region], published in 1966 by the Faculty of Education in Ostrava, he prepared an inspiring treatise on the health situation and alcoholism in the Ostrava region in the time of capitalist industrialisation. This very positively received set of studies was awarded the City of Ostrava Prize the following year in celebration of the 700th anniversary of the founding of Ostrava. In the Department of History, he held lectures and seminars on Czechoslovak history of the 18th–20th century and initially also on history didactics.

His life was marked by 1968 and the subsequent “normalisation” in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As head of a workplace involved in the reform process, he maintained, with considerable problems, his original position, subsequently dealing with the complex staffing situation of his department with difficulty and very limited authority. In his mind, the conflict situations brought him back to the post-February days of 1948, when he was experiencing political screening at the university in Prague, and he expressed his feelings, according to his friend, Professor Jiří Svoboda, by saying: “I can’t accept that I have to relive all this nastiness.” Mostly failed negotiations and stress eventually resulted in a severe myocardial infarction with long-term treatment.

He remained head of the department until 1 April 1974. At the end of the same year, he was appointed Vice-Dean for Studies while employed, and from 1980 until 1989 he held the post of Vice-Dean for Science, Research and Foreign Relations. In 1979 he was appointed a full professor of Czechoslovak history, and in 1981 he was awarded the title of meritorious teacher. During the 1970s, his organisation and managerial activities also increased in intensity. His membership in the editorial boards of scientific journals and anthologies (e.g. “Slezský sborník” [“Silesian Anthology”], “Společenské vědy ve škole” [“Civics in Schools”], “Ostrava – sborník příspěvků k dějinám a výstavbě města” [“Ostrava – A Collection of Contributions on the History and Construction of the City”]) was also extended; from 1981 until 1989, he was the scientific editor of anthologies and other works of the Faculty of Education in Ostrava. He was appointed a member of a number of subject-area committees (e.g. the committee of the ČSAV College of History for the Czechoslovak history of late feudalism, the committee of the ČSAV College of History for the creation of textbooks and teaching history), and he also intensified his activities as a reviewer in committees for the defence of candidate works, in habilitation procedures and as an opponent of scholarly and research tasks. Besides membership on the Academic Board of the Faculty of Education in Ostrava, he was also a member of the Academic Board of the ČSAV Silesian Institute in Opava, from 1974 of the Academic Board of the Silesian Museum in Opava, and in 1981 also of the Museum of Revolutionary Fights and Liberation in Ostrava.

Despite extensive work and public engagement, he continued to focus intensively on academic work as well. He concluded five-year cycles of planned research tasks with numerous studies or monographs. In the 1970s these mainly dealt with the issue of the Industrial Revolution and the beginnings of the labour movement in Moravia and Silesia, while in the 1980s, also in connection with his collaboration with the Institute of History of the University of Silesia in Katowice, he addressed the topic of the effect of industrial centres on the agricultural base. He was particularly intrigued by the specific group of the so-called “metal-farmers”, which was important in the socioeconomic development of the Ostrava industrial region. He also devoted valuable time to the political history of the 20th century, at first mainly when studying the Czech-German relations in North Moravia and Silesia, and later in the period-conditioned updating of topics of contemporary history, especially in popularising works. Then, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he turned his attention again to a topic close to his heart – the development of the Hukvaldy dominion. For the last time, he also returned to the Šumperk region by collaborating on the preparation of “Vlastivěda šumperského okresu” [“The National History of the Šumperk District”].

The dominant area of his academic activities in the 1970s and 1980s, however, was the creation of history textbooks for all levels of Czechoslovak schools. Over the course of two decades, he prepared either alone or with numerous co-authors a total of twelve textbook titles, often with a specific focus (the visually challenged, experimental schools). After the publication of the first textbook for the ninth grade of primary schools in 1970, with features of relaxation in the revival process of the 1960s, further textbook creation was strongly marked by period ideological constraints and brought limited possibilities of interpretation.

In this period he also participated very actively in academic meetings, both in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and abroad, mostly in Poland and the then East Germany. He prepared several papers and discussion topics from the field of history didactics, mainly for the conception and selection of subject matter and for the use of regional material in teaching history. His appearances at events connected with carrying out planned research tasks were also frequent, most often in collaboration with the ČSAV Silesian Institute in Opava and the Institute of History of the University of Silesia in Katowice. He also liked to attend regular historical symposia organised by the District Archive in Mikulov; his participation in one of them, dedicated to the history of winemaking, was recorded in his memoirs e.g. by Professor Arnošt Klíma.

In 1990, he retired and, for a time, suspended his university activities, though he kept in close touch with the Department of History, which went through a substantial transformation and became part of the newly established Faculty of Arts of the University of Ostrava. After two years, he returned to his old workplace and continued his teaching and academic work there until 2000. His work comprised lectures on the history of production (*Homo faber*) and selected lectures from national history.

He was also a supervisor of doctoral studies in economic and social history. Furthermore, from 1994 to 1996 he lectured at the Faculty of Arts and Science of the University of Silesia in Opava. He topped off his half-century-long academic career by collaborating on a new project of the Department of History – “The Biographical Dictionary of Silesia and North Moravia”, and, above all, by studies on the development of the Hukvaldy dominion from the Hussites to the Thirty Years’ War, although he did not manage to prepare his long-planned lifework “History of the Hukvaldy Dominion”.

In 2000, he decided to finish his activities in the Department of History, but remained in personal contact with the department until his death. In late 2003, he suffered from health complications, and after a longer stay in the hospital in Ostrava-Zábřeh, his life’s journey ended on 30 March 2004. The anthology “Hukvaldy études” that was being prepared by his co-workers, students and friends for his 80th birthday could thus only be published as a tribute to his incomplete jubilee and presented at a friendly gathering of family and authors at his ancestral home in Hukvaldy.

Translate by Eliška Suchánková