

SUMMARY

Panel C of the tenth Convention of Czech Historians focused on social and economic history. This choice of topic reflected the fact that the Czech historical community closely reflects current political and social developments. The far-reaching economic crisis which began towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century has once more sparked debate on the mechanisms of the economy, the free market, state intervention in the economy, sustainable development, the welfare state, and social harmony.

All of the above-mentioned topics – and of course many more besides – represent key questions for social and economic historiographers. Moreover, this area of historiography has itself become a focus of interest for those considering the methodology of historical research; this fact is to some extent reflected in these proceedings, perhaps most obviously in the paper by Rudolf Kučera. In Kučera's view, social and economic history are currently undergoing a critical phase of conceptual transformation; they are experiencing a degree of retreat from their former "glory", as the dominant schools of thought – the French *Annales* and the German Bielefeld school – gradually lose their creative power. Social history – viewed as a specific subdiscipline focusing on social structures and processes, analyzing social inequalities, unemployment and social mobility (including quantitative analysis of demographic data) and examining the phenomena of urbanization and industrialization – has recently lost its former prominence, giving way to historical and cultural anthropology and the history of everyday life. Economic history is currently undergoing a detailed assessment on a global level – for example in a project focusing on world economic history, which was presented by one of its participants, Antonie Doležalová. This project will underline the close connections between economic, social and cultural history, but also between economic history, economic theory, economic sociology, and national history. Marek Vařeka's paper considered the economic and social history of the Early Modern Age, which he views as a distinctive methodological and thematic world in its own right. Earlier studies by Czech historians formulated the key terminological apparatus and pointed the way for possible future research. The structure of research into economic history offers a wide range of possibilities for studies investigating various levels of society. Two authors discussed issues connected with business and entrepreneurship. Jana Geršlová pointed out that the history of business overlaps with many other disciplines; it is not merely the

domain of a highly specialized group of historians focusing on business structures and administration. Jan Hájek's paper offered a typology of entrepreneurs, while Radmila Švaříčková-Slabáková outlined how social history could benefit from the contribution of psychohistory.

When the organizers of this panel were considering where its conceptual focus should lie, they proposed a sub-title which would narrow its scope: *Where has Labour History gone?* This somewhat provocative title nevertheless expressed a significant trend in Czech historiography over the past two decades, namely the sudden loss of interest in the history of the working classes. This narrowing of focus offered an opportunity for an overall assessment of the situation, which was attempted by Jiří Kořalka – one of the many historians of the working classes present at the Convention. Jana Macháčová and Jiří Matějček offered a partial recapitulation of the current state of historical knowledge, while Stanislav Knob outlined possible future developments. The above-mentioned papers confirmed that Czech economic and social historiography has not experienced any major methodological shifts during the past two decades; instead, these twenty years have been characterized by a form of catharsis, or alternatively a process of forgetting which may in fact be viewed as something of a relief. On the one hand this is understandable; when history is placed at the service of ideology and political goals, a backlash inevitably follows. However, on the other hand – as was eloquently expressed by Jiří Woitsch in his paper *Where has working class ethnography disappeared to?* – a recently born, highly promising “baby” was in fact thrown out along with the ideological “bathwater”. One possible innovative approach to the study of working class history was presented by Lukáš Fasora, who used the former socialist youth organizations as an example of a generation-based concept of research, emphasizing that this generational approach has the potential to bring interesting new insights to the methodologically somewhat conservative environment of Czech historical sciences. Milan Řepa pointed out a rather neglected source of inspiration for labour history, focusing on the best-known exponent of the approach espoused by the journal *Past and Present*, the British historian E. P. Thompson, particularly his books *The Making of the English Working Class* and *Customs in Common*.

The Convention also benefited from papers highlighting possible sources of information for economic and social history or outlining current or recently completed research projects on these areas. Thanks to Marie Makariusová, readers are now aware of the *Biographical Dictionary of the Czech Lands (Biografický slovník českých zemí)*, which represents a valuable source of information on economic history. Václava Horčáková pointed out some on-line sources of information and gave details of available bibliographies. Jan Hájek presented the aims and achievements of the Society for Economic and Social History (Společnost

pro hospodářské a sociální dějiny). Milan Hlavačka and Lukáš Fasora outlined progress on two grant-funded projects related to social history - respectively *Ideas – legislation – institutions: social thoughts and social practice in the Bohemian Lands 1781–1939* and *Mutual relations and contacts between labour, bourgeoisie and aristocracy aimed at solving the social question in 1870–1914*.

Viewing the contributions as a whole, it appears that – despite all the sceptical views that have been voiced – social and economic history remains a productive, viable area of historiography. It is evident that new approaches will be needed – particularly the enrichment of the discipline through the incorporation of cultural-anthropological concepts. However, it is also clear that there is no need to abandon older methodological approaches or cast aside the achievements of previous research. Given that social relations and the economy are the alpha and omega of contemporary political and social life, social and economic history cannot remain on the margins of historiography as a whole.

Translated by Christopher Hopkinson