

## In memoriam of Jiří Kořalka (7<sup>th</sup> February 1931 — 30<sup>th</sup> January 2015)



The list of Sternberg famous natives published at the web pages of this Moravian town states several sportsmen, a few models and several actors and actresses. However, they have left out completely the Czech historian Jiří Kořalka. It must be mentioned, though, that he did not spend here much time, being it only from the year 1931, when he was born in this town on the 7<sup>th</sup> February, to October 1938, when the town Sternberg got annexed to the Third Reich and Kořalka's father, a very active local representative, a teacher, conductor and a pillar of a local amateur theatre company had to move with his whole family to Prostějov. Jiří attended there the elementary school and grammar school, too; thanks to a scholarship he could broaden his education also during his stay in the USA. In 1950 he applied for University of Political and Economic Sciences [Vysoká škola politických a hospodářských věd]. His choice was influenced by his wish to join later a diplomatic body, however pretty soon he changed his mind and went for a historian carrier. He completed his studies at the Philosophical and Historical Faculty of Charles University (University of Political and Economic Sciences was closed down in 1953). Here he submitted in 1954 his diploma work that was soon published in Liberec under the title "Rise of the Socialistic Labour Movement in the Liberec Region" [Vznik socialistického dělnického hnutí na Liberecku]. Few years later he followed up with a similarly weighty book "North Bohemian Socialists at the Head of the Labour Movement in Czech and Austrian Lands" [Severočeskí socialisté v čele dělnického hnutí českých a rakouských zemí].

After many years or if you like many decades we might deem that at this time no other books than those on labour or communist movements were published and that they were all of the same, i.e. negligible quality. Nevertheless, it would have been too oversimplifying judgement. Indeed, at that time many low quality works were written, similarly to our days, the only virtue of which was a repetition of the only possible truths. However, this cannot be applied to all works, not speaking of Kořalka's studies where there was no room for phrases concealing ignorance. His studies on Liberec socialists — based on his impressive command of sources and literature — have on the contrary retained a permanent quality. Kořalka covered in them a complicated way of particular labour movement groups to common socialistic awareness and organization, at the same time he placed it within a complex economic and political context and dealt with interconnection of a social and national issue. That is how he opened a way for a research of the Czech-German relations and the nationalism as such.

Contrary to other historians from his and younger generation, too, Kořalka did not have to feel ashamed for his first works. He applied himself to issues of labour and social movement as such even later — he perceived it as a significant aspect of modern reality. He cooperated from the second half of the 1970s with a team of ethnographers, who, under the lead of Mirjam Moravcová studied every day aspects and spiritual culture of the Czech working class. The output of their common work was



{and also internationally) an extremely successful book “Old Working Class Prague” [Stará dělnická Praha]. Kořalka’s appraisal of working class asset as for formation of modern Czech and Central European society can be illustrated mainly by his book “Czechs in Habsburg Monarchy and Europe” [Češi v habsburské monarchii a Evropě]. The very last Kořalka’s contribution as for this issue were his studies focused on compatriot, but also working class clubs in Germany.

As it has been already mentioned the north Bohemian theme brought Kořalka to study nationalism. He pointed out in a probably long forgotten, but at its time strikingly provocative symposium “Our Live and Dead Past” [Naše živá a mrtvá minulost] how malicious the relationship of the Czech nation towards Austria was and what consequences such an attitude (has) brought concerning its further development. His interest in theoretical issues as for a rise of a modern nation and national movement resulted in 1969 in the book “What is a Nation” [Co je národ] which made the author generally renowned, but which also caused him considerable personal problems.

Jiří Kořalka started his professional carrier in the Jablonec archive; nevertheless he pretty soon left for the Institute of History of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science, where he was praised not only as a historian but also as a very competent organizer. This institute was supposed to, as much as its predecessor of the very same name founded in 1920, deal with editing, however its focus turned to publishing of works that, in compliance with a new regime, fundamentally reassessed existing perception of the history. It played a significant role in conceiving and establishing a new, binding interpretation of the history; in order to perform this task it employed the best, young (and compliant) historians who it could provide with excellent material conditions together with above standard ones as for the research and publishing. In addition it could provide them with at time unusual contacts with abroad. In some fields, e.g. in the research of economic and social history its focus corresponded with some foreign trends, which meant that efficient historians — as for example Jiří Kořalka — could very well make use of the advantages provided by their Institute and could at the same time publish works, that, despite their tributary relation to ruling ideology always presented something new. Nevertheless, thorough studies of the history and contacts with professionals from close scientific fields of studies often impugned apparent truths and Czech historians subsequently strove for their own, more objective perception of the history. This endeavour correlated with more and more critical attitude of a great part of Czech intellectuals fighting for reformation of the existing regime. The standings of Czech historians were influencing public opinion and the public could properly appreciate this effort. It was maybe the very last time in our history when the historians were perceived as authority and their standings could markedly influence a reflection of the history by broader public.

Official management of the institute headed by the academician Josef Macek, at the beginning the main representative of radical Marxist orthodoxy, was not against this development, later on it even participated in activities condemning the Soviet occupation — the most significant was publishing of the so-called “Black Book” (Seven Prague Days 21<sup>st</sup> -27<sup>th</sup> August 1968. Documentation.) That it the reason why the Institute of History was closed down in 1970 and in its place a normalization Institute of Czechoslovak and World History was established. Similarly to many others Kořalka

worked here only on fixed-time contracts — he could thank for his being employed here at all to the fact that he participated fundamentally in a compilation of a synthesis of the “Concise History of Czechoslovakia II” [Přehled dějin Československa II.]. He was dedicated to this work fully, too and thus he could later on to his own satisfaction state that it had been his merit that the Czech public could have got acquainted with existence of the German national movement in 1830s and 1840s. Nevertheless, this life uncertainty resulted in many troubles and undoubtedly in many questionable steps of his, such as his statement at the world symposium of historians in Moscow — Kořalka denied that the historians had been persecuted in normalization Czechoslovakia as it had been stated already by first dissidents coming from his former colleagues. However, all circumstances and reasons for such behaviour Kořalka never explained. He was saved from this embarrassing situation in 1975 by an offer to take up work in the Tábor museum where he together with František Šmahel helped markedly in profiling this workplace and transformed it to an indeed first rate and efficient institution.

As for the history of the Czech historiography the Tábor Museum became famous for holding several substantial symposiums that — logically under patronage of local authorities — won its fame, similarly to more famous Pilsen symposiums, as places of a scientific discussions to a great extent independent of external political pressure. The Husitský Tábor was even much more influential, i.e. a year book focused on a research of the Hussite movement as such but also its reception in the centuries to come. The year book Husitský Tábor turned thus into a significant basis dealing with a research of historical awareness and gradually it broadened its scope also to covering social and cultural history of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Especially an extensive section concerned with new books raised a great attention.

When in Tábor Kořalka focused on social history of this city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; his short studies were to be used as groundwork for his forthcoming great monograph on the history of Tábor that he was preparing with Šmahel and other historians from the local museum archive. First and foremost he started to analyse Hussite traditions or if you like a second life of the Hussite movement, as it was called at that time. He perceived this apparently profane part of the historical research as an evidence of maturing and differentiation of the Czech nation and he managed to find in it many moments significant for getting to know Czech-German relationships. Studying Hussite heritage also turned Kořalka’s attention to a work of František Palacký, whom he dedicated (after several longer preparatory works) a concise (and also the very first big) biography written on the occasion of 200<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary of this “Father of the Nation”. His work presented Palacký in all his roles — as a historian, politician, and organizer of the Czech scientific life but also within his family. This monograph, published in Vienna in 2007 in German was subsequently supplemented with an edition of the correspondence between Palacký and his wife Terezia, rather important not only for getting to know Palacký’s opinions and those of his vicinity, too, but also of the life style of Prague bourgeoisie society of the 1850s.

The biography of František Palacký enabled Kořalka to present a part of the Czech 19<sup>th</sup> century, however his most synthetical work is *The Czechs in Habsburg Monarchy and in Europe 1815–1914* (originally published as *Tschechen im Habsburgerreich und*





in Europa 1815–1914) analysing the topic of a formation of the modern Czech society. He perceived this issue from several standpoints. First he commented on a division of the Czech population into two or if you like three societies as one of possibilities and he suggested that there had been other tendencies of the national development, although they did not win their recognition. Further on he specified conditions and data as for a rise of the Czech society (economic, territorial, demographic, social, organizational and intellectual ones, etc.), he also analyzed a complicated national situation in the Czech lands where the Czechs and Germans could under certain conditions appear as a minority, and also possibilities of their solution (i.e. various attempt for settlement). In the following section (as it had been already stated) he dealt with a lately rather marginalized question, i.e. to what extent the organized labour movement participated in the process of modernization of the Czech lands. In the very last part he focused on international relations and connections of the Czech national movement or some of its parts.

Jiří Kořalka matured as a historian in the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In compliance with the then prevailing historiography trends he was interested first and foremost in social history, big historical topics, such as modernization, nation, working class; he also addicted himself to local history and biography studies. In the last case it is necessary to point out his relevant contribution as for the dictionary *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon*. Being it as it may he perceived all his topics in a broad central European context, the result of which being his immense foreign contacts covering all the region of Central Europe, with an obvious centre in Germany and Austria. He was the closest probably to his Austrian colleagues P. Urbanitsch, H. Rumpler, E. Bruckmüller or H. Stekl who he cooperated frequently with as for the most remarkable enterprise of the Austrian or directly central- and east European historiography, history of the Habsburg monarchy (*Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*). Thanks to J. Kocka he had good contacts with the Bielefeld School of Social History, undoubtedly he was also close to historians who did not agree with his principles, such as L. Gall. In the Czech environment we must remind of his closest colleagues and friends who he performed with — as the Czech fairy tale figures “Dlouhý, Široký a Bystrozraký” [Longshanks, Girth, and Keen], as they called themselves — at many conferences, i.e. Otta Urban and Jan Havránek. (Kořalka played in this trio a part of the Keen.)

Anybody who has tried to study Kořalka’s work must have been surprised at an amazing amount of various shorter or longer articles and conference papers — his bibliography could be easily published as a book, too. Kořalka contributed to significant domestic and foreign magazines; however we may come across his entries also in less known and spread regional magazines and various symposiums. His magazine entries production is not however of a fragmentary, disparate character, there is on the contrary inner coherence. His articles served as preparatory or supplementary works for longer ones. These also confirmed his significance in the Czech historiography. In addition he was also immensely familiar with foreign and domestic papers and secondary sources and first and foremost he was able to outline and focus his concentration, plan his attitude towards the topic and especially structure his work — he deemed its structure as a half of the success. His personality thus stands

for a will to thoroughly study sources, ability to think theoretically and conceptually and extremely synoptical and persuasive presentation of research results for academic and lay public, too.

All these qualities, skills and possibilities would have meant nothing if it had not been for his hardworking, accuracy and for a long time also good health. His admirable performance was to a great extent due to his wife — PhDr. Květa Kořalková, CSc., without whose support and understanding he could not have achieved so much. His family background nevertheless collapsed at the end of his life — he was deeply affected not only by his wife's death but also the death of his only son Jaroslav. However in his last years he could have relied upon a circle of his devoted colleagues and friends.

**Jiří Pokorný**

