

Evaluation of the diploma thesis of Marian Lóži
„Dynamika vnitrostranického teroru na lokální úrovni KSČ
v době pozdního socialismu“

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Quality of the research proposal:

Despite a rather traditional title (the resort to the word “terror” in the title misleadingly points to a much more traditional branch of historiography concerning communism than this manuscript itself), this work is both original and important in the Czech context. It proceeds from material that was either unexploited (local archives of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia) or that were known but were not problematized in the same original way. Although it is only a masters thesis, this work, and especially its theoretical background and methodology, can already be said to be at the forefront of the Czech historical science concerning the communist period.

Preparation and aim of the work:

The bibliographical background for this work is solid and serious. The author's critique of Karel Kaplan (who never really analyzed the praxis of terror), Vaclav Brabec (who saw local cells of the communist party only as passive objects, not as social organisations that were able to participate actively to a definition of a common terror policy), and of Vaclav Kaska (whose outdated understanding of ideology left little or no place to social actors) is compelling. He is also quoting little known authors that produced

excellent analyses of that period, for instance Paul Barton (Jiri Veltrusky.)

The sources are used in a productive way, with a critical approach, and comprise :

- memoirs of party functionaries
- press and local press, that was a lot more critical in the regions than it was in the center
- archives, especially the archives of Marie Svermova

Concept and methodology:

The concept and methodology of this work are, at such a stage of studies, truly remarkable. A number of elements are particularly interesting:

- the author brings into the fore the notion of “faith” as a motivation for action on the part of social actors that is parallel but, and that is crucial, *compatible* with terror;
- he compares party members in their everyday action as *accusers* and, almost simultaenously, as *accused* within party cells, which provides a unique insight into the everyday functioning of the terror policy a in closed social unit;
- his approach of a dominating chaos in the way the party was controlled is considerably more refreshing and convincing than the preceding “totalitarian” theory according to which the central leadership was exerting total control over the party, including at the local level. His description of fights and jealousy between departements and local party cells is particularly convincing.

The author also brings a number of productive, innovative and stimulating insights by - rightfully - introducing and comparing the context at the communist party’s central level with the local

organizations. His description of a general disorder, as well as of the lack of competent local party cadres and their great instability, and last but not least, of corruption at the basic level, can leave no doubt as to the improvised character of the first years of the communist dictatorship, while documenting diverging and competing local and central strategies to implement power.

He is also astutely questioning – and dispelling – both the communist and the anti-communist narrative according to which the fight for power never endangered the total control imposed on the population itself: quite on the contrary, thanks to him we now know that the control imposed on party members and on the population varied according to the context and mainly according to the social actors. Resistance to the attempts at controlling resulted in less control, submissiveness to more control. As logical as it may seem, this is a very important discovery.

Similarly, his argument that it is uncertainty and a dysfunctioning apparatus that allowed terror to take place and not, as was previously imagined, an abstract, absolute power, is both new in the Czech context and very convincing.

I would also gladly praise that Marian Lozi starts his study before 1948. In fact, from that respect, 1948 is nothing more than a formal change. This introduction of a continuity between the pre- and post-1948 is fully justified, yet had hardly ever been practiced before.

Detailed review of the manuscript:

On page 48, the author states that “diktatori v zadnem pripade nebyli jen ve skrytu intrikujicimi manipulatory. Obraceli se na širokou verejnost, kterou se promyslenym populismem usilovali

ziskat na svou stranu a nadchnout pro sve zamery”: it would be interesting to have more details on this.

Similarly on p. 76, Lozi quotes a critic of party fonctionaries at the local level who was appealing to all “pocivi stranici, pocivi obcane” for them to cast aside the “stranicke parazity a skudce”, the local “dicators.” It would be interesting to know what kind of influence such appeals might have really exerted.

The reproach of “spatny pomer k lidem” addressed to Sling (p. 77) or the will to get “nejsirsi verejna podpora” in order to depose Josef Beran in the caslavsky okres (also p. 77) are particularly intriguing – and by their mere presence show how irrelevant the totalitarian paradigm is.

The crucial question is of course to know whether StB and the Soviet advisors really were the sole determiners of the terror policy and the show trials, or if some kind of alliance was forged between unpopular local leaders of the party and the StB in order to select scapegoats. This work does not raise the question openly, but does open a crucial research avenue for the future.

The case of Jindrich Homola (p. 93), local leader whom the central authorities of the party did not manage to remove in 1951 because of his solid support at the local level and despite incriminating “evidence” is also fascinating. Clearly, the notion of “popular opinion” (Paul Corner) needs a thorough analysis in the Czech context, as well as that of “vnitrostranicka demokracie” (p. 100), that was a lot more complex than a simple propaganda tool. The simple fact that the purge policy had such different outcomes in every single region is in itself an excellent discovery and base for future research.

Objections:

The parts of the work that are slightly less interesting are the reminder of the fight for power within the party head, as well as his three case studies of local “dictators”, and of Ivan Holy as director of Svit. As to the power struggle at the top, this is already well known and has been described numerous times; it is less innovative than the rest of the work (however all the while being a solid analysis that is fully justified in this manuscript.)

As to the three cases, one of them is particularly well known (Otto Sling) and the other two are rather long and repetitive. The same could have been said in just a few sentences. Besides, all these personal cases are not sufficiently analyzed, this part is too descriptive. However, the author's attention to the fate of women (even though this is not *stricto sensu* a gender perspective) in local elites, as well as that of national minorities, is a plus.

A more serious objection must be raised as to Marian Lozi's repetitive usage of the term “terror” and “diktatorsky”; domination, or more to the point, *practices of domination*, would have been more accurate. Local “dictators”, especially when it is a term repeated many times over, is both misleading and contradicting the intent of the work, which is to lead a social history of domination practices – even if it was used by Sheila Fitzpatrick.

The usage of the term is further complicated by the fact that the communist authorities themselves resorted to the term “diktatorsky”, for instance while arresting the person who was fast personifying the “internal enemy”, i.e. Otto Sling (p. 81.) It is therefore a clearly “loaded” term from the political point of view. Hence, considering the prevalence of the totalitarian paradigm in the Czech context, the author's use, and abuse, of the term is misleading. At the very least, the usage of the term would need a

much more thorough explanation than a footnote in the text referring to Sheila Fitzpatrick. In fact, it would be best of all if it were avoided. "Practices of domination" in reference to Thomas Lindenberger's *Herrschaft and Eigen Sinn* would be significantly more appropriate in view of this work's general approach.

Conclusion:

As this work simultaneously presents new theoretical arguments and an innovative methodological approach, introduces new empirical research results and significantly contributes to the critical debate on communism not only at the Czech but already at the international level, I can only praise the author and warmly recommend the best possible grade ("vyborne") for this diploma thesis. We can only hope and encourage the author to pursue his studies in a PhD program.

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