

Opponent's review

of the **Master Diploma Thesis** of the author **Anna Pererva**,

Student of the *Central European Studies* Program, FF UHK,

Perception of the Soviet Heritage in Czech Republic

FF UHK, 2017, 134 pp.

The presented Master Diploma Thesis is the first completed thesis of the CES program at FF UHK. Student Anna Pererva chose *Perception of the Soviet Heritage in Czech Republic* as its theme. The theme corresponds appropriately to the content of the whole study program, which includes the history, politics and culture of modern Czechoslovakia and Soviet Block and their reflection in the Czech society.

The thesis is divided into four basic chapters. In the first chapter the author describes the political system of Czechoslovakia in the years 1945–1985. The text describes and evaluates the state's environment from the restoration of the Republic after World War II to the arrival of Perestroika Phenomenon in the mid-1980s. In this chapter, the author, in my opinion, chose the suitable professional literature and made a solid historical compilation. In the second chapter, which is the most interesting for a reader, the author follows the demographic phenomena of the Communist Czechoslovakia, primarily urbanization (here seen as "microworld"). The chapter culminates with the interesting term "homo sovieticus" and its applications. In the third chapter, the author focuses on the perception of communism in the Czech environment, the „decommunization“ and the "rewriting" of modern Czechoslovak history. The whole thesis ends with a sociological quiz that was made to answer the questions of the perception of the communist environment in the Czech society.

Anna Pererva's Diploma Thesis has many benefits that need to be positively evaluated. The author's orientation in the specific Czech mental and political environment is well presented. She sees very well in her text the several basic levels: political, social, cultural, mental and ideological. Their interconnection is not always easy, but Anna Pererva's text shows, that the author understands them quite well. I also consider the critical approach to the foreign-language professional literature as the positive site of the thesis – most of the non-Czech authors are making fundamental doubts when describing Czechoslovak communism. It is good, therefore, that the author of the thesis does not oblige these speculations and creates her own opinion. The content of the text is formally and technically quite correct.

The text of the diploma thesis has, of course, several insufficiencies. In the second chapter, the author uses the designation "Eastern European Country" for

Czechoslovakia, and sees the essence of this designation in the belonging of the country to the policy of the Eastern Bloc. Which is correct, on the one hand. However, the geographic and mental affiliation, which is definitely Central European, is not fully described. From page 44, the text provides a relatively good overview of the rise of the percentage of manual workers in society, but rarely refers to specific resources. The numbers are fairly accurate – what was the source of them? Moreover, in my opinion, the author does not always distinguish between individual structures of the workers - in the 1980s the system was far from working-class origin of 1950s. We cannot see the „working class“ and „workers“ as one unified group in the society. The 1970s and 1980s created and presented much more sophisticated hierarchy of the working class. This hierarchy determined the social status and often political position of the working-class person in the late communist system. It is certainly interesting to describe the so-called Period of Gerontocracy in late Normalization, but the author describes it in a narrowly defined social group – top officials and party candidates. It is a question whether this Gerontocracy was also recognized in lower positions and to what extent it creates a social phenomenon. In the case of mortality and birth rates, I would disagree with today's relatively obsolete claim that the second demographic transition (SDT, p. 48) started in the Czech environment in the mid-1990s. In my opinion, the great changes (birth rate, divorce rate, etc.) occurred also after 1983, in the time when the era of so-called “younger siblings of Husák's children“ ended. Children born before that year belong with their socio-cultural ties to a different generation than people born in 1983 and younger. In the mid-1990s, therefore, the third demographic transition could be seen. On this phenomenon many other sociological sources are available, but especially in Czech language. On the other hand, author's application of the Van Deth's Theory of Values can be positively evaluated – I have no objections about this. On page 49 the author compares the interesting phenomenon of the adjective "high" in relation to marriage, birth, divorce and mobility. In comparison with other countries, it is true that Czechoslovakia was really "high" in these matters. I would not fully agree only with the term "high mobility" – the Czech society, at least in the period of Normalization, was clearly fixed to the place, to the home, to the regional environment. I am not saying that mobility has not occurred – only that the high mobility was present only in a certain life cycle of a person (before this person "settled" in the certain place). Changes after 1990 in the demographic environment of Czechoslovakia are an interesting and creative part of the whole thesis. I fully agree with the fundamental changes the author explains in her

text. The problem can be seen in the use of the term "westerization" of the society. Here the author demonstrates many indicators, but I miss a clear statement of the "eastern" type of behavior and ideological concept that still remains in the Czech society. I know the author responds to these questions in several places, but it would be appropriate to create a unified answer in the one place in the text.

An interesting contribution of the thesis is in the application of the term "homo sovieticus" to the description of mentality and society. The author based this application on Bazhanov's theory, based on Jung's archetypes (pp. 74 et seq.). The sociological quiz that the author presents at the end of her thesis is undoubtedly an interesting example of methods of the research of the perceptions of socialism in modern society. Personally, I think it would be more appropriate to initiate sociological research at the beginning of the diploma project, and then apply its results to answer specific questions directly in the text of the thesis. In this case, I would like to see a part of the text, which would be devoted to the comparison of the results of the sociological research and the theoretical conception presented by the author.

Summarizing: I evaluate Anna Pererva's Master Diploma Thesis quite positively in many ways. The author has dealt with a difficult subject of the research and brought her own insight into it. I would like the author to answer some of the questions I attached to this review during her defense. If this happens, I recommend the thesis to be positively defended and I evaluate it with a mark .

Signed in the City of Děčín, Czech Republic

August 14th 2017

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Questions for the Student's Defense of the Master Thesis

1. You mentioned the person of Milan Kundera several times. How is his literary work reflected in the other in post-socialist countries, in your opinion?

2. Have any other similar sociological researches been carried out in other ex-Eastern Bloc countries (e.g. Poland, Hungary...)? If so, do you know their conclusions? Is the Czech society in its perception of the socialist era specific somehow?
3. How was the "homo soviticus" present into a history of the Czechoslovak communism? Have there been any main changes in the concept of „homo sovieticus“ throughout the communist regime in Czechoslovakia?
4. And to the previous question: Do You think, based on the perception of socialism in our country and your research, that the Czechoslovak "homo sovieticus" was something specific? Was there also some "subspecies", a certain "Homo Czechoslovakia Socialiscensis"?