

### **Agrarianism in Central and Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries**

**Veranstalter:** Centre of Central European Studies, Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and of the CEVRO Institute, School of political studies

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The international conference „Agrarianism in Central and Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th Centuries“ carried on in a line of conferences organised by the Centre of Central European Studies - the joint research centre of Masaryk Institute and Archives of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic and of the CEVRO Institute, School of political studies. The organisation of the conference was also considerably supported by the Office of the government of the Czech Republic. The Prime Minister Jiří Rusnok accepted to hold the auspices over the conference and his office not only provided a representative venue for the official opening, but also supported the organisation team from the technical point of view.

The conference was opened in Hrzánský palace in Prague-Hradčany by the Chief of Staff from the Office of the Government, Radek Augustin, the scholarly part started the following day in CEVRO Institute in Jungmannova Street in Prague.

There were altogether eleven panels that gathered the presenters both chronologically and thematically and focused on different eras and places in the agrarian movement. The first panel was intended to give an overview of the agrarian movement in individual countries and of the up-to-date research. The first presenter JAN RYCHLÍK (Prague) introduced the agrarian parties and movements and looked into their mutual relations. Rychlík studied thoroughly the process of emancipation of the parties, their position in the political spectrum in the given countries with regards to political and economic circumstances. EVA BROKLOVÁ (Prague) focused on the personality of one of the founding members and a leading figure of the

Czech and later Czechoslovak agrarian movement Antonín Švehla. She tried to show not only the political face of the long-time Czechoslovak prime minister, his position within the party and relations to other major political figures, but also his family and private life. JOSEF HARNA (Prague) centred his presentation on the historiography about the agrarian movements. In the following debate the discussants asked about the political aspect of the agrarian movement and suggested other possible interpretations of this phenomenon.

The second panel centred on the very beginnings of the movement in the Czech lands. The agrarianism in its political form succeeded in becoming a very powerful political force although Bohemia was considered to be one of the most industrial parts of Austria-Hungary. LUBOŠ VELEK (Prague) analysed the rather complicated genesis of the movement from the factions inside the Czech national parties and various agricultural societies to the important political party. PAVEL FABINI (Prague) provided a detailed study into one of the agrarian factions within the Old Czech Party and explained its difficult position inside an all-nation embracing political force. The clash of identities was demonstrated on the example of Josef Dürich. Another example of the field where agrarian politicians were trying to gain political influence was sugar beet production. FRANTIŠEK ČAPKA (Brno) explained the importance of this domain at end of the 19th century and focused on the relation between the sugar beet producers and sugar manufacturers.

The afternoon session began with the look at the interwar Czechoslovak agrarianism. Chaired by Jaroslav Rokoský the presenters analysed various aspects of the political movement. The first paper by ANTONIE DOLEŽALOVÁ (Prague) pursued an interesting topic of corruption and clientelism within the agrarian party, which was subsequently given as one of the reasons for dissolution of the party after World War II. Examples of several high-ranking state officials with connection to the party shed some light on the complexity of relation between the state and the political party. MICHAL PEHR (Prague) dedicated his talk to the relation between the polit-

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ical agrarianism and political Catholicism in Czechoslovakia represented by the agrarian party and Czechoslovak People's Party with A. Švehla and J. Šrámek as their respective chairmen. Pehr provided interesting information about the background of political negotiations that had stood behind many compromises and deals sealed by both parties in the interwar era. MAREK ŠMÍD (České Budějovice) focused on the attitude of the Holy See towards the agrarian party. Relying on the reports of the papal nuncio, he documented the changes of the Vatican approach to the young state, including the perception of A. Švehla personality. MIROSLAV ŠEPTÁK (Prague) dealt with the topic of the agrarian foreign policy, which has been generally considered a weak spot of the party. Mostly devoted to the internal business of the state, the party lacked capable personalities that would engage in the sovereign domain of Edvard Beneš. It was only in the 1930s when Milan Hodža came up with a plan for changing the concept of Czechoslovak foreign policy, which did not work out anyway.

While the leading party figure of Antonín Švehla was presented at the beginning of the conference, the fourth panel focused on other important personalities decisive for the evolution of the agrarian movement and of the party. L'UBICA KÁZMEROVÁ (Bratislava) looked at the life and work of Anton Štefánek who is widely believed to be a founder of the modern national Slovak education system. ILONA BAŽANTOVÁ (Prague) pursued in her paper the work of Cyril Horáček, the second minister of finance in Czechoslovakia. Since A. Švehla had to do without high education and relied mostly on his common sense and political experience, the agrarian party was in a need of theoretical basis for its program. The theoretical works of Horáček and his academic career seemed to offer such opportunity. The panel was concluded by LUKÁŠ KOPECKÝ (Ústí nad Labem). His presentation introduced Karel Viškovský, one of the most important politicians within the party who is usually connected to the agrarian land reform since he became the first president of the Land Reform Authority. Kopecký made clear his involvement in the reform and also explained reasons that led

Viškovský to quit his office.

The last panel on Thursday revolved around the state of political agrarianism in today Europe. LADISLAV MRKLAS (Prague) first made a general overview of the agrarian movement in the nowadays European political spectrum, drafted a political family scheme with the current (explicitly or implicitly) agrarian parties, and explained two different evolutionary paths of the movement during the last several decades, one resulting into a „catch-all“ party, the other remaining focused on its original agricultural electorate. His colleagues from the CEVRO Institute then presented two case studies. MIROSLAV NOVÁK (Prague) made a knowledgeable outline of the Swiss People's Party and its position in the Swiss political system while providing necessary insight into its workings. MILOŠ BRUNCLÍK (Prague) shifted his attention to the Scandinavian agrarian parties. Not only did he explain the particularities of the historical development of each state and their impact on its political system, but, in the latter part, he also provided the answer the various parties gave to different challenges they had been presented with.

The last day of the conference opened with the panel dedicated to the international form of the agrarian movement. The first comparative study by MILOSLAV SZABÓ (Prague) and KLAUS RICHTER (Birmingham) analysed the anti-Semitic aspect in the agrarian movement where Jewish merchants and loan sharks were generally understood as enemies of independent peasants. These processes were examined on the example of Upper Hungary and Baltic countries in the first decades of the 20th century in the context of the agrarian movement trying to get to power. UWE MÜLLER (Leipzig) took up an important topic of land reform that was proper to most agrarian parties and analysed its possibilities and impact in Germany before World War I. STANISLAV STĘPKA (Warsaw) shifted the conference attention to the post-war era after 1945 when agrarian movement was disqualified from the political competition. His paper concentrated on the activities of the International Peasant Union as a possible tool for subversion of the communist regimes in the Eastern Europe. PIOTR SWACHA (War-

saw) followed up with his paper on European integration concepts in the International Peasant Union plans. In the debate that ensued, the topic of the International Agrarian Bureau from the interwar period was mentioned and the possible ideological link to the Polish exile Peasant Union was discussed.

The seventh panel looked into the role of agrarianism in Slovakia. ROMAN HOLEC (Bratislava) basically took up the theme from the preceding panel and examined the creation and role of the Union of the Slavonic Agrarian Youth as one of the forms of the international agrarian cooperation founded in interwar Czechoslovakia. RÓBERT ARPÁŠ (Nitra) addressed the questionable concept of Czechoslovakism that was promoted by the Czechoslovak agrarian party, but came under harsh criticism from Slovak People's Party in the 1930s. The clash between the young agrarian generation influenced by the Slovakian nationalists and the Prague centre seemed to be inevitable. MATEJ HANULA (Bratislava) focused on the role of the subsidiary agrarian organisation to raise public awareness and explained the essential role of the subsidiary organisations to attach the constituents to their party.

The following panel took up for its task to explore the role of agrarianism in south-eastern Europe under difficult political and economic circumstances. MIHAI-DAN CIRJAN (Budapest) looked at the Romanian agrarian movement in the interwar period and analysed its limits given by the rural character of the state, the role of the movement within the Romanian politics and availability of foreign loans to Romania. SUZANA LEČEK (Zagreb) showed the development of the Croatian Peasant Party in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia between the wars where the periods of passive resistance alternated with the period of parliamentary participation and times when the party was forbidden by the state. Leček cast some light on non-parliamentary activities of the party that managed to keep it the most popular movement among the Croatian inhabitants. This paper was followed by the presentation of IVICA ŠUTE (Zagreb) who explored the career of Josip Predavec and Rudolf Bičanić, two major economic experts of the Croatian Peasant Par-

ty with strong bonds to the Czech lands.

The last panel focused on the agrarian movement after World War II. TOMASZ SKRZYŃSKI (Nowy Sącz) studied the progressive subjugation and absorption of the peasant party by the communists in Poland. Although the party tried hard to keep its organisation in 1947, they were finally merged with the communist party two years later. ÉVA CSESZKA (Budapest) provided a detailed insight into the communist methods of taking over the ministry of agriculture which had been a centre of agrarian experts. The opposition in the ministry against the land reform compelled the communist party to purge the ministry and ensure its cooperation. VASIL PARASKEVOV (Shumen) examined the gradual suppression of agrarian activities in Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary. He tried to identify the various patterns and forms of communists' campaigns to eventually remove their political competitors by dividing the agrarian resistance into several phases and analysing them. The last paper of JAROSLAV ROKOSKÝ (Ústí nad Labem) dealt with post-war destiny of the agrarian party in Czechoslovakia. The once powerful political movement was banned and its representatives were, under various pretexts, sentenced to jail. When the communist party took over the state, agrarianism became doomed political ideology, victim of ill-founded convictions, ideological distortions and misinterpretations for the next four decades.

The two-day conference on agrarianism offered a wide ranging field of themes and topics. It explored the beginnings of the movement, looked at its „golden years“ between the wars, studied various agricultural phenomena, international cooperation and finally its abrupt end after 1945. Despite the complexity, it was possible to retain a unifying theme for each panel. The conference thus presented a unique possibility of comparative approach to diverse aspects of agrarianism as an ideology, political movement or economic doctrine. It showed similarities in the movements, and once again tried to give an answer to the permanent question why agrarianism seems to be an unparalleled phenomenon of Central and (South-)Eastern Europe.

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### Conference overview:

*Agrarianism and its historiography (chaired by Luboš Velek)*

Jan Rychlík (Prague): Agrarian parties and movements in Central and Eastern Europe and their relations

Eva Broklová (Prague): Antonín Švehla

Josef Harna (Prague): Historiography of Czech and Slovak agrarian movement: results and blank spaces

*Czech Agrarianism before World War I (chaired by Martin Klečácký)*

Luboš Velek (Prague): Origins and development of agrarian party till 1914

Pavel Fabini (Prague): Josef Dürich and „agrarians within old Czechs' party“. Clash of identities in the National party at the end of the 19th century

František Čapka (Brno): Efforts of agrarian party to gain political influence among sugar beet producers before WWI in the Czech lands (with special attention to Moravia)

*Antonín Švehla and Interwar Agrarianism in Czechoslovakia (chaired by Jaroslav Rokoský)*

Antonie Doležalová (Prague): Agrarianism: source of clientelism and corruption?

Michal Pehr (Prague): Agrarian party and political Catholicism in the interwar Czechoslovakia

Marek Šmíd (České Budějovice): Agrarian party and its representatives in the concepts and plans of the Holy See in the interwar Czechoslovakia

Miroslav Šepták (Prague): An option against the Prague Castle? Foreign policy concepts of Czech and Slovak agrarians in the 30's of the 20th century

*Agrarian Leaders and Theorists (chaired by Eva Broklová)*

L'ubica Kázmerová (Bratislava): Anton Štefánek, an important representative of agrarianism in Slovakia

Iлона Bažantová (Prague): National economist

Cyril Horáček (1862–1943)

Lukáš Kopecký (Ústí nad Labem): Karel Viškovský (1868–1932).

*Political Agrarianism Today (chaired by Antonie Doležalová)*

Ladislav Mrklas (Prague): A family of agrarian political parties then and now

Miroslav Novák (Prague): Swiss People's Party

Miloš Brunclík (Prague): Scandinavian agrarian parties

*Agrarianism transnationalized (chaired by Ivan Šedivý)*

Miloslav Szabó (Prague) – Klaus Richter (Birmingham): Agrarianism and agrarian anti-Semitism in the East Central Europe (1900–1938)

Uwe Müller (Leipzig): German concepts and experience of the Land Reform and its impact on the agrarianism in the East Central Europe

Stanisław Stepka (Warsaw): Attitude of the International Peasant Union to Communism (1947–1989)

Piotr Swacha (Warsaw): European integration in the International Peasant Union concepts

*Agrarianism in Slovakia (chaired by Michal Pehr)*

Roman Holec (Bratislava): Union of Slavonic Agrarian Youth

Róbert Arpáš (Nitra): Congress of young agrarian generation 1933

Matej Hanula (Bratislava): Raising of peasants' public awareness and its role in propagation of education and influence of agrarian party in the interwar Slovakia

*Facing the Challenges of the Interwar Economic Crisis and World War II (chaired by Jan Rychlík)*

Mihai-Dan Cirjan (Budapest): The External Limits of the Peasantist State: The Romanian Agrarian Movement and the Financial Crisis of an Eastern European State

Suzana Leček (Zagreb): „To use all opportunities“: Alternative political strategies of the

Croatian Peasant Party (1918–1941)

Ivica Šute (Zagreb): The economic leaders of Croatian Peasant Movement in interwar period (1918–1939/41)

*Agrarianism in the Aftermath of World War II* (chaired by Klaus Richter)

Tomasz Skrzyński (Nowy Sacz): The Polish Peasant Party after the departure of Stanisław Mikołajczyk (its place on the political stage, the structures) 11. 1947 – 11. 1949

Éva Cseszka (Budapest): Theoretical and political struggles between agrarian experts and the communist party in Hungary (1945–1948)

Vasil Paraskevov (Shumen): The Last Struggle: The Suppression of Agrarian Parties in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, 1944–1948

Jaroslav Rokoský (Ústí nad Labem): A prisoner's lot of agrarian politicians in Czechoslovakia after WW II

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