Communication

At the discretion of the executive editor, the ***Austrian History Yearbook*** *will publish communications relating to articles and book reviews in this journal. Letters may not exceed seven hundred fifty words for reviews and one thousand words for articles. Please submit communications in typed double-spaced form with wide margins and headed "To the Editors."*

TO THE EDITORS:

The great Czech writer Karel Čapek speaks in his study "Dvanáctero figur zápasu perem Čili Příručka písemné polemiky" (A dozen figures in a battle of the pen; or, A manual of written polemics) about twelve forms of biased polemic reviews.[1] If we add to the first of the figures an ideological designation, with which our scholarly and cultural life has been enriched during the past several decades, we come to the gist of Prof. Kansky's review of my book *K vývoji českého zemědělství na rozhraní 19. a 20. století* (On the development of Bohemian agriculture at the turn of the nineteenth century: The Agricultural Council for Bohemia, 1891–1914) [*AHY*, 22 (1991): 187–88]. Basically, I can divide his review into two parts. First, he describes the content and gives us an outline of the structure of my work. But even his description of the more general characteristics of the first chapter is, in fact, based on a sole sentence taken from the introduction. Moreover, this sentence has no connection with the Bohemian Agrarian Council, but refers instead to the social structures and their interrelationships at the time when the institution was founded. In general, it is important to emphasize that the method I used in the monograph is historical materialism, which in serious historical research is respected as one of several possible approaches to the systematic analysis of the past. Marxism, in contrast, is predominantly an ideological and political term.

The part of the book that is directly rejected by the reviewer spreads out over four chapters. The introductory

[1]Karel Čapek, *Spisy* 13 (Prague, 1984): 41–44.

pages together with some sections of the chapters that deal with the reorganization and activities of the Bohemian Agrarian Council, which comprise only four pages from about fifty, contain a specific framework that, of course, is open for discussion. But the rest constitutes an analysis of the problem that sticks to the facts from archival materials. Undoubtedly, an attentive reader will not miss the overall ambivalence of the outer shell of the monograph, which is to a certain extent a concession to the era in which the monograph was written. At the same time, the reader should not miss the proper intrinsic value of the contents and the detailed analysis of the investigated problem.

In my opinion it is reasonable to focus on the second chapter, but even there the evaluation from the point of view of historical materialism covers only about one-third of the text in contrast to the two-thirds that is a factual description of the organization of the Bohemian Agrarian Council. This is also the point where my criticism of the economic and power-holding elite of Bohemia—the bourgeoisie—conflicts with the opinions of the reviewer, who clearly has uncritical illusions about it. From archival documents that warn us against such an approach, one can mention at least the demand of the Czech department of the Agrarian Council for intervention by the army at the beginning of strikes of agricultural workers of July 1906. Documentation appears in the records of the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture in the State Central Archive in Prague, signature L 4, ref. 17 833/1906 and 21 633/1906. The reviewer views similarly the Czech-German relations in Bohemia where the contemporary search for potential areas of understanding cannot cover up the pointed character of conflict in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His final appeal for further studies is then unreal, as my view is supported by the research dealing with the administration of the Habsburg Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century by Ernst C. Hellbling and others in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 2, *Verwaltung und Rechtwesen*, (Vienna, 1975). By ignoring real historical facts and context Prof. Kansky makes it clear that he is not a historian by profession, but an economist and a geographer.

The second part of the review, which contrasts with his largely factual description of the contents, is dominated by the effort to label the monograph as a Marxist and ideological work that makes no contribution. Disqualifying a work for its method—in this case historical materialism—is surprising. As a whole, the review unfortunately has a certain bias. I analyzed the Bohemian Agrarian Council predominantly as an institution that in unprecedented ways aided the development of agriculture in the Czech lands and indirectly the agrarian movement. The monograph is consistently based on original, so far unused, archival documentation.

Of course, my book did not avoid (and at the time I wrote it, it was not possible to, otherwise it would not have been published) certain clichés in its overall approach to the problem. References to the origins of the work in the early 1980s (publication was held up because of production delays) do not alter the essence of the study or its documentation of concrete facts obtained from the archival material. These facts can hardly be controverted by ideological labels and an inquisitorial approach of the reviewer. I suggest that every reader, "Marxist" or not, is free to evaluate and judge the value of the monograph.

Jiří Šouša, Prague

Karel J. Kansky does not wish to reply.

The Executive Editor