

Review

STELLNER, František, Radek SOBĚHART, Pavel SZOBI, Marek VOCHOZKA, Marek VOKOUN. Vývoj českého vysokého ekonomického školství v letech 1945-1953 [The development of the Czech higher economics education in the years 1945-1953], 2015. Praha: Setoutbooks.cz. ISBN 978-80-86277-80-6.

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This publication by the interdisciplinary team of authors connected to František Stellner, and which consists of historians and economists alike, monitors the development of Czech higher economics education in 1945–1953. This publication is mostly substantiated on the basis of unpublished sources from the internal operations of the relevant universities in Prague, on published policy papers and study materials and on the published memoirs of contemporary witnesses or on memoirs that were documented specifically for research purposes. This publication is to be seen as a product of the current increased interest in historiographical research into Czech (Czechoslovak) tertiary education in the crucial period of change after 1945 and 1948. Simultaneously, it is also a reflection of the efforts to critically reflect on the ideological and institutional foundations of Czech tertiary education today.

The first three chapters pursue the chronological evaluation of the institutional and personnel developments of key universities and the state's policies in connection with these institutions. The first internal milestone in the period 1945–1953 was a political one, the 1948 Czechoslovak coup d'état. The second milestone (1951) was chosen in connection with the researched topic – the authors see the period starting in 1951 as being characterized by fundamental personnel changes (the elimination of Rudolf Slánský and of the structures he implemented in the functioning of universities) and later structural changes (closing down of universities, fundamental reorganization, new legislative norms, a stronger role for the ministry). The authors define 1953, the year ending the observed period, as a period characterized by the establishment of more stable structures and the clarification of the competences of the individual players in

tertiary education policy. In the same year, (among others) the University of Economics in Prague was established. In the field of economics education, the inception of this institution represents a certain symbolic milestone that ended the period of instability and of constant reorganizational changes that was typical of the post-war period.

The authors' particular interest lies in the evolution of the institutional structures of the relevant universities, the staffing policies of these institutions, their continuity and discontinuity. The authors show the openness of the system after 1945, which permitted unconventional academic career progress to some. On the basis of personnel data, they demonstrate the different notions of the individual players with regards to the functioning of the tertiary education system in the period 1945–1948. On the basis of specific steps taken against academicians, students and even universities, the authors document how, during political power interventions, the loopholes in the existing rules were exploited or how completely new rules were implemented. Over all, the authors present the tertiary economics education and its structures in the observed time period as being determined by mostly non-scientific, political factors.

The second part of this publication is a case study on the two significant institutional players in tertiary economics education whose inception is considered to mark the start of a relatively stable period after 1952/53, namely the University of Economics in Prague and the Faculty of Economics and Engineering of the Czech Technical University in Prague (FEE CTU).

The authors analyse the personnel developments at the University of Economics in Prague; they present short prosopographical studies of the key representatives, they observe their career paths, their publication and pedagogical activities, they monitor the habilitation and professorial procedures and also the experiments with new forms of study and scientific qualifications (research assistantship); they pay attention to the personnel structure, to the discussions on the internal organization and the necessity for the individual study subjects and to the (dis)continuity of the period under scrutiny with respect to both the pre-war period and the period after 1948. Even from this perspective, like in the introduction, the authors observe on the one hand the significant openness of the system and the possibility to “speed-up” careers, which stemmed from the high and urgent demand for a qualified labour force, and on the other hand, the decisive influence and dominance of political factors over expert factors when forming academic careers. According to the authors, the University of Economics in Prague can be seen (even in terms of the personnel factor) as the successor to the strongly ideologically oriented University of Political and Economic Sciences in Prague (UPES), which according to the authors explains the lower grade of political and methodological opposition from pedagogues. The authors reject the argument that the University of Economics in Prague could be seen as the successor to the University of Business CTU.

On the basis of a study of the FEE CTU (1952–1960), the authors present an experiment with a new form of curriculum for tertiary economics education, the so-called engineer-economics field inspired by the Soviet model. An analysis of the discussions at that time

about the need for such a specialization, or to the contrary, the more academic education represented by the universities, offers crucial data on the question asked at the beginning of this publication: What kind of economics was taught in the observed period, or rather, what kind should have been taught according to the players involved?

The concluding “Appendix” describes the tertiary education system in the Czech Republic today and the role of economics education within it. The integration of this into this publication should be considered as an attempt to highlight the similarities of a number of structural problems in the present and in the time period observed in the historical part of this publication. It can also be seen as a useful “intentionally created source” for future historians who in the next half-century will be evaluating the development of Czech tertiary economics education in 2016.

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