MICHAL ŠIMÁNĚ
Institute of Lifelong Learning, Mendel University in Brno, Czechia

Socialist Egalitarianism in Everyday Life of Secondary Technical Schools in Czechoslovakia during the Normalization Period (1969–89)

ABSTRACT This article focuses on the realization of official government regulations of egalitarianism policy in secondary technical schools, especially on the informal practice that was “quietly” tolerated by the communist regime. The research is based on the historiographical approach of the history of everyday life. The primary research method is the oral history method based on interviews with witnesses—teachers who worked at secondary technical schools in the period under review. Research using the oral history method is further supplemented by the study of period legislation, periodicals, and the study of archival materials obtained in the National Archives in Prague and the Brno City Archives. The study provides a unique illustration of the application of the policy of egalitarianism in the everyday life of secondary technical schools in the normalization period in Czechoslovakia. In particular, the witnesses' recollections reveal a practice toward some students that went beyond government regulations and influenced their studies in various ways, including admission procedures, dealing with disciplinary offenses, graduation, and obtaining a school-leaving certificate.

KEYWORDS socialist egalitarianism, secondary technical schools, teachers, Czechoslovakia, oral history

INTRODUCTION

The rise of socialist regimes during the 20th century in the Central and Eastern European states was accompanied by a significant change in the functioning of many areas of society in these countries. The primary role in this transformation was played by the application of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism by individual socialist governments, which were, to varying degrees, under the auspices of the Soviet Union, as its so-called satellite states. Czechoslovakia also became one of the satellite states of the Soviet Union in 1948, when the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCZ) took over all the political and administrative power in the country (McDermott, 2015, pp. 54–57).

As in the Soviet Union and other countries of the Eastern Socialist Bloc, one of the first goals of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia was to eliminate social inequalities or achieve the ideal of equality, justice, and interpersonal solidarity (Cabada & Kubát, 2007; Gerber & Hout, 1995, p. 612). Following the example of the Soviet Union and the principles of the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, the elimination of social inequalities in society was to be achieved through government policy of egalitarianism, which can be described as an ideology of socialist or radical egalitarianism (see, e.g., Arneson, 2011;

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Nielsen, 1990; Noonan, 2012). Various administrative tools of the ruling regime, ideological indoctrination, centralization of state power, and the suppression of individualism in favor of the collective were to contribute to the reduction of social inequalities (see, e.g., Parkin, 1971, pp. 141–143; Zhenzhou, 2011, pp. 431–432). In brief, inequalities should, therefore, be eliminated through top-down enactment by state apparatus.

Therefore, it is not surprising that, during the first years of socialist rule, various measures were gradually introduced to eliminate existing social and political inequalities, and class conflicts in general. In this respect, some measures—for example, reducing the prestige between the various professions by balancing their salaries—were applied. In particular, in the new conditions, the working class, in comparison with the years before the rise of socialist regimes, achieved higher wages or a more significant position and prestige than non-manual workers (Krejčí & Machonin, 1996, p. 12; Szelényi, 1987, p. 559). According to Szelényi (1987, p. 559) and Kreidl (2008, p. 28), within this policy in socialist society in general, the current traditional intergenerational transmission of social inequalities was to be cut or limited and thus lead to an ideal state of things.

One of the key areas that underwent a significant transformation in socialist Czechoslovakia since the first days of the CPCZ government was the field of education and schooling as this was one of the primary social spheres through which a new man was to be educated—respectively, a new generation of the socialist society loyal to the socialist establishment and communist ideology (see, e.g., Koutaissoff, 1953; Lunacharsky, 1982). For this reason, education and training represented an important environment where the policy of socialist egalitarianism was strongly applied. Basically, it represented one of the essential aspects of socialist education (not only) in Czechoslovakia. It involved different levels of the school system. The area of secondary vocational education, on which this article is focused, was no exception.

A significant milestone for education development in postwar Czechoslovakia was February 1948, when the CPCZ gained all political power, which it retained until 1989. Therefore, the future direction of education was determined exclusively by the ruling apparatus of the CPCZ during those years. Particularly in the first decade of the socialist regime, in the field of education, the CPCZ quite uncritically imitated the school system of the Soviet Union. Acceptance of the Soviet vision of building socialism led to massive industrialization, especially in the still-agrarian areas, and to the strengthening of the engineering, chemical, and metallurgical industries. The need for new professionals in these developing areas of the industry was also reflected in the increasing number of secondary technical schools and the importance of vocational education in general (see, e.g., Šimáně & Kamanová, 2021, pp. 277–279).

As a result, it meant the involvement of political authorities in a number of formal acts related to, for example, the selection of applicants for study at secondary or higher education institutions. Applicants were evaluated in terms of not only their educational attainment and prerequisites for further studies, but also their personal attitudes toward the ruling regime, their relationship to religion, their social background, or their parents' activities in the period before 1948 and 1938.[1] Publicly professed religious beliefs, or subscription to the ideals of the democratic First Czechoslovak Republic and, in particular, to the personality of T. G. Masaryk, or parents' activities during the First Republic in more-exposed professions (e.g., in the army) meant certain rejection of the application for study, despite the applicant's possibly excellent academic results in previous studies (see, e.g., Šimáně & Kamanová, 2020).

A new round of changes in the educational policy of the Czechoslovak state, or rather of the CPCZ, took place at the end of the 1950s in connection with the Stalinist regime and Stalin's cult of personality condemnation by Nikita Khrushchev at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the USSR in 1956. The turn of the 1950s and 1960s in Czechoslovakia is therefore characterized by a gradual abandonment of blind imitation of the Soviet system and an orientation toward the real needs of Czechoslovak society. The first changes manifested mainly in the state's economic activities, but, over time, they also presented themselves in other areas of Czechoslovak society (for more details, see, e.g., Fawn, 2004). Education was no exception. However, it did not mean the abandonment of communist ideals. That is evidenced by the formulation of the mission of Czechoslovak schools in the new Education Act of 1960. According to it, schools were to "educate the youth and workers in the spirit of the scientific worldview, Marxism-Leninism . . . the enthusiastic builders of communism" (Zákon č. 22/1960, 1960). As a result of this act, for example, the original 11-year secondary schools disappeared completely; secondary technical schools, secondary vocational schools, grammar schools, and other kinds of schools were gradually introduced into secondary education. This system of education was established during the 1960s; it even survived the turbulent period of the so-called Prague Spring in 1968 and the onset of the so-called normalization (see, e.g., Bischof, Karner & Ruggenthaler, 2010; Segert, 2008). Although the normalization period meant a return to previous practices—that is, the state before the reform movement—the education system itself did not change. Thus, further significant changes came after November 1989 with the fall of the communist regime in the so-called transition period.[2]

The education reforms set during the socialist era in Czechoslovakia were explicitly motivated by the reduction of inequalities in access to education (Simonová, 2010, p. 35). Several government measures had to serve this purpose. First and foremost, it was a matter of centralizing the entire school system, where, for example, private and church schools were abolished and, on the contrary, unified education (*jednotné školství*) was introduced. Furthermore, there was a significant quantitative expansion, especially of secondary education, which opened up educational opportunities for a broader range of students

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[1] The period of the so-called First Czechoslovak Republic of 1918–38 (also known as the pre-Munich Republic) was characterized by the emphasis on democratic and republican principles.

[2] In this context, it can be noted that the CPCZ was not abolished after 1989, as in other states with socialist experience, but transformed into a new party called the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (CPBM). Although it has never become a dominant force in society, and since 1989 has never had any real power to enforce the main points of its political program (including school issues), it was part of the Chamber of Deputies until the autumn 2021 elections, when it did not gain a single seat for the first time since the Czech Republic was founded.

than in the years before 1948. Also, the education fees (tuition fees) were abolished, and free education with various study scholarship programs was introduced. Another significant measure was the introduction of state control over the admission process to the secondary and tertiary level of education through the introduction of a quota system. Part of this system, however, was also taking into account the cadre profile (*kádrový profil*) of parents; for example, their origin, Communist Party affiliation, and their possible religious beliefs were examined. Nonreligious pupils and students of the working class or peasant origin who were engaged in CPCZ organizations were especially popular in this respect (cf. Hanley, 2001, p. 25; Szelényi, 1987, p. 559; Zounek et al., 2017a, p. 494).

From this point of view, a number of the above-mentioned measures intended to eliminate education inequalities created several completely new institutionalized and legitimized forms of inequality. In this context, Wong (1998, p. 2) writes about the reverse-discrimination policies in schooling and work. In other words, these were situations where, on the one hand, the interests of previously oppressed groups of the population were protected, but, on the other hand, this "protection" in practice meant the oppression of other groups. In socialist Czechoslovakia, achieving equality in education thus led to the disadvantage of those who did not meet, for example, the political or ideological criteria of communism (see Matějů & Řeháková, 1992, p. 615). However, as Wong (1996, p. 62) points out in his text, in addition to these institutionalized and legitimized forms of new inequalities, there were many hidden, illegitimate, but quietly accepted forms of inequality recognized by the Communist Party, such as different access to quality consumer goods or housing. One can assume that a similar situation prevailed in the area of Czechoslovak socialist education. In other words, in addition to the existing legitimate practice of enforcing individual legislative norms of socialist equality policy in education, which indirectly introduced new inequalities, there was a practice that went beyond the letter of these laws with the tacit consent of the communist power. However, the way this practice, both legitimate and "hidden," manifested itself in the everyday reality of secondary technical schools in Czechoslovakia is still rather enshrouded and concerns many other topics in the contemporary history of pedagogy and education in countries with socialist experience.

In this respect, that may come as a surprise to some readers. After all, the everyday life of (not only) ordinary people during the communist period in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in various contexts (including the topic of inequality) has been studied for many years, as Zakharova notes (2013, p. 217) and also in texts by Elena Osokina, Elena Zubkova, Igor Narsky, Sergei Zhuralev, Malgorzata Mazurek, and others. The collapse of the Eastern Socialist Bloc in the early 1990s and the opening of archives in the countries with socialist experience represented for historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and other specialists a kind of "firsthand" bonanza for research on socialist societies, comparable to the opening of archives after the fall of the Nazi Third Reich, as Fitzpatrick (2000, p. 1) states. However, the study of socialist education and pedagogy through the lens of the history of everyday life in the former Eastern Socialist Bloc countries has long been rather neglected among scholars. It is only in recent years that we can see more activity in this field as well (see, e.g., the publications of Kestere & Kalke, 2018; Kudláčová & Šebová, 2019; Rahi-Tamm & Saleniece, 2016; Somogyvári, 2019; Zounek et al., 2017a, 2018).

That also applies to the very topic of egalitarianism in socialist education in Czechoslovakia. There is a large body of sociological research, in particular, related to my study, whether focused on socialist Czechoslovakia or other countries with a socialist experience (e.g., Hanley, 2001; Kraaykamp & Nieuwbeerta, 2000; Krejčí & Machonin, 1996; Kreidl, 2004, Wong, 1998).[3] However, these are mostly studies that look at the issue from a macrosociological point of view. They focus on the quantitative solution of the question of whether the policy of socialist egalitarianism in the field of education actually provided equal opportunities for all, represented a change in the educational structure of society and therefore in the social structure of society, and so on. I approach the topic differently.

My text does not intend to continue sociological discussions on the questions of whether and to what extent the advocated policy of socialist egalitarianism applied in education actually, for example, reduced social and educational inequalities in socialist society, but to supplement these discussions with a historical-pedagogical perspective on the everyday reality of the application of this policy in the field of Czechoslovak vocational education and, at the same time, to contribute to the general understanding of the functioning of education in socialist regimes, as well as the functioning of socialist regimes as such.

METHODOLOGY

The main goal of the study is therefore to capture and interpret the manifestations of the policy of socialist egalitarianism of the ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the everyday life of secondary technical schools.[4] I focus on how the implementation of the policy of egalitarianism in the environment of secondary technical schools manifested itself. At the same time, I focus not only on how the official government regulations of this policy were fulfilled but also on whether and how practices not implied by official government regulations but "quietly" tolerated by the communist power were applied. I look at this issue from the point of view of the teachers of the time who worked at the given type of school during the period of socialist Czechoslovakia.[5]

My research is limited to the years 1969–89, a period that, in Czech (Czechoslovak) historiography, is referred to as the period of normalization. The years of normalization are characterized by a new tightening of the political situation. That happened due to the events of the second half of the 1960s, which are characterized by the liberation of the socialist regime, some liberalization (e.g., abolition of censorship, orientation toward the market economy), and culminated in efforts to reform the whole system according to the motto "socialism with a human face." In general, the goal was a greater escape from the "binding" policy of the Soviet Union and a certain effort for autonomous development. This effort intensified in 1968 by the events of the so-called Prague Spring. As is well known, however, reform efforts were violently suppressed as early as in August 1968 by the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops (Williams, 1997; Zounek et al., 2018, pp. 324–325). The CPCZ and its subordinate organizations soon got rid of reformists. The result was, in general, a return to the more orthodox principles applied by the communist government before the Prague Spring and the time of liberation; that lasted until the Velvet Revolution in 1989, which is associated with the end of socialist Czechoslovakia.

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[3] Many of these publications are based on data from extensive research by Treiman and Szelényi (1993).

[4] According to the international classification ISCED11, these are schools that offer a complete secondary vocational education completed by the school-leaving examination (ISCED11 level 354).

[5] I am aware that a deeper knowledge of the studied issues would be provided by the view of the students of that time (or other actors in school life) of secondary technical schools; however, due to the need to narrow the focus of my project, I focused only on former teachers or school leaders.

The research data presented in this study were obtained as part of a broader research project focused on secondary technical education in socialist Czechoslovakia. The project's main aim is to describe and interpret the everyday life of secondary technical schools in socialist Czechoslovakia through the eyes of the teachers of these schools. The project is based on the historiographical current referred to as the history of everyday life. This can be understood as the study of the life destinies and a wide range of activities within the everyday actions of those who often stood behind so-called great events or phenomena, that is, ordinary people. To put it another way, it is the study of the routine, but also unexpected activities of often anonymous individuals or groups of people that lead to political or event history, the so-called macrohistory (for more, see, e.g., Eckert & Jones, 2002). In relation to the topic of this particular text, it is an attempt to capture and interpret the manifestations of the socialist egalitarianism policies of the ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in everyday life of secondary technical schools.

The research data of the whole project were mainly obtained through the oral history method. The preference for this method is also based on the fact that the availability of traditional sources of historical knowledge (archival materials) for the field of Czechoslovak education from 1948 to 1989 is very limited. As stated, for example, by Zounek, Šimáně, and Knotová (2017b), archival materials related to socialist education are still unprocessed in the archives of the Czech Republic and essentially inaccessible to the general public or only in a very difficult way and in limited quantities. Another problem may be the problematic credibility of the information contained in these archival materials. As Konopásek (1999, pp. 24–26) points out, it is necessary to remember that, in totalitarian societies, many data or documents were not produced officially or were "edited" to serve political purposes or propaganda. Kotkin (1995) literally writes in this context about publicly expressing loyalty by knowing how to "speak Bolshevik" (p. 220). They can, therefore, be highly misleading. Therefore, from this point of view, Konopásek (1999, pp. 24–26) claims that, apart from a highly critical approach to such materials, the only way to empirically approach the understanding of important characteristics of totalitarian regimes is to study the life stories of the actors of a given period. One method of capturing these life stories is the oral history method.

> According to Vaňek and Mücke (2015), we can understand the method as a series of sophisticated but evolving and refinement practices through which the researcher in the

> humanities and social sciences gains new knowledge, based on oral communication with people who have been participants or witnesses to an event, process, or period being researched, or people whose individual experiences, attitudes and opinions can enrich the researcher's knowledge of them or the researched problem in general. (p. 14)

In oral-historical interviews with witnesses (of a certain event, process, or period), a new historical source is created with the participation of both the witness and the researcher, which brings new knowledge of the past and new interpretive perspectives (Vaňek & Houda, 2016).

In addition to new interpretive perspectives, however, the oral history method has—like any other method of researching the past—some limitations, as is evidenced by a number of discussion papers expressing a certain disdain for the oral history method. In some cases, it is even equated with historical myths (see, e.g., Dejung, 2008; Tumblety, 2013). In other words, a number of historians point to the distortions that must necessarily occur during the process of narration. Further, for example, the concern is expressed that the use of the oral history method promotes the subjective significance of contemporary witnesses. According to critics of this method, human memory can never achieve objectivity because of its individuality and selectivity.

However, the stories that the interviewees describe in their narratives cannot be understood as an attempt to provide historical truth but rather as an attempt to identify themselves within the event or process being described. As a matter of fact, we are all witnesses to events in our lives that we reflect on and give meaning to. Despite these potential limitations, the data collected should not be seen as a "distortion" of the past but rather as a mediation. Memory, in this sense, does not necessarily objectively describe the event under study. In particular, it serves us to reconstruct and understand a person's actions in a given situation or understand the event itself, which we would not have known otherwise (Ferreira & Mota, 2013, p. 714; Gardner, 2003, pp. 178–181). The eyewitness's account can be seen as one more source that reveals to the historian how people thought about certain things, whether it's about food, housing, school, or the political situation (Dejung, 2008).

The fundamental contribution of oral history to the knowledge of contemporary history is seen in the fact that it creates a new historical source that can be used not only in the context of the given research but also in other research. In addition, interviews have the advantage that the historian can ask witnesses about different topics or ask for clarification of certain ambiguities or contradictions. The informational value of the new source is thus greatly enhanced.

Within the framework of the whole project, I have so far conducted a total of 39 interviews with 21 interviewees—teachers of vocational and general subjects who worked at secondary technical schools in the former South Moravian Region,[6] which was one of the largest regions of socialist Czechoslovakia during the period of normalization. Mostly, I conducted two interviews with each of the narrators. The first interview with each respondent was based on the respondent's biographical narrative, into which I intervened minimally, typically only in the form of follow-up questions. The questions concerned both personal and professional life. The second interview took the form of a dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee. The content of these interviews was based both on pre-prepared questions related to the aims of the project and on the results of the first interview.

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[6] Based on the territorial division of Czechoslovakia according to the Act of 1960 (Zákon č. 36/1960, 1960).

All interviews were recorded on a dictaphone and then transcribed verbatim and anonymized. Interview transcripts were analyzed in the Atlas.ti software environment, which is primarily designed for qualitative data analysis. In particular, the first step of my analysis was carried out through the so-called condensation method (see Thompson, 2000, pp. 248–253) or through thematic analysis based on open coding, as described in, for example, Flick (2006). The condensation method is also commonly used to analyze qualitative data in educational sciences (see Zounek et al., 2017b, p. 60). In this way, during the interview analysis, I "separated" different messages and obtained data on the expected themes but also completely new, unexpected ones. I then proceeded to the so-called indexing of the transcript, that is, forming a list of individual elements of the interview such as dates, facts, and specifics of the narrator's account.

Through the above-described analysis of the interviews, I also obtained data related to the topic of this article. Specifically, the data used in the article come from 14 oral history interviews I conducted between 2019 and 2021. The narrators of these 14 interviews were seven witnesses (one male and six female) aged 62–81. They were former teachers who worked before 1989 in these types of secondary technical schools: gastronomy and economics school, agricultural school, industrial school, technical (engineering) school, and art school.

Although the oral history method represents the primary method of my research, I supplemented it partly by studying contemporary legislation; and one contemporary periodical[7] focused on secondary vocational education.

In the analysis (both of periodicals and journals of the Ministry of Education), I used the content analysis method, which is specifically designed to analyze the content of communications of any kind (Disman, 2011, pp. 166–170).

To a limited extent, I also use some archival materials in my text. These are from the National Archives in Prague and the Brno City Archives. In the study of archival materials, I proceeded using traditional methods of historical research (see Zwettler, Vaculík & Čapka, 1996). In particular, I used mostly the direct method, whose principle lies in obtaining historical facts by directly examining (studying) the source in which the information is directly contained.

THE PARTY POLICY

The invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia in August 1968 strongly marked further development in the field of promoting the policy of egalitarianism in secondary technical schools. Not surprisingly, there was an almost immediate return to the system that operated in schools before the Prague Spring. The role of the teacher as the "eyes and ears" of the communist government promoting the ideas of Marxism-Leninism strengthened. The teacher had to identify again "with the fundamental interests of the working class, with the irreconcilability with all that stood in the way of the struggle of the working class; with every form of the petty bourgeoisie [*maloměšťáctví*], individualism, elitism, nationalism, and liberalism" (Hudec, 1971, p. 147). In general, the teacher had to be a decisive factor in the education of the new generation that should leave school as "politically aware citizens of the socialist state, for which scientific worldview and Marxism-Leninism became their creed" (Hudec, 1971, p. 148). In the whole field of education, according to a 1971 report by the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CC CPCZ), the course was restored to prevent the gradual revival of the old school system of the pre-Munich Czechoslovakia and re-created the thorough "democratization" of education eliminating social and class discrimination that was severely disrupted in 1968 (Zpráva o vývoji, 1971, pp. 3, 9).

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[7] The journal *Vocational School* was published in 1948–90.

Class Origin

For this reason, the class background of the students was on the agenda again. That is evidenced, for example, by the directives of the then Ministry of Education on the admission procedure for secondary technical schools, during which emphasis had to be put on

> class and social structure of our socialist society and proportionally ensure the social composition of students admitted to secondary schools, especially to create conditions for full employment of gifted children from working families and cooperative peasants [*družstevních rolníků*] . . . to take into account the needs of economic sectors, given by uneven territorial distribution, aiming at the most efficient use of high school graduates . . . according to the established state plan for the development of the national economy. (Směrnice o přijímání ke studiu, 1970, pp. 21–22)

My witness Lada, for example, recalls the need to take into account the class and social composition of students admitted to secondary technical schools according to the conceptions of the communist regime:

> When a person wanted to go to secondary school, for example, not only his grades were decisive but also the so-called origin was crucial. That means, I don't know, if he was from the working class, dad worked at the lathe or something like that. Or was a peasant, that is, in agriculture. So those were the moments that actually meant that if the person studied with good results but didn't just comply with that . . . the door was simply closed for him. And if the teacher wanted to harm the student, he had the opportunity.

Her memories show that the decisive factor in this respect was not the student's talent, previous study results, and possible ability to continue the studies, but the class origin (*třídní původ*). In this context, Lada's remarks on the role and opportunities of the teacher are also intriguing. In principle, if the teacher wanted to harm the student, he had an opportunity. Actually, however, in this respect, teachers did not have many options to intervene, help the student, or, conversely, do harm. Evidence of this can be seen, for example, in the former teacher Klára's memory of one of the admission procedures, in which she participated as a member of the commission: "There was a girl from Hodonín. In her papers was written: 'I do not recommend it.' The one who tested her was upset; he said, 'such a clever girl, we can see that she is interested, I would love to have her here, but we must tell her that we do not accept her.'" The decision to accept or reject someone for admission to a secondary school was based not only on the application form submitted by the principal of the primary school from which the student applied but also on some recommendation of the District Committee of the Communist Party. These recommendations were very often based on ideological criteria. So it was not the teachers themselves, as Klára proves again: "There was simply one sentence: the statement of the school principal—I recommend, the statement of the ideological secretary—I do not recommend, and when there was I do not recommend, there was no way how to change it . . . even if she were as smart as a whip, they wouldn't accept her."

In the previous case, we do not know what was behind the rejection made by the ideological secretary. However, the following memories of Olga, a teacher of descriptive geometry, reveal much in this context:

> I went to study engineering. . . . Many other children went there because they were not accepted where they wanted to go, for example for political reasons, as their parents were expelled from the Communist Party, or, I do not know, they did not agree with the occupation [invasion of Warsaw Pact troops]. So we had a few kids like that in class there. We had a classmate who came from an aristocratic family; he wanted to study history but wasn't accepted; he was compromised. One classmate wanted to study pharmacy, the class teacher even gave her a recommendation, but her father was expelled from the Communist Party—so we had about four such children in the class.

Thus, not only did the absence of workers' or peasants' origin play a role, but so did belonging to an "undesirable" group of the population. As Olga's narration shows, the aristocratic past of the student or their ancestors played an important role, as well as the fact that one of the parents was expelled from the CPCZ and thus became generally untrustworthy within the socialist regime (see also, e.g., Kraaykamp & Nieuwbeerta, 2000, p. 93; McDermott, 2015, pp. 156–159). In particular, the last option in the period of normalization played a significant role. The normalization regime relatively consistently punished Communist Party members who held reform positions during the Prague Spring and subsequently criticized the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops. In this regard, for example, Wong (1996, p. 65) states that about 500,000 of its members left the CPCZ during the first years of normalization. Evidence of this can also be seen in the memory of Ludmila, an economics teacher, who remembers her youth: "and so they fired him, and then I had problems with that, too."

However, working-class or peasant origin did not always represent an advantage. This is evidenced by the story of my interviewee Michaela, who comes from a peasant family. The "problem," however, was that her father "was one of the most prominent peasants in the village—her father did not want to join the cooperative [*družstvo*], so he refused to sign the application. . . . He was arrested and imprisoned for a short time." This episode also affected Michaela's life many years later, when she wanted to apply as a teenager for secondary school. However, the class teacher plainly announced to her what her possibilities were: "You are not applying for any school because we are required to send you to the agricultural school in Boskovice; you will not get anywhere else." So Michaela started attending the school, where they noticed her talent and recommended her to apply for secondary technical school. However, after applying, she received a rejection: "We do not accept you, no explanation, nothing, no justification, we do not accept." However, Michaela was not satisfied with a stern rejection and personally met with the headmaster of the secondary school to get an explanation why they did not want to accept her. Instead of getting an answer, however, the director provided a rather unscrupulous announcement: "You will go to the cooperative, you will go to the cowshed and you will work in the cowshed" (Michaela).

Michaela's story, as well as the above-mentioned memories of my interviewees, shows that, in general, decisions were made according to criteria that could not be influenced by one's own will and effort. In this regard, children also had to carry the consequences of their parents' actions, in which they were, if at all, only passive participants. Respectively, as my other witness, Rita, claims: "They punished. They punished the parents through their children." For example, the door to further education was closed for Michaela "only" because her father, although from the peasant class, belonged among the kulaks and did not want to voluntarily hand over his property to the United Cooperative Farm (*jednotné zemědělské družstvo*). However, she could hardly have done anything about his decision, because, at that time, she was only a year old. Similarly, the children of former private individuals were ostracized, such as the children of factory owners and also those whose parents owned small craft workshops or worked in the church environment, and so on (for more, see, e.g., Nečasová, 2020).

Quota System

One of the other areas that those interested in studying at a secondary technical school could not influence by their own will and study abilities was the quota system for the placement of 15-year-olds and high school and university graduates. The quota system, or scheduled numbers (*směrná čísla*), was closely related to the economic development of socialist Czechoslovakia. As in many other states with a socialist establishment, it was based on central planning and most often took the form of five-year plans (see, e.g., Žídek, 2019). It is therefore not surprising that one of the plans for the development of the Czechoslovak economy was for the preparation and deployment of qualified workers. During the normalization period, such plans were a high priority because, as stated in a document of the CC CPCZ Secretariat from 1974:

> the long-term adverse demographic development has fundamentally determined the scope of the plan's resources. Given this fact, it is therefore necessary to pay increased attention to the rational distribution of youth resources to cover the development needs of individual sectors of the national economy as much as possible. (Zpráva o rozmístění, 1974, p. 1)

The unfavorable demographic development that accompanied the normalization period and its impact on secondary vocational education in this context is recalled, by Lada:

> Then there was the decline in those students. And the schools didn't have enough that year [1983] of those students. There were plumbers and mechanics there. And the plumbers and others, those guys stopped applying there. So, even though it was strictly regulated, there was a certain number of places in grammar schools, a certain number was in the technical schools, and the rest of them were actually shared by the vocational schools. So that's how it worked.

The plans of the Ministry of Education clearly stated in this respect how many students could be accepted to secondary technical schools. For example, in 1973, the total number of students accepted to secondary technical schools in the Czech part of then Czechoslovakia was set at a maximum of 45,000. Interestingly, the Ministry of Education had another 1,000 posts set aside that year as a "reserve for resolving difficulties in dealing with objections to not being accepted to study" (Zpráva o rozmístění, 1974, p. 8). As we can see from the document, that reserve was exhausted because 46,526 students were admitted to secondary technical schools in that year.

Within the quota system, the monitoring of the class origin of individual applicants or the Communist Party affiliation of their parents was not neglected. For example, about 66% of the students admitted to Brno secondary schools in 1974–76 came from the working or peasant environment. In the same period, about 58% of students in the same period had at least one parent who was a member of the CPCZ (Příprava školního roku, 1976, p. 8).

However, during the normalization period, the quota system allowed the ruling Communist Party to apply its rules and principles consistently in choosing suitable candidates for secondary technical schools only partially. For most of this period, it had to deal with a dilemma in which, on the one hand, the Czechoslovak economy developed due to technical progress, and on the other hand, due to the demographic situation, it lost human resources, which it could use within this development. The regime, as mentioned above, was able, through its official regulations and authorities, to prevent "undesirable" people from studying, but only if the economic plan or the necessary quotas was fulfilled. The proof can again be found in one of the memories of my narrators. Specifically, the teacher of technical subjects, Lada, who, after an unsuccessful admission procedure in 1972 to the grammar school, tried other entrance exams in the same year, this time at a secondary technical school:

> So I actually did the exams for the chemical technical school, and they didn't accept me there. . . . In the third round, I therefore applied to a high school of mechanical engineering, where . . . they opened a class where they wanted more girls because they needed draftswomen [*kresličky*] . . . and no one wanted to study for it. It was already clear there that it was a difficult school, and the children were simply not very interested in it. And they needed them [draftswomen] for that industry because there were scheduled numbers.

Her memory is interesting from several points of view. First of all, it is interesting that Lada participated in the third round of the admission procedure for secondary school. First, she applied for a grammar school, then a secondary chemical school, and finally to a secondary engineering school. However, according to the admission directive of the time, that was not officially possible. The directive clearly stated that an applicant could apply for only two secondary schools in their application (see Směrnice, jimiž se mění a doplňuje směrnice ministerstva, 1972, p. 34). The third round therefore had to be announced as exceptional. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any evidence for this claim so far. I can therefore only assume that this was the case. However, it is not hard to figure out the reason for announcing this extraordinary admission process. After all, as the second part of Lada's memory suggests, no one applied for school because it was generally perceived as one where studying is difficult. One can therefore assume that, in the background of the admission of Lada to the secondary engineering school, there was a necessity to fulfill the plan and quotas set by the Ministry of Education.

BEYOND THE LETTER OF THE LAW

So far, in my text, I have tried to depict how the official principles of the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia were implemented in the environment of secondary technical schools, which had to contribute to the elimination of social inequalities and the achievement of the ideal of equality, justice, and interpersonal solidarity in education. In addition to these legitimate principles and rules, however, several others barely had legal support in the normalization socialist establishment. At secondary technical schools, as is clear from the memories of my witnesses, there existed, for example, favoritism toward selected students or corrupt behavior on the part of teachers and the management of individual schools.

Favoritism

Favoritism can be generally understood as favoring or prioritizing selected individuals in the provision of certain services that should be available on the principle of equality. Even in the environment of secondary technical schools in the period of normalization in socialist Czechoslovakia, this was not a rare phenomenon. Favoritism during the study, from the admission procedure to the final exam—the so-called school-leaving examination—was experienced mainly by students whose parents were members of the CPCZ. After all, as Lada claims, for example: "It wasn't about, you can do it yourself, you can make it, you can achieve something when you study, but if you are a member of the Party, you will be fine."

As Wong (1998, p. 18) describes, membership of the parents in the Communist Party was the only but probably the most relevant form of social capital in socialist countries. It was, therefore, not uncommon for the citizens of socialist Czechoslovakia to solve their individual and family problems and needs through contacts in the CPCZ or at least by seeking and mobilizing support from Communist Party officials. In many cases, CPCZ members thus gained significant advantages over non-members.

At the same time, the favoritism toward students could already take place during the admission procedure to secondary technical schools. For example, Klára recalls: "They said it about my friend that she wouldn't get to secondary school if her father weren't an inspector and a prominent communist." A more specific experience is illustrated by another of my interviewees, Rita, a former teacher of the secondary school of economics and services: "The boy, for example, said . . . they will accept me, my father is in Královopolská [engineering plant in Brno] political function, he is a big prominent official [*funkcionář*], done. . . . He was accepted even with poor grades."

In this context, it is interesting to see how the favoritism toward selected candidates was ensured during the admission procedure. Alan remembers one of the possible ways it could happen: "During the normalization, it looked like this—the student came, there was a table downstairs and there he got a number and the student, the adept, he kept the number all day. If someone wanted . . . and had to push him through [in the sense of supporting him to be successful], he had to find out what his number was."

A similar procedure was followed in the evaluation during the whole study of the students. In this respect, Alan recalls the situation of some of the students at his school:

> If the person had bad grades, you could help him there. . . . We were getting points, well, points for homework, for revision tests, end-of-term tests, etc. You could get, for example, 0 to 15 points, I don't remember it well anymore, so 13 to 15 points was A; but basically, everything was graded . . . well, and someone should have received eight or ten points, and if someone wanted to help him, he might have been given twelve.

However, there was a difference compared to the grading during the admission procedure. According to Alan, several tests of the pupils had to be archived for a long time. Therefore, the teachers could not, for example, due to a possible inspection by the school inspectorate, push too hard concerning their help in the evaluation: "It was not possible, when it was entirely wrong, for someone to give fifteen points when the person achieved eight or five. Well, he couldn't do that. He could have given him two or three extra points."

Another situation, however, was the oral exams. Rita recalls the course of oral exams:

> And there was Mr. M.; he was the ideological secretary of the District Committee of the Communist Party. He, therefore, studied economics in a distance program. There were selected people who simply granted him grades, wrote his grades down into the credit book. When I was the headmaster [after the Velvet Revolution], I looked at it, yes, so I saw in the catalog who signed it, so it was the deputy director, the chairman of the Communist Party, and one economist, and they took turns at all the exams.

In the case of oral examination within individual subjects, therefore, only selected teachers, acquainted with the whole situation, examined the pupils, and they could pass the exams without major problems during the study. Rita's memory is also interesting from another point of view. It reveals that, apart from the children of various communist functionaries, the functionaries themselves usually studied at secondary technical schools. And that was within different forms of study according to the terminology of alternative forms of study, such as the above-mentioned distance learning, but also evening courses or study along with employment (Boháč & Šulcová, 1979, p. 54). Quite succinctly, Alan describes the reasons for the participation of representatives of various functions in socialist bodies and enterprises in some of the alternative forms of study:

> Maybe it was on behalf of the company, for example, he worked in public relations of the company. . . . And, maybe, the man had a good [cadre] profile so they would make it the head of the department, but he needed to have this kind of school. Otherwise, he couldn't become the head. So they supported him by giving him some graces [*úlevy*], and he just had to get through it like this for five years.

These were mostly loyal people, especially trusted by the CPCZ, who, however, needed to complete their secondary vocational education with a secondary school diploma due to their career growth. That again provided an opportunity for favoritism from the teachers and the management of secondary technical schools, as Rita recalls:

> These were people who were functionaries but didn't have adequate qualifications. . . . And they needed the certificate. They may have had many years of practice, but they needed the paper. . . . You know, for example, the secretary of the District Committee of the CPCZ, so it got about that, well, he needs to complete the qualification, he is a functionary, but he doesn't have adequate education, so they were seeking how to get the diploma, well that was it . . . and, in the end, they got their certificate there.

As the memories of my interviewees imply, it was probably no exception that the favoritism accompanied the selected students basically from the admission procedure to the final exam, that is, graduation. For example, the above-mentioned ideological secretary of the CPCZ District Committee, Mr. M., had an easier way to pass this school-leaving examination, as Rita recalls: "Well, and M. was taking the school-leaving exam [*maturitní zkouška*], and he even boasted that the only thing he knew was Sholokhov and that he drew this topic for the exam. . . . The examiners simply slipped him Sholokhov." In other words, the examiners probably agreed with this student on a specific question, which they subsequently slipped him during the school-leaving exam. This concluded his "successful" studies at a secondary technical school and at the same time enabled further career growth.

An interesting chapter in connection with the monitoring of acts of favoritism toward selected students of secondary technical schools in socialist Czechoslovakia is the dealing with disciplinary offenses of students. In this regard, Klára, for example, recalls dealing with disciplinary offenses of pupils: "Disciplinary problems? There weren't any. . . . When there was a classification meeting, and someone complained about a student, the headmaster said, 'I'm not going to the regional committee and saying how many behavior problems we've had, I'm not!'" In the next part of my interview, Klára explains other reasons apart from the headmaster's reluctance to explain the reduced grades for behavior at the Regional Committee of the Communist Party. "We sent a boy to a drunk tank [detention center for intoxicated people—*záchytka*]. He would normally have reduced grades for the behavior. But he [the headmaster] wouldn't allow it. He wouldn't let that happen because he didn't know which of the favored brats he would punish." The headmaster was simply afraid that he would punish one of the students whose parents held important positions in the Communist Party.

Corruption and Cheating

Favoritism at secondary technical schools was not the only conduct that went beyond the school legislation at the time. In this sense, according to the testimonies of my interviewees at secondary technical schools, for example, there were also corrupt practices supplemented by various frauds. Again, this was not a rare phenomenon for the socialist regime in Czechoslovakia. In fact, it occurred and took different forms in all areas of society at the time, including education (Naxera, 2015).

After all, as Rita aptly put it concerning the favoritism toward selected students in secondary technical schools: "That wasn't for free, of course, there was always some kind of bribe, people said he asked half-a-scrap [slang expression for bribes—*škvarek*] and then the whole scrap, but no one knew how much half-a-scrap is and how much scrap is." Bribes in various forms and amounts occurred on virtually any occasion related to studying at a secondary technical school, that is, from the admission procedure, throughout the whole study to the issuing of the school-leaving certificate.

In this respect, Alan recalls one attempt to bribe him during the admission procedure: "Well, I personally experienced the following incident, a father from South Moravia came there . . . and he made me accept ten liters of wine, yeah. I said: 'I don't want it; I absolutely can't guarantee that your daughter will get here. Sir, look . . . if she isn't good enough, then it just won't work.'" Regional affiliation seems to have played a role in such "small" bribery attempts. South Moravia was a well-known wine region in Czechoslovakia.

Similarly, students could offer, for certain benefits, various less accessible products (scarce goods [*podpultové zboží*]) from various state-owned enterprises or from abroad. As Rita recalls:

> Boys from Slušovice [at the time of socialism, famous united agricultural cooperative] were bringing my colleague different types of hard-to-obtain goods, such as English bacon, and another day they brought sausages. . . . It was in Slušovice; it wasn't like that here—the boys from Slušovice studied here, but they didn't have to do anything at all.

As Rita then goes on to point out, the students from this company, by importing scarce goods from the Slušovice to the teachers and school management, essentially ensured a smooth passage through their studies. Literally, "they were promised that they had four years of guaranteed quiet study, without any problems" (Rita).

However, bribes for various benefits provided to selected students did not have to take the form of hard-to-obtain goods. In some cases, it could be enough to just build friendly relationships, especially with CPCZ political officials, whose services could be used sometime in the future. That is revealed, for example, when Rita talks about the principal of the secondary technical school where she worked: "He had thought it through well. . . . He did what they wanted to hear, and helped them as much as possible, and they benefited from him and he from them." It was a mutually beneficial relationship. We do not know what exact benefits the principal of this school received from his contacts, but as the following statement shows, we know what it was necessary to do to build socially beneficial relationships:

> When he left, and I started [as the headmistress of the same school after 1989] . . . for example with one pupil, they contacted me through the family and asked if he graduated because [his parents were getting divorced and the mother-in-law wanted to know. . . . I found out that he only finished the third year, but he received the final report [*maturitní vysvědčení*]; so, even such things happened. It was not registered, but he [the former director] simply issued it. (Rita)

According to Rita, there were more similarly issued unauthorized final reports, as in the cases where some students under the socialist regime graduated from a given school in an unusually short time: "There was even one distance student who completed two grades in one year. Well, it isn't possible to pass all the exams, is it?"

The memories above show that, in addition to the official line of promoting the policy of egalitarianism in secondary technical schools, which was set by the CPCZ, other rules were also enforced: rules that teachers and school managers created on their own according to their interests and needs, without any support in contemporary legislation, or without the "awareness" of the CPCZ.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The egalitarianism policy promotion in socialist Czechoslovakia in the period of normalization can be, in general, understood as one of the essential ideological tasks of the regime. After all, as Wong (1996, p. 65) states, socialist Czechoslovakia can be considered one of the most egalitarian societies within the countries of the former Eastern Socialist Bloc. It is, therefore, not surprising that secondary technical schools were one of the environments where this task was to be fulfilled. In this regard, the ruling regime used several official instruments based on both the ideas of Marxism-Leninism and the needs of the national economy. The class origin of individuals and the quota system played a decisive role in this regard. These official tools were used by the socialist government through teachers and school management, especially during the admission process. The essence of the system was the privileging of certain groups of the population, especially people with a suitable social origin and those with an adequate cadre profile. Therefore, the children of parents or, in some cases, individuals themselves (in the case of some so-called alternative forms of study) who were members of the CPCZ, were favored or at least had social contacts with CPCZ members and officials who could help them (e.g., Kreidl, 2004, p. 137; Wong, 1998, pp. 2, 18). On the contrary, children of individuals who were arrested or expelled from the CPCZ for political reasons were denied the opportunity to advance to a higher level of education, as stated by Hanley (2001, p. 26).

However, Hanley's idea in this regard is only partially valid. As some results of my research have shown, I can assume that children of "undesirable origin" were denied the choice of the focus of their further educational career rather than secondary education as such. The socialist regime in Czechoslovakia in the normalization period faced conflicting decisions in connection with vocational education. In this respect, it supports Kotkin (1995, pp. 21–22), who states that the pursuit of certain goals in the socialist establishment often contained contradictory tendencies. In other words, the very way in which socialist reforms were implemented was often at odds with the stated goals of such reform, and, at the same time, it was implemented or even circumvented or changed in unpredictable ways. Specifically in the field of secondary vocational education in Czechoslovakia, for example, while the CPCZ tried to promote its ideological principles, on the other hand, it struggled to cope with the increasing demands for human resources in the context of the development of the Czechoslovak economy. And all of this occurred in an unfavorable demographic situation, when basically the number of children, or rather the number of applicants who could apply to secondary technical schools, decreased throughout the entire normalization period. As my interviewee Lada's story showed, the regime was forced to make some compromises in this light. For example, the regime (even by violating its own rules) additionally allowed students, who were initially/originally denied for further study mostly because of ideological reasons, to study at some types of secondary technical schools. And one can assume that students with a similar fate as, for example, Lada thus gained the opportunity to achieve a full secondary education completed by the school-leaving exam. Although it was a school that was not one of her priorities, it was simply a result of fulfilling the plan set by the quota system.

Other results of my research also show—for example, the ideas of Kraaykamp and Nieuwbeerta (2000, p. 94)—that thanks to membership in the CPCZ, some individuals of Czechoslovak society were able to get easier access to economic and cultural privileges. In my case, to complete a full secondary vocational education. My interviewees show that the significant involvement of parents of students in the CPCZ or being a student (in the case of some alternative forms of study) in a significant position in some of the CPCZ bodies or a state enterprise, facilitated not only admission to secondary technical school but also a smooth passage through studies ending in the successful acquisition of a school-leaving certificate. Of course, this was not possible without significant support and favoritism from the teachers and the management of the school where these "exposed" pupils studied. No official regulations were providing special "reliefs" for such pupils. Thus, teachers and school managers supported these students out of their convictions and with certain intentions. After all, as Kotkin (1995, p. 246) states, in socialist culture, there were several different "privileges" that could be gained or lost. In other words, there was always something available that someone else did not have, as long as one managed to gain the favor of the person who could provide it. Secondary technical education in socialist Czechoslovakia was no exception in this respect.

At this level, the environment of a secondary technical school could also become an environment full of corrupt practices and fraud. Insufficient talent, failure to master the subject content, frequent absences, disciplinary offenses, and so on were covered up in various ways for such students so that the students would eventually succeed in their studies. The reward was, subsequently, for the teachers and the school management various material gifts, as well as new social contacts for important persons from the ranks of the CPCZ, which they could use for their future benefit. As Heinzen (2016, pp. 98–99) notes, this was a behavior that accompanied socialist life to a relatively large extent. Making various deals at or beyond the edge of the law in the so-called shadow economy and criminality involved people across the social spectrum. Bribes were offered and accepted by all types of people, from farmers to workers, engineers, or pensioners needing housing, jobs, documents, or other scarce goods. Thus, applicants to study at secondary technical schools in socialist Czechoslovakia were similar to the above-mentioned types of people, and the secondary technical school represented just another institution where nepotism and clientelism were applied (cf. Matějů & Řeháková, 1992, pp. 615–617).

However, my research also brought interesting methodological moments. First of all, it should be noted that the research results are based on the statements of a limited number of interviewees. In the interviews, my witnesses tended to play the role of passive opponents of the socialist regime. Respectively, they perceived compliance with regime regulations and rules as a necessary part of the profession. None of the narrators was significantly involved in enforcing the CPCZ policy, or at least they did not express themselves in this direction. Fear of a certain “ostracization” by contemporary society, where adhering to the communist ideology is not received very positively in the Czech Republic, may also have played a role. Thus, my research also shows one of the limitations of the oral history method: in other words, the fact that the narration of witnesses may be accompanied by a kind of uncertainty or ambiguity, especially on “uncomfortable” or controversial topics, or in cases where the topic proves to be too sensitive for the narrator (e.g., Smith, 2017; Vaněk & Mücke, 2015).

For this reason, too, I tried to supplement my findings with an analysis of periodicals and available archival sources. Here, however, I came to interesting findings. Archival sources and periodicals substantially overlook this topic. In some detail, they capture only the official level of promoting the egalitarian ideology of the CPCZ in secondary technical schools—especially in the form of various information about the quota system, the number of registered applicants, their origin, family background, and so on. I have not yet found anything about issues of favoritism, corruption, or fraud that occurred in schools. I explain that by the fact that the socialist regime, of course, did not want to present such cases in the periodical press. The situation in the field of archival materials was rather surprising for me, as I would expect, for example, various complaints, and anonymous allegations. However, I have not yet found such materials in connection with the topic. It is possible that my failure is also due to the current state and availability of archival materials in the field of socialist education. The vast majority of these materials are still unprocessed and inaccessible to the general public. In other words, the information may exist, but it is still waiting to be discovered. ■

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Corresponding author email: simane@mendelu.cz

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