

The Reflection of the Bohemian Society in Diaries of Josef Kalousek



Martin Klečáček — Pavel Fabini — Luboš Velek (eds.), *Deníky Josefa Kalouska II.*, Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR; Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2016, 332 pp.

The personality of Josef Kalousek (1838–1915) is presented to the readers of this magazine in my study printed on its previous pages. Therefore, I can limit myself to the edition of his diaries extant in manuscript originals in the National Museum Archive in Prague. Only a part of them is published in this edition, however, from 8 June 1866 to 9 September 1914. This is evidently a coincidence, a historical time between two major wars that affected momentarily the lives of the inhabitants of the Bohemian Lands. Kalousek had begun to write his diary entries earlier and the editors had to explain why they began to publish their second volume. Their introductory claim that these jottings whose “immediacy and openness makes them an extraordinary source of a personal nature for understanding the life of a student from a poor family whose diligence, application, talents, and a stroke of luck got him to the top echelons of Czech society”, rings objectively true.

I should add, however, that the diaries of Kalousek describe vividly the intense relationship between the political and academic milieu in Czech national society of the time, which affected materially his sphere of activity as the first adjunct and then full professor of Bohemian history (1882, 1886) in the Czech part of Prague University. However, the entries made by Kalousek in his diary are not homogenous over time, which comes as no great surprise on such occasions. He even interrupted his entries for several years between June 1876 and August 1880 as he faced some unexpected problems in his family life and his academic career, in which he lagged behind his younger colleagues, did not advance satisfactorily after he took his higher doctorate (1871).

He recorded most intensely his experiences, insights and delicate pieces of information from the private lives of leading representatives of the Czech national society in 1866–1869. This was followed by the period of the 1880s after the division of the Prague University (1882) into a Czech and a German part the Czech academic milieu began to form as a sphere of symbolic power that set itself the goal, in the person of the philosopher T. G. Masaryk, to disentangle itself from direct dependence on Czech politics, and above all, the National (Old-Czech) Party. The loyal Old-Czech Kalousek regarded Masaryk as a “faiseur” (p. 231), that is a schemer striving to form an interest group with young university-educated scholars whom he calls pejoratively, in more than one passage, a “gang”. He believed that Masaryk aimed to “destroy the local idols” (p. 231) in order to take control with his authority not only of Czech science but also to take a leading position in Czech politics (see esp. pp. 232–240).

Whether we agree with this or not, Kalousek gives us in many passages of his text a number of welcome stimuli for development of scholarly interest in the mentality of leading Czech politicians and university intellectuals of his time. In particular, he names intentionally or unwittingly the relationship between their public presentation and their private conduct, their notions about ways of legitimise their social



ambitions, whom and why they consider allies, competitors, or enemies. In some cases Kalousek explains in what circumstances they are able to change their positions, negotiate, seek necessary or sensible compromises, or come into open conflict. It is remarkable that on these occasions he tried to capture their authentic language, though its analysis would demand a separate study. I believe that he oscillates between an effort to create a “distinctive saloon speech”, a purposeful presentation of its users, their little intrigues, and last but not least, creation of a body of information, anecdotal stories, indiscretions and rumours for those in the know, to whom they are to provide a comparative advantage, manipulate them or mislead them.

This language is frequently presented by Kalousek in the form of direct quotations, in which German-language passages appear, and French expressions sometimes included in the verbal communication of these social circles. Publications reviewed for the readers are annotated in Czech translations by the editors. Their abundant annotations contain moreover many snippets of useful information to a satisfactory professional standard. The closing name index is a paragon of its type (pp. 303–330). The edition comprises what is perhaps too brief an introduction (pp. 5–9) plus a picture and text appendix recalling the genealogy of the family of Josef Kalousek and his wife (pp. 284–285).

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