

Collectivization – Restitution – Literature: Examining the themes of *Rustic Baroque*

A transcript of the panel discussion with the author Jiří Hájíček, translator Gale A. Kirking and collectivization historian Mgr. Jiří Urban

The video is available at:

<http://youtu.be/xmDC5gIgEb8>

This video was filmed, edited, and subtitled by Real World Press/English Editorial Services. The opinions expressed in this video are those of the panelists and other participants and do not represent the opinions or policies of the American Center in Prague or the Government of the United States of America.

Sherry Keneson-Hall: I'd like to welcome to the American Center our guests, writer Jiří Hájíček, translator Gale Kirking and historian Jiří Urban who all are here to help to launch the English version of the book *Rustic Baroque*, or in Czech *Selský baroko*.

This award-winning novel takes us through a painful period in Czech history, the collectivization of agriculture. Understanding this historical period is important for us today to help us better understand the developments that are going on today in the Czech Republic, as well as people's attitudes and sentiments which can be observed today as well.

I'm sure that this discussion tonight will bring about interesting historical facts, as well as the author's approaches to this historical novel. Having both the author and the translator here is a bit of a treat because it opens up a lot of opportunities for discussion on this. I'd like to thank you all for coming again and congratulate the publisher, Real World Press, on the occasion of this English translation, and last but not least, I wish the English version the same success as the original version. Thank you all for coming.

Gale Allen Kirking: My name is Gale Kirking and I am the translator of Jiří Hájíček's *Rustic Baroque*. In addition, our Brno-based company, English Editorial Services, is the publisher of *Rustic Baroque* under our Real World Press imprint.

Joining me on the panel today are of course the author of *Rustic Baroque*, Jiří Hájíček. Jiří spent his childhood and his youth in the countryside of rural South Bohemia. He's a graduate of the University of South Bohemia and worked in the countryside as an agricultural specialist for

several years after university. He presently divides his time between working as a bank clerk and, of course, writing. Jiří Hájíček has published 7 books of prose, including 4 novels and 3 books of short stories. His latest novel, *Rybí krev*, or *Fish Blood*, was released in early 2012 and has been extremely well received by both readers and critics here in the Czech Republic. All of Mr. Hájíček's works are set in the countryside of South Bohemia.

Also joining us is Jiří Urban, who I think it is fair to say is today one of the Czech Republic's leading academic experts on the historical facts and lasting effects of the 1950s collectivization in the Czechoslovak countryside. Mgr. Urban is a research associate at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and in addition he is a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy at the University of Pardubice. At that university he also teaches a course on dealing with the country's communist past. As I mentioned, he is the author of *The Countryside under the Knout of Collectivization*, which examines the circumstances of a typical kulak trial in the 1950s.

My background is quite varied. I grew up on a small family farm in the United States in the state of Wisconsin and I was surrounded by neighbors who had names like Havlíček and Zeman and Malý, and I never had any idea what the ethnic background of these people was at that time. But I certainly know now.

Now, some of you in the audience surely know Rustic Baroque, or *Selský baroko*, either from the Czech language original or perhaps from the new translation. But just let me very briefly sketch out the story for you. The main character of the story is one Pavel Straňanský, who is a professional genealogist. And he does research quite often into family histories of some American clients who have Czech names but don't really know too much about their Czech roots. One day, Pavel is approached by a potential client, a rather dodgy character named Šrámek, who is looking to dredge up some information from the period of the 1950s that for his own personal reasons would be useful for him today.

So, with that introduction, I would like to begin by asking Mr. Urban briefly to describe for us what was collectivization? Why and how did it happen? And, while focusing especially on the actual events occurring in the 1950s and the period before the Velvet Revolution, please tell us what were the ramifications for the countryside and for the country as a whole?

Mgr. Jiří Urban: Good evening. If we are to speak about collectivization, let me introduce it is a process, in Czechoslovakia imposed with violent means, when from privately farmed countryside, a structure was created according to the Soviet model, a system of united agricultural cooperatives, state farms and state tractor stations.

What were the main idea and essentially the main intention? To gain control, supremacy over the food market. As I already mentioned, the Soviet model is probably known from the Soviet environment: similar forms of *kolkhozy* (in Czechoslovakia, united agricultural cooperatives), and *sovkhozy* (state farms), respectively, and tractor stations (in Czechoslovakia, state tractor or tractor-machinery stations).

The process in Czechoslovakia was influenced by international politics, and for the third time I have to mention the Soviet influence. If after February 1948 anyone had doubts about the direction of agricultural policy following the Soviet model, after June 1948 and the so-called resolution of the Informbiro on Yugoslavia, which said that in states which after WWII came

under the influence of the Soviet Union there is no other process for agricultural development than to collectivize according to the Soviet model.

In autumn 1948, the top members of the Communist Party were searching for a process to implement regulation and clarify terminology concerning class enemies in the countryside or capitalist elements, as Lenin addressed them in his writing. Before they discovered the advantages of accepting the Russian term, “kulak”, comrades started using the Czech equivalent, “village rich”, as a term that was sufficiently able to stir envy, angst and hatred, to unleash the much-wanted “class struggle” in the villages.

The date from which collectivization in Czechoslovakia may be considered to have started was 23 February 1949, when the Act on United Agricultural Cooperatives was approved, later followed by implementing regulations.

If I should summarize in five minutes the collectivization process that took place in the countryside for at least the following 11, 12 years, then let’s say that it can be divided into three distinct phases.

During the first two years starting in the spring of 1949, the top members of the Czechoslovak Communist Party were convinced that collectivization would be a very quick process, accepted by the countryside. As you probably know, this did not happen. The farmers who had had private ownership of the land for generations and for whom farming was their greatest social security, did not easily give up their land and resisted.

This was followed by the phase 1951–1953, when the priority task of the top members, but not only top members, of the Czech Communist Party, but essentially collectivizers from the center down to the individual villages, was to break this resistance, no matter the cost. From an economic perspective, efficiency and productivity of agriculture then became completely secondary, and they went to any extremes, sparing no one in asserting pressure to establish the cooperatives and in exemplary punishments of people perceived as authorities in the countryside.

Then, due to international and internal political circumstances, an easing occurred, which was interrupted by the then First Secretary Antonín Novotný in mid-1955 when he defined, again, as was usual for the Communist Party, a new line of policy that said that there is no other future for Czechoslovak agricultural policy than to collectivize. It can therefore be said that the Czechoslovak Communist Party rejected the model applied, for example, in Poland with the state pseudo-cooperative sector coexisting with the private sector.

In a final sentence, let us summarize the completion of collectivization, when the pressure on the remaining private farmers peaks in 1957 and 1958. In 1960, when Czechoslovakia gets a new constitution, becoming a socialist state, Antonín Novotný proclaims the construction of socialism, (if I use words of the time) to be complete and collectivization to be concluded.

Those who remained in private farming after this ruthless decade for the countryside deserve my admiration, and we need to mention these were only individual islands on the map of agricultural land in Czechoslovakia

GAK: Now, I would like to come back to Jiří Hájíček, and I would like to ask about his inspiration for writing *Rustic Baroque* and, in particular, Mr. Hájíček, why do you feel that the themes of

collectivization and restitution are particularly worth writing about in the first place? How do you view the significance of these events for Czech society?

Jiří Hájíček: I first came to this topic primarily through my family, as the history of the 1950s affected my grandparents and my father.

It is sort of interesting, I would say generally, that the affected generation does not always reflect these things, for example artistically, which means that perhaps the affected generation does not want to write or make movies about it and such. Of course, I only started to be interested in what my grandparents and parents went through in my 30s.

It is maybe a bit similar to the situation as, for example, in Germany, when only successive generations start taking interest in what their parents went through during World War II. This means that I only came to this topic sort of secondarily.

It is true that these topics were not often discussed in our family, as they were painful memories, so I started to look into and read books about it. Just before the program started, Mr. Urban and I were discussing that in those years, even after the year 2000, there wasn't much literature about it, and by this I mean non-fiction, so for me, a big help was, for example, Mr. Jech's book *Twilight of the Farming Estate*, which was one of the few non-fiction books available on this topic.

Then various anthologies were published, and of course for me, archives were great sources of inspiration because I went directly to village chronicles.

For example, in the Třeboň archive and in Budějovice, I found archives of various villages and I was interested in how the chroniclers authentically recorded this in the 1950s, how they wrote about it. So I would thus answer Gale's first question of how I came to it and why I started writing about it.

And the next thing, how I think collectivization affected the countryside, I will confirm what Mr. Urban said, that of course... I would like to add that I wrote these things really from second-hand accounts, via archives, non-fiction literature and memories of witnesses, because I did not live through it myself.

However, today it is confirmed that in that decade from 1950 to 1960 the Czech countryside completely changed its face as the ownership relations changed, the land was transferred to cooperative ownership, and I always say that when you go to the countryside, even today, you can see in almost every village, some half-collapsed farmstead, or homestead, with only the walls remaining, and it is quite probable that this was a farmstead of some expelled farmer, left to dilapidate by the cooperative, and no one reclaimed it afterwards. So today, I would say, after 40, 50 years, this historic process is apparent in the countryside and there are traces of this history in almost every village.

GAK: Thank you. Now I'd like to come back to Mr. Urban again. We've heard about collectivization and there was also during the 1990s, or the beginning of the 1990s, a certain period and process of restitution of property, and I would like to ask specifically what was going on in the countryside at that time, and to what extent was it possible or did it occur in the 1990s and the decades to follow that the clock was turned back to, say, 1950, with regard to land tenure and the character of the countryside? And to what extent was the countryside

irretrievably transformed, for better or for worse, by these consecutive processes of collectivization and restitution?

JU: Forty, forty-two years of interruption and intentional nullification of the traditions of private farming could not be erased, and passed over in the 1990s. Although rehabilitative and restitution acts were adopted in the first half of the 1990s, the percentage of people, the descendants of farming families, who fortunately wanted to return to private farming, deal with all the challenges brought by compensations, returning of property, was very small.

At the same time, it needs to be said that the state of agriculture, the form that generation had left behind, was no longer found in the 1990s. To sustain and succeed in the forming competitive environment, it was necessary to farm much larger areas and have much larger, more costly investments into machinery. Those who decided to continue the broken tradition of private farming received their family property, I'm not afraid to say it, after 40 years of devastation. The memories of those people, witnesses who remain among us, or memories recorded in writing or as recordings or in the form of increasingly popular oral history, recount the terror from the completely derelict estates, from 40 years of lacking a personal, close relationship with the property.

Those who decided to continue this tradition experienced great indebtedness and disillusion in returning the property to its original state, or at least to an approximate state. Through great personal sacrifice, they continued the traditions of those farmer families. Let me just remind you that it is a small minority. Today, we are speaking of the descendants of those people who in the 1990s found the strength to reestablish private farming – which are of course a minority in comparison to the transformed former state enterprises, state-managed agricultural cooperatives – and to struggle in the new competitive environment.

GAK: Rustic Baroque deals in historical themes and might even be described as historical fiction. And thus, even though Jiří Hájíček is not a historian in the same sense professionally as is Mr. Urban, he nevertheless must have done a lot of historical research in preparing his novel. So, Mr. Hájíček, please characterize for us, how much and what kind of research went into writing Rustic Baroque?

JH: I spent a lot of time in archives, with archival materials and mainly village chronicles. That was my main research of historical documents. Non-fiction played a certain role as well, and I must tell you, now that we are here at the American Center, what actually brought me to Třeboň to the State Regional Archive. It was a descendant of one of my forefathers, who had gone to the United States of America, some time in the 19th century, at the end of the 19th century, which was the first strong wave of emigration from the former Austria-Hungary to America. And this man has this surname to this day, even though I don't know how they pronounce it in America, and he approached me by e-mail, I think because he found my website, and wanted some connection to the Czech archive because he was interested in how his ancestors first got to the United States. It is pretty normal for Americans to seek their roots.

So thus I went to Třeboň, the regional archive, and there I met Mr. Kalivoda, who is a professional genealogist. So we started talking and in the end spent a lot of time together, and he was actually the one who deals with these matters professionally. People contact him to have a family tree made professionally and absolutely perfectly from chronicles which lead back to

the 17th or 16th century. So this is someone who knows Kurrent, Schwabacher, all those types of writing. He is versed in these things.

So for me this was an inspiration, and at that time I was already entertaining the thought that I'd like to write a novel about the 1950s, and with this it just connected, that the story I cannot tell from my own memories, because I did not live in the 1950s, that the whole story would be told by someone, who deals with tracking people's pasts in the archives. So that's how the protagonist, Pavel, was born, a genealogist, who through that special assignment came to the chronicles and the village history. So this led me to the manner in which to tell the story.

GAK: I would like to come back again to Mr. Urban. You have researched and written extensively about collectivization and the countryside, and you've also read Jiří Hájíček's *Rustic Baroque*. I would like to ask you a two-part question:

First of all, in *Rustic Baroque*, there are trans-generational issues in which the past actions or experiences of a family member impact upon younger generations today. To what extent is this an accurate portrayal of the issues that are facing Czech society today?

And then the second question, related back to the first question, how do you feel that these issues and tensions will continue to be dealt with in Czech society into the future?

JU: It probably is not necessary to stress that I was born at a much later time than when the collectivization was carried out. In my research I draw not only from archival sources, but primarily, as Mr. Hájíček and I were discussing, from those official materials from the 1950s that are significantly marked by ideological language, so a historian such as myself really values any personal dimension of a source. So while some witnesses still remain alive, I am always glad for such a meeting and therefore my response to your question must be primarily based on such experience. Unfortunately, on that basis, I must state that the current generation of great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren of people who went through the decade of collectivization as active farmers are not interested in their family histories.

In contrast, I encountered the attitude such as "Well, my mom..." that is, one of the people appearing in my book during the 3 to 4 years when we were meeting was between 95 and 98 years old, and her daughter, a septuagenarian, said "Well, my mom is looking forward to you, she is glad that someone will listen to her." So the generation of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren had no interest in listening to her, it was a history too distant and dead and it was unnecessary to repeat it.

On the other hand, based on my modest experience from academic grounds as a beginning educator I must state that in seminars on these topics today's university students are interested. But, of course, you have to realize what percentage of the youth this is. These are students who have purposefully selected studies of contemporary history, and chose a course dedicated to the 20th century.

GAK: I thank Messrs. Hájíček and Urban for helping me to begin this discussion. Now we'd like to open the discussion up to members of the audience.

Ms Vránová: My name is Jaroslava Vránová. I would like to ask you the first question, if you grew up in Wisconsin and were surrounded by Czech families, Havlíček, Zeman, how did it influence you?

This is one question, and second question, to Mr. Urban, if collectivization in Czechoslovakia was carried out according to the Soviet model, was collectivization in the Soviet Union carried out according to the Israeli model, according to kibbutzim? Or, is there a connection between kibbutz and kolkhoz? They are one in the same, no? Thank you.

GAK: So, I will begin, as I mentioned, not until sometime when I was at university did I realize that the neighbors who had names like Malý and Zeman and Havlík, we said, were in fact Czechs, I didn't realize that. There was certainly an effect on the community, a small farming community which I grew up in.

I wouldn't say it affected me so much, except that I was a little bit outside of it, because I was not from that tradition, but I realized once I moved to Europe, where it came from.

JU: As for your question, the first part concerning the Soviet model, briefly due to time concerns, I've already mentioned it, yes, collectivization in Czechoslovakia was carried out 100% according to the Soviet model.

As for the second part, about kibbutzim, it is necessary to stress that we must not confuse two totally different phenomena. That is, the kibbutz as a cooperative project in the true sense of the word, fulfilling the pillars, principles of cooperativism, i.e.: voluntariness, first; autonomy, second; and shares expressing the economic participation of its members, third. All of this, when compared to the agricultural cooperatives or in the Soviet environment with the kolkhoz, that was only paraded as cooperativism.

In Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party very skillfully and cleverly tried to link to, so to speak, or exploit the tradition of voluntary, real cooperativism that had existed here since Austria-Hungary and the First Republic. And for that reason, the collectivization project in Czechoslovakia was named "United Agricultural Cooperative", which contained the word cooperative. However, I stress again, that collectivization according to the Soviet model and cooperativism as represented by the Israeli kibbutz must not be confused.

prof. PhDr. Ing. Věra Majerová, CSc.: Thank you, my name is Majerová. I would just add a little as to why the term "United Agricultural Cooperative". In each village there were a number of cooperatives, pasture, fish pond cooperatives, etc. and when collectivization started, all of those cooperatives were united into a single cooperative, so that is why it was called a "united" agricultural cooperative, and members could file a written request to leave within 14 days, if they did not, they remained members of the cooperative.

Anyway, I did research on collectivization, I'm from the Czech University of Life Sciences, and I have a question. When you were working with sources... It's not clear... It's clear to me when the term "kulak" came into being, but it's not completely clear to me how the term "kulak", which in Russian means "fist", and I did an analysis of the 1950s press precisely on the topic of collectivization, and up to 1953 there are only the terms "village rich" and "countryside rich", then the vocabulary escalates, even to insults, such as "sprouts of the green international", "criminals", "murderers" and such, and I believe that, and that's my question, when you were studying the sources, whether you encountered it, and I believe, that after a delegation of five or six hundred communists left for the Soviet Union to study methods of collectivization, a number of Russisms occur in the official press, among others "kulak"

And I didn't find anywhere why this word "kulak", which can be translated as "fist", started to be used for the village rich.

JU: The roots of using this term in the Russian countryside can be sought in the 19th century. Colleagues studying the modern era would probably look for it already in the 18th, and then in the beginning of the 20th century it started to be institutionalized by Stolypin's agrarian reform. This was an expression for entrepreneurs. You know the Russian village had been organized in obshchinas, and those who invested and had a business, somehow excluded themselves from the obshchinas, were called kulaks, with a somewhat pejorative meaning.

In contrast, Stolypin, I think in 1905, made "kulak" the designation of the most progressive farmers, which we can say corresponded to the previous context, the most progressive ones who invested their surpluses into expansion and modernization of their agricultural enterprises.

The first attempts to introduce mass production to the Russian and soon Soviet agriculture at the turn of the 1910s and '20s, in those 20 years, in the conditions of fading civil war in the forming Soviet Russia were met with resistance, the same as I mentioned for the years 1949–1950 here.

Then, you know, on the eve of the 1930s, Stalin enforced collectivization at all costs, and, as I already mentioned, the expression kulak again received another meaning of the class enemy, the village capitalist that needs to be exterminated, against which class hatred, as it was called then, must be artificially stirred.

When I now jump 20 years ahead to Czechoslovakia, this term was discussed already in that previously mentioned autumn of 1948 and the comrades agreed that the spell of mystery, foreignness, in the term kulak, and I don't think that many people knew its literal equivalent of "fist", was somehow something alien. Something which, in connection with the Czech equivalent "village rich" should stir angst, the idea that it is a cooperativist with lots of money hoarded, and should disturb the image of the village, and I don't want to idealize it, where small peasants cannot fare without the help of these medium and large farmers, and the medium and large farmers cannot fare without the seasonal help of the small peasants or landless individuals. Natural integration, symbiosis, coexistence. So this was the perspective from which these terms were used, at least in my view.

Pavel Kříž: When I read the book, unfortunately I didn't have the time to read it word for word, I somehow missed that most of the examples, the drastic ones, the arrests, imprisonments, condemnations, etc. but mostly from the chronicles or archives to what degree you could draw from or drew from the direct witnesses of the confiscations, expropriation, expulsion and so on, because most of the things that were conflicting were personal matters, which were also there in the villages, angst, terrible envy...

But otherwise all those drastic things that took place in the villages, I have a cottage in a village where I've been living for 30 years, and when I heard what had happened there, it's also in South Bohemia, what happened there and what the people went through, and in what ways it was done, then I either did not perceive that, or it wasn't there. I wanted to know, if you could hear directly from those people how drastic it was, and whether you put it there or not.

JH: In the book there are two or three villages I made up, these are fictional villages, but created from all of those chronicle records – and the fates and histories from those chronicles must be read rather between the lines, because the chronicles are pretty simple records, “On day such and such, the farmer from house number so and so was expelled...” So I tried, in fact, from all those stories I read in those chronicles to build a typical picture, a typical history.

Another interesting thing about the chronicles was – and I’ll say this just as an aside – was the degree to which the chroniclers tried to record those things in a faithful way, and not conforming to the regime and the pressure exerted on them. So in the archives you can find chronicles written relatively liberally for the time, chronicles written in the contemporary language, as well as chronicles with censorship interventions, which is very interesting.

So I tried to compose a model example of those stories. From what I knew from personal conversations; I perhaps did not use specific stories, but I think the mechanism is apparent from the book.

As you mentioned, local personal relations played a big role there, among the people in the villages, and it is also interesting to mention that the pressure, which Mr. Urban mentioned already and it was from the highest places and went downward, but a big role, which surprised me, was played by the local, district officers, district agricultural administrations, disciplinary committees of the agricultural offices, and thus you really get to the level of the village or its surroundings, so I agree with you that local animosities played a big role, the local envies and stories that were there among the people.

So, my story is composed of many stories, it’s a single “model” story. I tried to get a little bit of the atmosphere there because, of course, I’m not a witness, I didn’t experience it, so in some of those chronicle records that I quoted my point was to communicate the language and the style used in the records, the atmosphere of that period and of the countryside.

GAK: Mr. Urban would like to comment as well.

JU: I would like to respond briefly to Mr. Kríž. I really do recommend that you read the book, take your time and read carefully, because, well, it’s been 6 or 7 years since I digested Selský baroko, but Mr. Hájíček can get away with what a historian such as myself cannot in my work, which is to masterfully suggest and draw out these nuances of everyday activity of the countryside in dialogues. And he does that with absolute brilliance. In this same style he uncovers all of the injustices caused by collectivization. So that is just my personal recommendation for you.

In terms of the topic we opened, that the directives were initiated at the centre but were somehow reflected on the levels of districts and mainly villages and in neighborly relations, from my experience, I could talk about cases where in certain villages the posts of the chairman of the party organization, chairman of the municipal national committee, agronomist, or agricultural secretary, etc. were taken by people who did not care for the central directive at all. Nevertheless, they had healthy judgment and realized that private farming would not be sustainable, and immediately so in 1949. I actually encountered this in a number of cases. They founded their United Agricultural Cooperative to satisfy the district officers, those active collectivizers, and they essentially maintained a fictitious cooperative on paper, enjoyed the benefits of priority allocations of seeds and fertilizers, and continued farming as they were used

to. However, as you must certainly suspect, sooner or later this loophole had to be closed, but it is worth mentioning.

And the other extreme also noteworthy, is when neighbors who used to help each other in the autumn in picking potatoes and apples became those “class enemies”. Personal relations were pushed completely aside to benefit the ideology while violence and hatred were artificially stirred up.

JH: And, if I may, what Mr Kríž perhaps meant specifically, I also noticed that there were of course local differences. The powers-that-be were probably most focused on areas where there were really large landowners, such as Moravia or large villages. For example, I found a chronicle of a village where a farming cooperative was founded as late as in 1959, as there were no large landowners, and the people there founded it because the cooperatives were everywhere else already; there was no big pressure there, but they finally founded the cooperative as late as in '59 – somehow in the shadow of all those historical events.

So not all areas were the same, and there are of course areas in the countryside where the process happened somehow from inertia, if I can say so.

JU: Certainly, the attention was focused on the main production areas of then-Czechoslovakia – the Elbe Basin, Haná, South Moravia and such. So it was much more intense there than in some forgotten or outlying village or hamlet. Nevertheless, that collectivization policy constantly tried to convince functionaries, citizens and farmers that there was no other way than to form a cooperative. This was deeply ingrained in their heads, and if it could not be accomplished as I described in my book, by intimidating an area by setting examples through punishment of the most respected farmer in the village, then it could be done by beating them down economically so that resisting the establishment of the cooperative was beyond human power. The differentiating policy was so strict in terms of tax concessions, mandatorily prescribed deliveries, rights for clothing coupons, and other things from the supply policy that it was very hard to resist.

Participant: I'm reading the book right now and it's very interesting, very enjoyable. Perhaps for Mr. Urban, in the book it mentions that at least some of the farmers who resisted collectivization were hanged, others were imprisoned. Do we have any actual figures about how many people were killed, how many people were sent to prison, as a result of the collectivization?

JU: Thank you for this question, unfortunately not, we have no figures about the number of people sentenced but, fortunately, not actually killed in Czechoslovak countryside. But there is almost a rule that we can say almost each village in the Czechoslovak countryside has its own victim of collectivization, somebody who was not only sentenced, but persecuted somehow in the aim to collectivize that village.

Ms Majerová: And how many people were in auxiliary technical battalions, do you know?

JU: We don't, perhaps I don't, but...

Ms Majerová: Six people were executed in the processes in the Pilsen region...

JU: Of course, well, although Stanislav Broj and the others who were included in political monster-trials, they were not direct victims of collectivization. At least I do not perceive them as such. I would rather call victims of collectivization the farmers who instead of betraying their families' traditions and giving away their property to the enterprise of a United Agricultural Cooperative, set fire to the farmstead and went to the forest to hang themselves. I consider such cases to be the true victims of collectivization, and it is difficult to enumerate them for all of Czechoslovakia.

Ms Majerová: We probably won't, but from the sources I studied these trials were so very often conceived as big propaganda campaigns, and I have had dozens of conversations with those persecuted. Unfortunately, I'm not so diligent as Mr Urban here, who has already published it, I still have it only in manuscript... But anyway, what they told me was that they were in prison for a long time and still not indicted, because they were waiting until some clever legal process could be constructed for them to fit into. It's hard to say whether to connect it with collectivization or not. These were rather unsuitable people from those villages, and they could be accused of anything, and they were also indicted for that purpose. Sometimes they did manage to break them so that they confessed, some didn't survive, and so forth. It is very difficult for a historian to discern whether a person was a victim of exactly that, or a combination of those things that happened there.

JU: I can of course only agree with this, and briefly, certainly there were victims killed. But, from the way I see it, these were rather personal tragedies of the experiences of those subjected to the pressure, rather than farmers being executed by local authorities, as happened in the Soviet model. Nevertheless, in addition to Stanislav Broj and several other Agrarian Party authorities (although they could no longer be Agrarians after 1945), we do have several victims documented.

I mean for example a case from the Nová Paka area, where Vladimír Cerman, 22 years old, was executed for – and actually our colleague over there was addressing the topic of resistance against the imposition of communist power in the countryside – this young man took a military rifle and shot into a meeting of local comrades discussing the founding of a United Agricultural Cooperative.

By the way, I don't know, from a purely technical perspective, if anyone here is a firearms enthusiast, but near Nová Paka in December 1951 when this happened, there was usually fog, with visibility of 150 meters, and to hit a lightbulb in a first floor room, this was quite a feat of marksmanship. However, the investigators of the State Security of course did not discuss it in this context, and it was proven, not only by ballistic analysis, but by the very angle itself that, even if he had wanted to, he could not have hit anyone in the room, due to that angle. He nevertheless was essentially included into a State Security investigation and through provocation using a secret agent of the security apparatus, he was made out to be a spy. At 22 years of age, for such a boyish act intended to intimidate the collectivizers, he was hanged at the Pankrác Prison gallows.

GAK: I would like to thank once again the American Center for having us, this was a very excellent opportunity for all of us. I'd like to thank you. You've been an excellent audience, and we are going to be chatting with you some more while we're here, and of course I want to thank the members of the panel for joining us here today. So, thank you very much.