

IN MEMORIAM JIŘÍ KOTÁSEK



Jiří Kotásek belonged to a generation of Czech educationalists whose lives and professional careers were significantly influenced by historical events and the development of Czech society in the 20th century. It was particularly the second half of the century, when his scientific career was launched, that presented for Jiří Kotásek a period of disappointment and injustice. This was caused both by the social conditions in Czechoslovakia at that time, which were even made worse by the Cold War, and by the bipolar division of the world which paid no regard to his qualities as an expert and gave him no credit for developments in his field. Utter humanist and convinced European though he was, this brought considerable

complications and restrictions and for some time even disqualification from the scientific life and activities of a university teacher, which he considered more of a mission than profession. A great opportunity for using Kotásek's scientific and educational erudition came in the last decade of the century. It was a time when most people would have left active professional life for another and enjoyed retirement. But let us go back to the beginning.

Jiří Kotásek was born on December 2, 1928 in Brno. He spent his childhood and his student years there. In the Czechoslovak Republic, in the time before Munich, he (as a pupil) experienced primary (*obecná škola*) and secondary school which he later on described as traditional but admittedly of a high standard, influenced by the pre-war atmosphere when the meaning of the notion "homeland" evoked special feelings and when education was dominated by the national dimension. When he was 11 years old, he learned to feel the sufferings of his nation both emotionally and rationally and to hate the occupation, as did other members of his generation. Entering university after the war and completing his studies at the State Institute for Male Teachers (*Státní mužský učitelský ústav*) was for Jiří Kotásek an introduction to the academic world, to its freedoms and demanding requirements for intellectual output as well as an encounter with the power and totalitarian structures which infiltrated into academic life. At that time, however, he personally was not directly affected by these complicated circumstances. He did not perceive them very much during his studies; he realized them later in the 1950s. After finishing his studies at the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University, he was briefly a biology, geography and social sciences teacher in the second and third stage of school (lower secondary and upper secondary level of education).

He came back to the Faculty in 1950 as an assistant professor. In 1950 he received a minor doctoral degree in educational science and psychology. He was accepted onto the program of continuous preparation for scientific work at the Higher Institute for Education in Prague (*Vysoká škola pedagogická*). In 1958 he received a post-graduate academic degree after defending the thesis *Acquiring Biological Laws in the Educational Process* (*Osvojování přírodovědných zákonů ve vyučovacím procesu*). In the first period of his scientific work, he concentrated on teaching methodology and he published studies on the teaching methodology of the natural sciences. Research in the context of Soviet studies, especially on educational psychology, and papers by German and Polish educationalists, made him turn to the methodological problems of educational science, particularly to the issue of empirical research in the educational process. He also started to be interested in educational reforms, particularly in the Swedish reform which reflected the model of the social state.

From 1961 on, Jiří Kotásek worked at the Institute for Distance Study Programs of Charles University, later called the Institute for Teacher Training of the Faculty of Education of Charles University. He combined his activities as university teacher with intensive scientific activities in which the focus on theoretical and methodological issues prevailed. Apart from that, Jiří Kotásek was involved in writing university textbooks on teaching methodology and educational science as co-author, and he also wrote several chapters in the textbook for teachers at secondary vocational schools and for instructors of vocational training. In one of his research lines, he was still concerned with issues of teaching methodology. Later a second line of research focusing on education and learning processes in adult age became of interest to him. He devoted his habilitation thesis *Contributions to the Theory of Adult Education* (1965, *Příspěvky k teorii vzdělávání dospělých*) to the concept of lifelong learning as a subject in educational theory. The period of political liberalization allowed him to be more distinctly focused on Western theories of education and experience. He undertook several study trips at that time: to Denmark, Austria, Great Britain and the Federal Republic of Germany. He was involved as a consultant in UNESCO and was the team leader of an international project concerned with issues which were connected with the system and content of teacher training, using international comparisons as its basis. He presented the results of this project at an international conference of experts in 1967. Connecting the issues of university teaching methodology and adult education, he approached questions of teacher training and its organisation which became a permanent interest and which also constitutes a significant part of his personal bibliography. Kotásek's works on lifelong learning and adult education received international recognition and acceptance. Later on, these studies were used as one of the bases for elaboration of the essential UNESCO publication *Learning to Be* edited by J. Faure and published in 1972. Paradoxically, Kotásek's comparative studies *Current Problems of Teacher Education* (1970) and *L'idée d'éducation permanente dans la réforme actuelle des systèmes éducatifs et de la formation des maîtres* (1972), published and quoted abroad, were

forbidden publication in the Czech language at a time when the mechanisms of 'normalisation' were already in operation.

In the second half of the 1960s, when the social atmosphere loosened up and culminated in the Prague Spring in 1968, Jiří Kotásek was given two further great opportunities. He made use of them with profundity common for him. Kotásek's organizational and conceptual activity in the Pedagogical Society was an important part of his scholarly life. The Czechoslovak Pedagogical Society (ČSPS) was founded in 1964 as an academic association of research workers, publishing university teachers and school experts. Jiří Kotásek became its scientific secretary. He participated in constituting the association's profile, formulating its status and defining the program of its scientific activity. At that time, the Pedagogical Society significantly influenced the scientific methodology and direction of Czech educational science. It worked on a decentralized basis having active branches throughout the whole of the republic. Right from its inception, ČSPS emphasized the significance of education as a powerful instrument of social change, the importance of a scientific basis for political decision-making about education and the necessity for scientific freedom in educational science. It rejected ideologically dogmatic pedagogy. In the following years (1965 – 1967), ČSPS carried out a critical analysis of post-war Czechoslovak educational development on the basis of international comparisons. It focused on fundamental theoretical and methodological problems in educational science, and it introduced Comenius's *General Discourse* to an international milieu. Jiří Kotásek was actively involved in all those activities and he applied his scientific erudition to them. After the Prague Spring, in December 1968, ČSPS was divided into its Czech and Slovak parts due to federalization and Kotásek was elected the chairman of the Czech Pedagogical Society. He emphasized educational policy, international cooperation and contacts with teachers in his program presentation.

The second notable field of Kotásek's scientific activity in the second half of the 1960s is connected with inter-disciplinary cooperation with other social sciences. At that time, an inter-disciplinary team at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czechoslovak Academy of Science was being formed under the influence of Western 'futurological' social science studies and Soviet 'prognostic studies'. This team was led by Radovan Richta. Their aim was to study social and human aspects of the scientific revolution. The central topic of the international conference held in April 1968, and of the resulting publication *Civilization at the Crossroads (Civilizace na rozcestí; Richta et al., 1969)* was a humanistic concept of civilization. It emphasized the role of education in social and personal development. The identification of determining elements of social change presented a concept different to the previous dogmatic view of class struggle and social revolution. It corresponded to social theories in the world at that time and it was a significant stimulus for educational science. As part of an inter-disciplinary team, Jiří Kotásek put across his concept of lifelong learning together with other Czech educationalists. He started from a critical analysis of the educational system of that time and he argued for education at secondary level to be widely accessible, for individualization of pupils' learning and for teaching that emphasized learning processes for people in all life

situations. He also developed the concept of using technical devices in lessons. His study anticipated later theories concerning a knowledge-based society. While the English translation of his work received a vast amount of publicity, the results of this study were negatively criticized in the domestic environment in the time of normalization, and its further use was suppressed on grounds of alleged ideological unsuitability because it inclined to the theory of 'convergence', did not reflect a class division of the world and did not take the advantages of socialism as compared to capitalism into account.

In the tense post-Prague-Spring atmosphere, Jiří Kotásek published his critical views of the entrance of the Warsaw Pact armies into Czechoslovakia and defended the independence of scientific research. As a result of his opinions, international activities and publications, he was included on the central register of politically unreliable persons during the normalization period. He was forbidden to teach, to publish or to be otherwise publicly active. He was also forbidden to travel to the West. The nomination procedure for his professorship was suspended. Jiří Kotásek faced withdrawal from the life of the educational community and from the possibility of influencing future teachers in their educational activities. After the first wave of ideological and practical repression, he could take part in the work of teams concerned with information systems for education and educational science, teacher training programmes and methodological issues in the educational sciences and in subject-related teaching methodologies, mainly thanks to the support of the vice-rector of Charles University, Professor Kraemer. He was, however, not allowed to publish. Some of his studies and critical viewpoints were published as anonymous samizdat copies or under the names of different authors, particularly at the Institute for School Information (*Ústav školských informací*) and at the Research Institute for Vocational Education (*Výzkumný ústav odborného školství*). Although disqualification from scientific life when reaching the peak of his professional career was a deep disappointment for Jiří Kotásek, he continued working even in conditions under which a weak personality would most probably have resigned.

In the 1980s, when the strict normalization rules were loosened, Jiří Kotásek was accepted as a scientific assistant at the Institute for the Development of Higher Education Institutions (*Ústav rozvoje vysokých škol*). This newly established institution allowed him to concentrate on conceptual scientific work. He focused on the pedagogy of higher education institutions, studies of higher education systems and the methodology of their research. He published (now already under his own name) expert studies and study texts. He planned and organized pedagogy courses for teachers starting at higher education institutions, and he contributed to proposals for a multi-level university education and qualifications. However, he was still not allowed to travel to the West. However, due to an administrative mistake he went to the University of Surrey in Great Britain and participated in a course for teachers of staff development. Subsequently he was invited to partake in the creation of a conception for the training of university teachers. This gave him a certain satisfaction and the chance to apply his knowledge of theories on, and research into, higher education which he used in the programme document.

Until 1989, he was the head of ÚVRVŠ. This institution organized a number of national and international conferences and in all those activities Jiří Kotásek was its central personality. In 1985 he was even sent to Cuba to participate in the program of lectures focusing on improvements in the quality of higher education. Thanks to his activities and consistency, a network of higher education workplaces was created in Czechoslovakia which provided for the pedagogical and psychological training of teachers in higher education institutions. At the end of the 1980s, Jiří Kotásek initiated and developed cooperation with Slovak partners at institutions of higher education and with the Institute for the Development of Higher Education Institutions in Bratislava. A draft proposal for multi-level higher education, to which Jiří Kotásek significantly contributed, was submitted to the rectors of universities at the end of the 1980s. It was not accepted with understanding at that time. It was, however, ahead of its time and the further development of higher education institutions later on confirmed its progressive aspects.

After November 1989, Jiří Kotásek was rehabilitated. He was appointed a professor and he returned to Charles University. In January 1990, he was elected Dean of the Faculty of Education of Charles University by the academics. He understood this function as an obligation to the Faculty which he considered to be the main institution for university teacher training and which required fundamental reconstruction after the normalization period. In that period, the Faculty had compromised itself ideologically, educationally and scientifically. In the new approach of the Faculty, he looked back to the ideas of pre-communist 1946, but at the same time he strove for the creation of a modern university of a European type. In the first stage of his activity as the dean (apart from solving personnel and organizational problems) he restored the Faculty's educational and scientific activity with the help of a management team. It was to Kotásek's credit that after the abolition of the Comenius Institute for the Education of the Czech Academy of Science (ČSAV), conditions were created for establishing a new research workplace at the Faculty. Moreover, the editor's office of the magazine *Pedagogika* was also transferred to the Faculty. Thanks to his support, the Institute for Research in Education and Psychology (*Ústav pedagogických a psychologických výzkumů; ÚPPV*) was formed. At this institute, he gathered specialists from his former academic workplace and from other institutions. Similarly, experts and educationalists who contributed to the realization of the new way forward were accepted to work in other posts at the Faculty under Kotásek's service as Dean. Jiří Kotásek as Dean also strove for the development of the Institute for Further Education of Pedagogical Staff as a recognised university workplace. Further development, including a number of reorganizations, confirmed the value of Kotásek's approach. Currently, there are the following: the Institute for Research and Development in Education at the Faculty of Education of Charles University, which serves as a scientific and research workplace significantly contributing to Ph.D. study programs in education, the Institute for Professional Development of Pedagogical Staff, the Centre of School Management and the Centre for Educational Policies. The foundations of this structure were formed at the time when Kotásek was Dean.

In the 1990s, the transformation of the Czech educational system and educational policy stood at the centre of Kotásek's interest. He saw these issues in a complex way with their mutual relationships, in the context of international development and European integration processes which had to be linked to domestic conditions. In the first stage of transformation, he built a team of experts at the Faculty which defined the conceptual basis for one of the first projects of educational reform *The Future of Education and Training in a Restored Democratic Society and in the context of the European Unification Process* (1991, *Budoucnost vzdělávání a výchovy v obnovené demokratické společnosti a ve sjednocující se Evropě*). Kotásek considered international cooperation and the comparative study of education abroad to be an essential and natural component part of the development of education and educational science. He initiated the foundation of the department for comparative educational science at ÚPPV and the inclusion of comparative educational science in the study programs for teacher training where he himself taught. He can be credited with the fact that the 8th international congress for comparative education was held in Prague in 1992. The Faculty of Education of Charles University was its main organizer. The place where it was held and the main congress topic, *Education, Democracy and Development*, were fundamental in the given context. The congress contributed to the renewal of communication with educationalists across the world, and it gave moral and intellectual support to the transformation of education in the post-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Jiří Kotásek gave a lecture called *The Vision of Development in the Post-Socialist Era* at the congress based on the situation in Czechoslovakia. He concentrated on the transformation process of education in the context of fundamental changes in social, political and economic structures. He identified the ensuing dilemmas and outlined visions of the development of education after the breakdown of the former regime. He described the new situation as a laboratory for social and educational reform and he emphasized the importance of comparative education for the transformation process. After the congress, he became a Vice-President of the World Council for associations concerned with comparative education.

In the first half of the 1990s, despite being fully occupied with obligations as a dean and involved in public activities in favor of educational reform and in international activities, he published a number of expert studies and articles in specialist Czech and foreign periodicals which dealt with university education, teacher training and general issues of the transformation of educational systems at the end of the century. He participated in the creation of a specialist study entitled *Higher Education* (1991, *Vysoké školství*) which was taken as the basis for evaluation of Czech higher education by OECD examiners; he led the project *European Perspectives of Czech Education* (1994-1996, *Evropská perspektiva českého školství*); he took part in the project of the Council of Europe focusing on educational reforms (1995) and in the preparation of a significant OECD document *Reports on National Policy in Education: The Czech Republic* (1996, *Zprávy o národní politice ve vzdělávání: Česká republika*).

He resumed work in the field of educational policy after having served two

terms as the dean and after a research stay at Stanford University in the USA where he was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship. He became a scientific worker at the Centre for Educational Policy, and he represented the Czech Republic in a number of international organizations. His activities as a member of Czech UNESCO Commission and delegate from the Czech Republic to the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation of the OECD (CERI) or delegate of the Czech Republic to the European Network for Teacher Training Policy at the European Commission were of particular significance. He initiated the translation of the noted Delors report *Learning: the Treasure Within* (UNESCO, 1995) into Czech and wrote an introduction. He considered this report a world charter of education for the 21st century. He recognized a global foundation of educational policy in it which he defended and whose principles he applied in national documents in the following years, to the creation of which he significantly participated.

In 1996 Jiří Kotásek accepted the post of a consultant to the Minister of Education in which he worked for the next few years. In this function, he made use of his high expertise as well as strategy planning and diplomatic negotiations and a sense of the practical application of the theoretical basis of educational policy, to the construction of which he contributed significantly. In 1999 he was entrusted with leading the team that worked on the fundamental document of Czech educational policy *The National Program of the Development of Education in the Czech Republic* (*Národní program rozvoje vzdělávání v České republice*). Later he described this task as one of the most difficult as well as interesting that he'd had to deal with in his life and he devoted an essential part of his expert capacity to it. He considered the methodological basis of the White Paper as a specific kind of scientific knowledge and the process of its creation as a demanding collective work for which the dialogue between the expert and teachers was essential. The background for the White Paper's formation and for the demanding procedures connected with its preparation was provided by the *Institute for Research and Development of Education at the Faculty of Education of Charles University*, whose employee he was from 1998 until the end of his life. The formation of the White Paper became part of the research and development studies of the Institute; the expert viewpoints of its staff and the staff of the Faculty influenced this document. Jiří Kotásek untiringly moved the work forward; he initiated seminars and discussions. While being fully devoted to and involved in the project, he relied on cooperation and incited the enthusiasm of the whole team. The process of preparation of this document was described in the annual report of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic for 2000.

When the document was accepted by the government of the Czech Republic in 2001, Jiří Kotásek turned to the broader educational public. At a meeting of the Czech Society for Education in 2002, he presented a paper in which he explained the methodology and the meaning of the document from the expert point of view. He received positive feedback, which pleased him very much, and he considered the acceptance of the document by the general public as a source of the utmost satisfaction as an evaluation of the results of experts' work. As a consultant to the

Minister, he defended the White Paper's overall conception, its principles and strategic lines in the following years. Particularly during the formation of the draft School Act, he did not merely want formal document to be formed but it mattered to him that it was comprehensible, the meaning as well as goal of the changes codified, and that the needs of education in a democratic state were formulated. His proposal to include those ideas in the Preamble to the Act was not accepted because, according to lawyers' opinions, it did not respect the form and diction of Czech legislation. He was justly disappointed over this fact. But he intensified his efforts to interpret the meaning and goals of education in a number of lectures and articles published at home as well as abroad and he even presented his ideas publicly in the media.

From 1999-2004 Jiří Kotásek was co-author of the research project *Development of National Education and Teacher Training in a European Context (Rozvoj národní vzdělanosti a vzdělávání učitelů v evropském kontextu)*. The results of his research were published in several collections of articles and they were summarized in two chapters of the monograph *The Role of the School in the Development of Education (Úloha školy v rozvoji vzdělanosti)*. In those studies, Jiří Kotásek dealt with the transformation of the school and the basic outlines of educational policy as well as with the future of the school and education. In his last years, he focused particularly on issues relating to anticipating the future of education. He applied the methodology of future scenarios that was introduced to him during his participation in the OECD project CERI and he carried out remarkable research in the Czech environment. His results confirmed the recognition of the school as an irreplaceable social institution and organization concerned with learning processes. They also supported the future focus of our Institute which will concentrate on research into school education.

Jiří Kotásek was one of the initiators and co-authors of the project *Center for Basic Research into School Education (Centra základního výzkumu školního vzdělávání)*. He lived to see the decision that the project was accepted and received financial funds from the Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic. He welcomed the acceptance of the project with open delight and satisfaction. He was pleased about it not for himself but for education as such which, according to him, deserved to have an appropriate workplace and conditions for basic research.

In his last lecture which was held at the round table for educational policy *White Paper After Five Years* on February 23, 2006, he critically and with admirable profundity evaluated the development of school policy in the Czech Republic.

It is not possible to omit Kotásek's teaching activity and his close relationship to teacher training. He was categorically in favor of university Master's-level study for teachers at all stages of school development. He also pleaded for a balanced representation of expert, pedagogical and psychological, methodological and practical training in all study programs. He supported the formation of the Act on Pedagogical Staff and he succeeded in defending all the above-mentioned requirements. In his teaching activities, he was mostly concerned with tutoring Ph.D. students in his last years. He also taught comparative education courses

and courses on educational policy. He trained many Ph.D. students who currently have significant positions in higher education institutions, research institutions and in important national and international organizations. He influenced numbers of school directors and school authorities who attended his lectures on school management. He will be remembered by the teachers that he lectured with special pleasure and with whose training and profession he was concerned in a significant part of his research and publications. His lectures always had a clear and well-considered structure and were presented in precise language with scientific argumentation and with examples as well as personal experience which was appreciated both by students and his colleagues. As the chairman of habilitation committees, he supported the academic graduation of a new generation of specialists. As a member of scientific boards and Associations of Deans of Faculties of Education, he succeeded in putting through many progressive changes which supported the prestige of Faculties of Education.

Kotásek's work is characterised by a remarkable variety of topics, continuity and concentration on the essentials of the field. His comparisons between educational systems and analyses of educational reforms contributed fundamentally to comparative education and became the basis for further areas of educational science in which he was active. Comparisons and the feeling for real problems in the educational system brought him to the issues of educational policy and he played an essential role in the constitution of its scientific basis. As one of the first Czech educationalists, he elaborated the concept of lifelong learning and he applied it to teacher training. He founded the process of education for university teachers, and he contributed to the development of university teaching methodology and to a theory of higher education. He contributed to the development of a general teaching methodology perceived as a theory of teaching based on the interaction of instructors' teaching activity and pupils' learning activity with the broad background in the context of the way what effect external and internal factors have on the nature of this interaction. His argumentation in favor of methodologies of subject teaching contributed to the establishment of their scientific status. Last but not least, it is necessary to mention his contribution to the concept of professional teacher training and well-grounded insistence on the necessity of educating teachers at universities.

The internal continuity in Kotásek's work was deeply embedded in the traditions of Czech educational science and its connections to European values. This inner integrity of his work was a principal contribution to the restoration of Czech educational science and Czech education in the process of integration within Europe after 1989.

While having all those merits in his own specialist field, Jiří Kotásek was also a very precious and harmonious personality radiating energy and optimism which he was able to transfer to others, as he did his human honesty, reliability and sincerity. His joy at the success of others was entirely sincere, he liked to share his experience, he unselfishly shared materials and publications that he gained on his foreign travels, and he constantly had new inspiration. He was a scientist of great

erudition. He was very hard-working and he never limited his perspective to his own work. He preferred dialogue and team work, valued its internal coherence and gladly accepted various roles in the team. As a coordinator and partner or co-author, he always worked at a high level of professionalism and with high standards in terms of quality. At the same time, he was a gentleman and a great companion with an amazing sense of humor.

Unfortunately, Professor Jiří Kotásek is not with us any more. He died after a long and serious illness on August 22, 2006. His work's heritage is, however, not finished. It remains a bequest for his followers among whom we would like to consider ourselves and we would like to take up the baton honorably.

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