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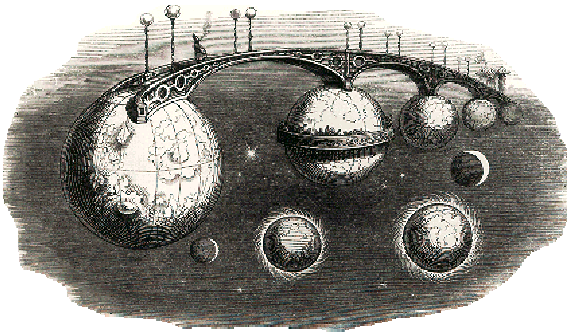

NEITHER MINE NOR THINE-
COMMUNIST EXPERIMENTS
IN HUSSITE BOHEMIA

PRINCIPLES, PROPOSITIONS &
DISCUSSIONS
FOR LAND & FREEDOM

AN INTRODUCTORY WORD TO THE ‘ANARCHIVE’

“Anarchy is Order!”

‘I must Create a System or be enslav’d by another Man’s.
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create’
(William Blake)

During the 19th century, anarchism has develloped as a result of a social current which aims for freedom and happiness. A number of factors since World War I have made this movement, and its ideas, dissapear little by little under the dust of history.
After the classical anarchism – of which the Spanish Revolution was one of the last representatives–a ‘new’ kind of resistance was founded in the sixties which claimed to be based (at least partly) on this anarchism. However this resistance is often limited to a few (and even then partly misunderstood) slogans such as ‘Anarchy is order’, ‘Property is theft’,...

Information about anarchism is often hard to come by, monopolised and intellectual; and therefore visibly disapearing.The ‘anarchive’ or ‘anarchist archive’ Anarchy is Order (in short **A.O**) is an attempt to make the ‘**principles, propositions and discussions**’ of this tradition available again for anyone it concerns. We believe that these texts are part of our own heritage. They don’t belong to publishers, institutes or specialists.

These texts thus have to be available for all anarchists an other people interested. That is one of the conditions to give anarchism a new impulse, to let the ‘new

anarchism' outgrow the slogans. This is what makes this project relevant for us: we must find our roots to be able to renew ourselves. We have to learn from the mistakes of our socialist past. History has shown that a large number of the anarchist ideas remain standing, even during the most recent social-economic developments.

'Anarchy Is Order' does not make profits, everything is spread at the price of printing- and papercosts. This of course creates some limitations for these archives.
Everyone is invited to spread along the information we give . This can be done by copying our leaflets, printing from the CD that is available or copying it, e-mailing the texts ,...Become your own anarchive!!!
(Be aware though of copyright restrictions. We also want to make sure that the anarchist or non-commercial printers, publishers and autors are not being harmed. Our priority on the other hand remains to spread the ideas, not the ownership of them.)

The anarchive offers these texts hoping that values like **freedom, solidarity and direct action** get a new meaning and will be lived again; so that the struggle continues against the

'demons of flesh and blood, that sway scepters down here;
and the dirty microbes that send us dark diseases and wish to
squash us like horseflies;
and the will-'o-the-wisp of the saddest ignorance'.
(L-P. Boon)

The rest depends as much on you as it depends on us. Don’t mourn, Organise!

Comments, questions, criticism,cooperation can be send to
A.O@advalvas.be
A complete list and updates are available on this address, new texts are always

WELCOME!!

"NEITHER MINE NOR THINE": COMMUNIST EXPERIMENTS IN HUSSITE BOHEMIA*

THOMAS A. FUDGE

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"Henceforth, at Hradišt and Tábor there is nothing which is mine or thine. Rather, all things in the community shall be held in common for all time and no one is permitted to hold private property. The one who does commits sins mortally . . . No longer shall there be a reigning king or a ruling lord; for there shall be servitude no longer. All taxes and exactions shall cease and no one shall compel another to subjection. All shall be equal as brothers and sisters."

Táborite articles 1420*

"Also in material concerns some have come to a common decision to renounce such things, to hold nothing of their own, neither private property nor money nor any other thing, according to the example given by the first Christian leaders, about whom it is written that they held all things in common, having nothing of their own but sharing everything with those in need . . . And whichever among them possess worldly wealth, let them do with it as the gospels ordain: give to the poor, and having shared their goods out among them, let them earn their bread by the labour of their hands, for this is, indeed good . . . If after that anything still remains over, let them share it with their nearest. But if, on the other hand, they are unable to supply their own material wants, let them take from their brethren, who have concurred in this decree."

Synodal decree of the Unitas Fratrum 1464*

I

Experiments with communist ideas in late medieval and early modern Europe represent one dimension in the pursuit of utopianism.* Communalism and the implementation of communism frequently were allied with reformation tactics. Such reforms were sometimes socially, but more often religiously motivated. The religious dimension of utopianism consistently drew on the volatile traditions of apocalypticism, eschatology, antichrist, and millenarianism. From the end of the eleventh century movements guided by beliefs in these motifs occurred with some regularity. Joachite prophecy and its derivatives played no small rôle. The twelfth-century Calabrian abbot and hermit Joachim of Fiore ostensibly had perceived the coming end of the world. Flagellant groups in Italy, French and German territories and the Low Countries, Brethren of the Free Spirit and the Lollards in England all shared a belief in the imminent end of the world.* Heiko Oberman has described the eve of the European reformations in terms of a "nascent apocalyptic mood" predicated upon the apocalyptic texture of late medieval thought. These traditions and convictions spurred forward groups such as the Hussites in their urge to purge in preparation for the day of the Lord. The calamitous social situation in some contexts, together with the fervent conviction in the parousia, frequently created a situation of near desperation.*

Because of such circumstances the intoxicating influence of idealism and utopia continued to be pressed forward. One pervasive ideal was communism. The quotations above support this notion. Apocalyptic utopianism forced eschatological expectations into a variety of concrete historical settings. The idea of communal living and the sharing of goods likewise became an historical reality,

consistently in theory and sporadically in practice, for much of the fifteenth century. The idea and practice emerged in Bohemia around 1419 and cannot be considered moribund until the death of Jan Kalenec in 1547. Thereafter, the communist ideas of the Hussites passed over into the communities of the Anabaptists, Habrovany Brethren, and Brüderhofe of the Hutterites in Moravia, where they remained an historical issue for a full century until 1622.* Similarly these communities had contact with others of like persuasion later established in Poland, Transylvania, and the Carpathians. The axiom "neither mine nor thine" became the watchword for the Hussite attempt at realizing a viable and practical utopian society.

II

The forces unleashed in Bohemia in the context of the early Czech reformation coincided with various other influences and events both in the lands of St. Wenceslas and beyond: the papal schism, conciliarism, a weakened monarchy in the Czech lands and the burgeoning strength of the nobility, widespread poverty, the execution of "St. Jan Hus," a heightened perception of ecclesiastical corruption, popular heresy, the influence of radical preachers, apocalyptic fervour and an imminent sense of the need for change and reform. The radicalizing of the reform movement included in its agenda a critique of medieval social order, new theological emphases and a conscious attempt to establish the primitive church in Bohemia. In this latter aspiration the Hussites combined an impressive social critique and the ideals of the apostolic church, with the result that rudimentary experiments with communist ideals emerged as an option.

Despite several innovative developments, communism did not figure in the reforming agenda up until the time of Hus. A theoretical equality of all people was advanced but was not implemented. Widespread protests against social abuses and in defence of peasants rights remained unaccompanied by concrete action. The on-going attack on the sinfulness of those who accumulated vast wealth and oppressed others in the process remained verbal and in sum had little impact at the popular level. The reason for this is clear: Hus and his predecessors perceived the problem as primarily moral, not social. Poverty was never declared evil and the social structure was not thought to be inherently skewed. Indeed, the social order of the Middle Ages saw itself and accepted itself as the divinely ordained natural order of society.* The early Czech reform movement acquiesced in this view.

Hence, it could attack only the abuses of the system, not the system itself. With the advent of the Táborites the system itself faced severe challenge.

III

" As the brilliance of the sun, or the wetness of the water, so . . . marriages were held in common. In the manner of beasts they mated for a single night. No one knew the meaning of saying "mine," but as those who live in the monastic life they referred to all goods as "ours" in word, heart and in deed. None of their quarters were bolted and the doors were not closed in the face of the poor. Among them exists none who are . . . destitute."*

What sounds like a description of Hussite Tábor was written nearly three centuries earlier by Cosmas of Prague (c. 1045-1125), Bohemias first historian. For a time in 1419 and 1420 the description is, in the main, accurate apropos to Tábor. The social emphases and communist experiments at Tábor have long been a cause célèbre in modern Czech historiography.* According to Vavinec of Bezová, the conservative Hussite chronicler, the priests of Tábor began preaching a unique advent of Christ among the elect. Those within the safety of the five designated cities of refuge -- Plze, Klatovy, atec, Louny, and Slany -- would survive the wrath of God. From all over Bohemia and Moravia multitudes of people thronged to the Táborite priests. Having sold their possessions they brought the money and placed it at the feet of the priests.* In 1419 several mass gatherings occurred in which elementary communist principles were invoked; everyone was called "brother" or "sister" and social distinctions were ignored.* Food was shared in common, the richer supplying the poor. No difference was made between "mine" and "thine," though the communal sexual use of women was not practised at this point. But later, as noted proleptically by Cosmas of Prague, this did occur on the fringes of Táborite society. By the term communism I mean a community of goods. James

Stayer has defined that idea as the attempt to practice the principles outlined in the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 2 and 4.* His definition is appropriate for fifteenth-century Bohemia.

The phenomenon of selling possessions and donating the proceeds to the priests at Tábor was not an isolated occurrence. The conservative Hussite, Jan Píbram corroborated Vavinecs account and noted that a similar event occurred at Písek, a centre with a history of radical sectarian devotion, where community chests were established.* Where did this particular communism originate? The motif can be traced to two sources. First, it developed out of the Hussites intense desire to establish the primitive church in Bohemia. Priest Jan elivský, preaching in the New Town of Prague at the Church of St. Mary of the Snows, articulated this desire forcefully: "O that the city of Prague would now be the example for all believers, not only in Moravia, but in Hungary, Poland, Austria . . . !"* Jan Píbram wrote in disgust that the radical Táborites considered themselves the sole holy, universal, church and community in all Christendom.* Píbram's charge must not be dismissed for this is precisely how the radicals viewed themselves. Nor were they alone in this assumption. A century later the Hutterites claimed that the practice of common goods marked out the true believers and in 1529 Clemens Adler, the Anabaptist leader in Silesia, underscored this idea.* Not long thereafter, radicals in Poland expressed similar convictions, insisting that private property was wickedness.* Given the Táborites' biblicist enthusiasm, the communist practices of the early apostolic community was enough to warrant its imitation in Hussite Bohemia.

However, a simple "thus saith the Lord" would hardly have been sufficient to attract so many adherents to Tábor. The second source provides a solution. Without doubt the chiliast enthusiasm which swept the radical sectors of Hussitism had strong appeal. The promise of a world utopia, coupled with the combined pooling of resources for the betterment of society, attracted its followers.* After a lifetime of giving one's productivity over to the lord of the land, and in the face of mounting political and economic difficulties, there were those willing to risk what little they had on the prophecies and visions of the radical priests.* Understandably, the majority of those attracted to this particular communistic lifestyle were the socially disinherited and disadvantaged. No one could expect "the lame devil," Oldich Romberk, to ride into Tábor and surrender the nine towns, twenty-six small villages and almost seven hundred whole and partial villages he controlled,* or to grant freedom to the eleven thousand peasants under the control of the Romberk empire.* Nonetheless, we know that in addition to peasants, there were village magistrates, grooms, potters, priests, servants, barbers, carpenters, town councillors, cobblers, blacksmiths, burghers, and cooks involved in Táborite activities.* How many were advocates of communist ideals is impossible to determine. But those wishing to escape the hegemonic strictures of medieval society could place their hopes in the vision of a chiliast, apostolic, communist Bohemian society.

It was not incidental that these early Hussites forsook the cities and towns and fled to the hills. Clearly such gatherings in the towns would have come under the scrutiny and censure of the authorities. Moreover, if we are to believe the figures of chroniclers, the sheer numbers present at these gatherings dictated the wide open spaces. Beyond

this, was the conviction that towns were symbolic of all that had gone awry in society. The town milieu not only exacerbated social divisions but also conflicted with notions of apostolic poverty. Many leading intellectuals in pre-Hussite Bohemia expressed grave reservations about the cities, towns and the prevailing ethos within. Jan Hus made clear that in great cities, evil people gathered and succeeded in turning towns into seats of the devil.* Hussites later conceived the town even less favourably. Jan Rokycana and Petr Chelický both spoke critically and bitterly about urban centres. The latter insisted that the city embodied Antichrist.* Considering the physical demarcation of towns and cities and the type of popular beliefs which grew up around them, it is not surprising to find these urban centres demonized. The boundaries of cities were marked clearly. The walls or ramparts identified the social autonomy of the town. Troops kept watch by day and night. When night fell the walls glimmered with the light of torches. Gates were shut from dusk until dawn. No one could enter or leave during those hours without permission. Climbing the walls was punished severely. Even approaching the walls during the night constituted a criminal act. The walls of towns symbolized security and formed a boundary between the community and the rest of the world.* Walls kept the city in and the rest of the world out. The city of God and the city of Antichrist could not, and should not, be mixed.* So the radicals fled from the urban darkness to the light of the hills, where the Hussites anticipated the end of time and the climax of human history, in an artificially constructed apocalyptic utopia.

The experiment at Tábor not only sprang from a desire to witness the primitive church in Bohemia redivivus, but also from impulses for a more just social order.* The proposed renovation would conceivably set the stage for the arrival of

the eschaton. The apocalyptic mood in Bohemia found a context for establishing this idea among the Táborites. An experiment developed wherein social divisions and structures of hierarchy were swept away: payment for rent and service forbidden, all goods to be held in common, material wealth collected before newcomers could be admitted to the community, certain former laws disregarded, all debtors released from their obligations, lord-peasant relationships dissolved, all persons henceforth became brothers and sisters, and private property was outlawed in the quest for a new social order. A popular song combined the social critique of the aforementioned "Priest Jan, the apostate monk of eliv," and the sentiment being expressed at Tábor.*

"According to the wisdom of the masters, they would have told God to arrange matters in this way: the poor should neither eat nor drink, should sleep neither at night nor day, but always work and pay their lords. The lords, after listening to the priests, would require more and more dues. Then, when using up the peasant, they could turn his body into that of a beast of burden and subject him to forced labour. This is how the wretched have come to be in anguish in every land, especially the Czechs, on account of the conceited priesthood."*

How could the problem be rectified? Tábor provided an answer. The overarching rubric of Hussitism contended that the establishment of the primitive church ethos was the ultimate ideal. This notion was advanced by the Prague university master and Hussite lawyer, Jan of Jesenice, according to whom the land should return to apostolic simplicity where all things are held in common.* Thus the Táborite leaders instructed the people to cease paying rents and being subject to their lords. "Now you will freely take

possession of their towns, fish-ponds, pastures, forests and everything they own."* Jan Píbram noted further that Táborites advocated the violent abolition of the nobility: "All lords and knights should have their throats cut and their goods ravaged. This has happened with many of them [nobles] being murdered."* The idea of communal goods posed a serious threat to the stability of hierarchical society and called into question the nature of medieval social structure. This was not lost on the detractors of the radical Hussites. A century later, drastic measures were enacted to discourage both religious dissent and social innovation as they related to a community of goods. On 20 August 1527 the Habsburg ruler, Ferdinand I issued a decree against the Anabaptists calling for those who taught the sharing of property to be executed by beheading.*

Táborite radicalism resonated elsewhere in eastern Europe over the next century. Dissenters in Poland found a patron in Jan Sienieski in 1569 at Raków where, driven by apocalyptic anticipation, they attempted to establish a "New Jerusalem." Their commune outlawed distinctions of rank and estate, condemned obedience to state authority and law courts, and advocated complete withdrawal from society. The emphasis fell upon manual labour, equality, pacifism, and community of goods. Raków perceived itself as a pattern for the kingdom of God.*

The idea of community chests which arose at Tábor spread. At Písek "one or two chests" were set up and "the community of people nearly filled them."* Additionally there were also chests at Vodany.* Howard Kaminsky has suggested that the community chests probably had their origin in several sources: first, in the practical problem of distributing resources to large crowds of people; second, in the tradition of communal sharing in the primitive church;

and third, in the idea that entrance into the new community of Christ should be made without the trappings of the old Babylon. In other words, the chests functioned as a practical renunciation of the old world.* The priests of Tábor, among them Václav Koranda of Plze, Mikuláš of Pelhimov "Biskupec," Martínek Húska, and Jan of Jiín, were the main leaders in this new communist experiment. At Tábor, barrels and tubs were set up in the main town square next to the church. All who joined the Hussite commune were required to place their superfluous personal belongings in the barrels and tubs. Vavinec of Bezová reported that the people of Tábor elected certain men as overseers of the collection and distribution of goods. Biskupec and other priests were to faithfully administer the goods of the community according to need.* While that priestly management of the common chests was established early on at Tábor, it is interesting to note that the funds and goods at Písek were under the administration of a layman. "The administrator of the chest [at Písek] was . . . Matj Louda of Chlumany,"* a political and military leader. These administrators managed all property and made available commodities into common possessions. Communal expenses were covered by the common treasuries. Concomitant with this was the promulgation of the principle that all leaders, priests, town administrators, and military commanders must be elected by the common assembly of people. The communist ideals set forth at Tábor, Písek, Vodany, and other towns were, in the beginning, a huge success. Crowds of peasants and poor people flocked to Tábor daily in such numbers that many nearby villages became entirely deserted and in time disappeared altogether.* It seemed that an apostolic community had been established. An anonymous song, hostile to the Hussites, conceded that the Táborites had achieved an ideal of sorts: "They meet together in peace,

unity and love, sharing eggs and bread with one another."* Later witnesses corroborated the essential context of Táborite communism: "they attempted to live after the example of the primitive church, possessing all goods in common, with one making provision for the other, and referring to all members as brothers."* The emphasis went well beyond Christian charity and focussed on communal sharing.

These emphases were repeated during the time of the European reformations. In 1525, the chronicle of Johannes Kessler of St. Gallen reported that most of the village of Zollikon on Lake Zurich converted to the Anabaptist faith. Like the early Christians the villagers removed locks from doors, made all things common and implemented a community of goods.* Likewise at Raków, in the 1570s, the Polish communists endeavoured for a time to imitate apostolic social practices.

As we have seen, originally the common chests were filled by those flocking to Tábor, Písek, and other centres of radical activity. So strong was their commitment to the Hussite program that these converts sold all their belongings, renounced their past, and gave their money to the communal fund.* These original contributions could not sustain the needs of the growing community for long, however. During 1419 and 1420 Táborite religion was imbued strongly with chiliast-apocalyptic ideas.* The end of the world was forecast, the return of Christ envisioned, all evil in the world was predicted to be at an end, the wicked would be annihilated, fire and sword would devour the enemies of boí zákon [the Law of God].* Those who adhered to the Law of God were urged to flee to the mountains since salvation would come only to those in the hills and ultimately they would dwell with the saints and,

chief among the saints, Master Jan Hus.* But the arrival of the eschaton failed to occur amid growing hostility. Consequently the Hussites, in April 1420, elected four men as military captains: Mikuláš of Hus, Zbynk of Buchov, Chval of Machovice, and Jan ika. These troops, later known as the "warriors of God," came to be regarded as a social estate alongside the traditional categories of medieval society. In their early battles and raids, especially at Voice and the seizure of the fortress of Sedlec and Rábí Castle, all luxuries were destroyed: treasuries laid waste and clothing, jewels, and other goods destroyed. The early chiliast-millenarian views were still active in the Táborite mentality: all riches must be subordinated to the primary task of establishing and defending the Law of God. The same phenomenon occurred in Prague on 30 July 1419 when the New Town councillors were defenestrated in the presence of Priest elivský and Jan ika. The bodies of the town officials lay dead on the street, their hats and chains of office untouched.* This idealism soon fell away and the plunder of war became a means for sustaining the common chests.* Under torture, Jan Polák of Prachatice admitted that he had been in collusion with Táborites and together with ika had attacked castles. "The horse-shoe maker" Jan of eice, with Pavlík of Chvalkov, Petr of Pelhimov, Janek of Chvojnov, Oldich of etice and others, confessed to destroying property belonging to the Romberks. Pibík Tluksa of Kamen took part in Táborite raids while Jan of eleznice, "a keeper of horses," admitted to helping ika "steal and rob." Buzek confessed that he was the leader of petty raids on Romberk territory.* Clearly, these forays were intended not only to harass the enemy, but also to maintain the community chests. The Hussite warriors never succeeded in gaining permanent integration into Bohemian society yet their existence remained crucial in the 1420s.

ika's warriors presented a different form of challenge to social order.*

Jan Píbram, the anti-Táborite Hussite, accused the priests of Tábor of seducing and deceiving the common people. For Píbram, the communist ideals were nothing more than a cleverly conceived plot to benefit "falešní svuodce" (the false seducers).* Píbram went so far as to accuse those "ukrutné šelmy" (violent animals), and especially Matj Louda of Chlumany the administrator at Písek, of dishonesty and duplicity with regard to the common funds. As far as we know, there were no regulating safety devices in place to monitor the distribution of the common chests. Embezzling common funds could have been an easy affair within the existing Táborite system. On the other hand, Kaminsky has rightly observed that no other source remotely supports Píbram's allegation, which "seems highly unlikely in a period characterized by so high a degree of fanatical idealism."* Notwithstanding, cases of abuse in the later Hussite period and among the sixteenth-century Hutterites can be found.* Sometimes the experiments became subjects of caricature. A woodcut of the later sixteenth century depicted Hutterite communism as a dovecote of witches. While Jacob Hutter gestures from the highest window the Hutterites fly around in wild sorcery-like fashion while a fox watches from below.*

Communist extremists at Tábor, called Adamites, pushed for even more thorough-going communism in the abolition of the traditional family structure. Not willing to live in the monastic spirit, whose "rule was the work of Antichrist,"* the Adamites called for the communal sharing of women. "Pijde a bude taková láska v lidech, e všechny vci budú mezi nimi v spolku a obecny, i eny . . ." (Behold, the time is upon us when there will be much love among the people

and all things will be held jointly and in common, even women . . .).* Another source describes the Adamite communal sharing of women thus: "They held their women in common and no one could know a woman without the consent of the leader, Adam. When a brother burned for a sister with strong desire, he would take her by the hand and go to the elder saying, 'my spirit is on fire with desire for her.' Then the elder would reply, 'go, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth'."* The sexual libertinism of the Adamites and the communist idea concerning women was never accepted by the wider community at Tábor, despite later accounts which associated Adamite practices with all of Tábor.* Similar propaganda followed other communities holding common goods. Johannes Cochlaeus reported to Erasmus that the Swiss Anabaptists made everything common, including young women and wives.* Eventually the Adamites were driven from Tábor and destroyed by ika first at Klokoty in April and then later near Jindichv Hradec and Strá in October 1421. Sexual egalitarianism, however, did find wider acceptance and survived longer than the communal sexual sharing of women. Hussite women did function in leadership rôles. John Klassen has noted references in the literature of the period which suggest that treatises were composed by women.* Štpán of Dolany, abbot of a Carthusian house in Moravia, asserted that there were women preachers even in Prague* while Ondej of Brod, Catholic professor of theology at Charles University, claimed that Hussites hired women to preach.* An anti-Hussite rhyme also stated the same thing: "They make preachers out of cobblers (ševcóv), millers (mlynáóv), butchers (ezníkóv), bakers (pekaóv), tanners (koeluhóv), barbers (lazebníkov) and other craftsmen (jiných šemeslníkóv). Even women are allowed to preach."* Among the Adamites, Rohan shared leadership in tandem with a woman named Maria.

The stern critique of social structures by popular preachers shaped the Hussite social experiments. Jan elivský, "the preacher of poor, deprived and oppressed people,"* accused prelates and magistrates of perpetuating the sufferings of common people. According to elivský these oppressors, exalted by the Donation of Constantine and simoniacal heresy, would not proclaim God's kingdom to the poor.* The communists at Tábor declared their readiness to do so. Not only did the Táborites preach the Kingdom of God, they attempted to begin it with the communist ideals of south Bohemia.* Without external force this radical resolve was abruptly and dramatically contravened. The vision of a utopian society had been disrupted from within. On St. Galls Day, 14 October 1420, Táborite leaders in the strictest terms collected all the usual rents and dues from the peasants at Tábor.* The article "all taxes and exactions shall cease," as noted earlier, was summarily violated and contravened. The disappointment and utter chagrin of the peasants over this unexpected development was understandably intense. St. Gall's Day was the usual day for collecting peasant rents. The communist peasants felt certain they had been set free from this burden. It was not to be. Indeed, the burden increased. Several sources report that the Táborites collected the customary payments as well as additional dues.*

There is no unimpeachable evidence to suggest that the Táborite leaders acted arbitrarily in a self-serving quest for gain. There is abundant evidence, however, to suggest that by its very nature Táborite communism could not succeed indefinitely. There are essentially three reasons for the collapse of the communist ideals at Tábor. First, there was the superficial pluralism which created instability. The best example is the Táborite Adamites who wanted to draw the

early communist ideals out to their logical conclusion. The mainstream community was prepared neither to follow nor to tolerate the new innovations. The proto-nationalism in the Hussite agenda likewise maintained the historic rift with the Germans. Only Germans who embraced the Hussite programme wholeheartedly were fully trusted and welcomed into the reforming communist programme. Though it has been pointed out that Hussitism had its supporters in Germany,* the evidence clearly suggests that a thin line of demarcation separated the two peoples. In Prague, for example, German Hussites in 1420 had a separate church -- the Church of the Holy Ghost.* Second, a loss of vision with respect to the communist ideals and the Hussite myth, together with a tendency toward corruption, undermined the experiment at Tábor. We have already alluded to Píbram's unsubstantiated allegation of dishonesty at Písek among the administrators of the common chests. An old chronicler reported that Hussite soldiers looted towns and robbed people for personal advantage.* After 1425 Táborite preachers claimed that some people were interested only in profit.* Mikuláš Biskupec described the loss of vision thus: ". . . as long as they were poor (they were willing to be part of the program). But as soon as they had filled their bags with money, they . . . turn to eating, drinking, ease and entertainment."* An extreme example is the petty nobleman, Mikuláš Trka of Lípa who, through military service in the Hussite armies, gained control of nine castles, fourteen towns and 320 villages.* This conundrum would later be found in Hutterite communities, although admittedly not to the same degree. Wilhelm Reublin alleged that in the Hutterite commune at Slavkov (Austerlitz) great inequity abounded. Reublin charged that some communal members ate "peas and cabbage" in separate chambers while in more elegant dining rooms the leaders and their families had "roasted meat, fish, poultry,

and good wine!" All of this went on while small children in the community were malnourished. Predictably, tension threatened communal stability.* Such disparity cannot readily be found among the Polish Brethren at Raków, nonetheless difficulties emerged there as well.

It is worth considering that the original vision among the Hussites not only became lost but may have been flawed with inchoate corruption even at the outset. Clearly, except in unusual cases, certain types of people advanced within the communities of equality. The priests at Tábor continued, as in the evil towns of Antichrist, to exercise significant social power and authority. Women only occasion-ally escaped patriarchy. Equality was contextually determined. It is also manifest that those arriving first at Tábor secured for themselves dwellings more centrally located and archaeological investigations have shown that these earliest houses were substantially larger than those secured by late-comers.* Even in the earliest days of apocalyptic utopianism some were more equal. In this the Hussites were not unique in the history of pre-modern communist experiments. Despite the proclamation of economic equality at Münster in the 1530s, no attempt was made to put everyone on equal footing.* Furthermore, Jan of Leiden and his royal court "made a mockery of the egalitarian pretensions of community of goods." In Stayer's words, the Münster experiment was little more than "a shabby façade which imperfectly disguised the persistence of gross privilege."* At Tábor there remained both exploitation and deferential egalitarianism.

The grave weakness of the communist experiment at Tábor lay in its nature. Táborite communism was not full-blown communism. Indeed, the Táborite experi-ment was limited to consumption communism, not production communism.

Family units worked for themselves and contributed surplus to the general supply. Essentially, the communism at Tábor was established not on production concerns but rather in terms of the needs of the poor. This limited enterprise created an unstable communism and led to the contradictory configuration of rich and poor which predicated the general collapse of the utopian vision. Tábor could not survive as a communist enterprise on such shaky socio-economic foundations. With the early abolition of all traditional means of income and the ridding of all instruments of production to await the apocalyptic climax, it became apparent all too soon that no society could exist indefinitely under such principles. The wealth of the common chests could last only so long. Without the development of industry, trade or an economic polity of governance to replenish the chests, the experiment could not continue. Similarly it may be said that Anabaptists in Central Germany in the sixteenth century failed to solve the problem of how to effectively organize their sharing of goods.* Remarkably enough, Tábor, as a community, did not dis-appear. With the development of a system of crafts, Tábor became, economically, quite similar to other Bohemian towns.* With the initial establishment of Tábor, communist ideals had become articles of faith. By the end of 1420, Tábor's radical theology remained, but her communist ideals had been expunged from the state-ments of doctrine.

When Aeneas Sylvius visited Tábor thirty years later, communism had long been extinct. Nevertheless, Aeneas reported two vestiges of the old ideals. First, people of different inclinations, mainly heresies according to Aeneas, lived together in peace.* Second, the Táborite clergy were supported by gifts from the community since they did not own property.

The Táborites stock a building for them at public expense with grain, beer, pork-fat, vegetables, wood, and all necessary furnishings, and they add to this a three-score of groschen each month for each priest, out of which sum the latter may buy fish, fresh meat, and, if they wish, wine. They offer nothing on the altar; they condemn all tithes; and they do not observe the offering of first-fruits either in name or in fact.*

It is entirely possible that the funds of the common chests evolved into church funds. Since there is no evidence to suggest that contributions to the common priestly fund were obligatory, it seems reasonable to connect the survival of original communism, which extended to the entire community, with the communally supported common stores for the priests of Tábor.*

The ideals of early Tábor attempted to harmonize the demands of the Christian faith with the realities of Bohemian society and thus produce an alternative to religious and social problems.* The implementation of its communist ideals in 1420 was doomed from the beginning. But the experiment would be tried again in Bohemia, within a generation, by another community imbued with the original spirit and fervour of the Táborites.

IV

In 1452 Jií of Podbrady, the later Hussite king, forced the capitulation of Tábor. Its fortifications were dismantled and its main leaders, Mikuláš Biskupec and Václav Koranda of Plze were imprisoned. Within five years the delayed offspring of Tábor was born. Sometime in 1457 or 1458 a group of people under the leadership of eho Krají (Gregory "the tailor") of Prague, c. 1420-74, established a community at Kunvald in northeast Bohemia. Originally this group was called Brati zakona Kristova (The Brethren of the Laws of Christ) but later became known as Jednota Bratrská (The Unity of Brethren) or the Unitas Fratrum.

The glory of Tábor was gone forever, but her spirit was far from dead. In the early years of the Unitas Fratrum it was the spirit of Tábor and Petr Chelický which provided the main impetus.* According to James Stayer, similar influences may be detected in the early example of the Swiss Anabaptists and groups later who pursued communist ideals. Following Chelický, the "Brothers and Sisters of the Laws of Christ" decreed that none of their members should participate in state governance because the state created inequalities. Christians must not rule, accumulate wealth, engage in trade or keep inns. This latter prohibition was linked to the general negative perception of the profession. The Kunvald community used the Táborite designation of "brother" and "sister" for members of their group.* In its earliest stage the Unitas Fratrum was no more than a loose federation of groups kept together by the zeal of their leader and founder, eho, and their desire to live according to the gospel.* This entailed the principle, advanced partially by both the Táborites and Chelický, of complete human equality. There were to be no social divisions of "rich" and "poor." Hence, it became mandatory on the grounds of

communism, pacifism, and anarchism for those holding property, wealth, and rank to renounce all symbols of status before joining the community. Our knowledge of this practice comes from statements by four leading members of the community. In the spring of 1480, Michael, Jan Táborský, Prokop of Jindichv Hradec, and Tomáš of Lanškroun were apprehended at Kladsko by order of the duke of Munsterberg. The brothers had been enroute to visit Waldensian communities in Brandenburg. The examination of the brothers was held on 4-5 June and conducted by Roman priests.* The restrictions of the community regarding property discouraged many of the nobility, who may have otherwise been inclined, from joining the Unitas Fratrum prior to 1470. Two known exceptions were Methodius Strachota and Jan Kostka of Postupice. The former "on joining the Brethren . . . gave up his castle at Orlice (near Kyšperk, where his family had their seat) and lived in poverty as a nobleman's secretary and later as a miller."* Trade was forbidden as was earning interest on financial loans. The underlying Christian principles of charity and mutual aid were stressed in the formative years. The early apocalyptic zeal so characteristic of the Táborite years had not faded. The conviction of living at the end of the age continued to provide motivation for the ongoing pursuit of utopianism.

At a synod in Rychnov in 1464, many of these tenets received official formulation. The communism of goods -- in keeping with the primitive church and the Táborites -- was deemed obligatory. As noted earlier, all material concerns were to be renounced, private property relinquished, all things -- both money and goods -- were to be held in common; everything was to be shared with the poor and the community was to provide for all the needs of its members. A reformed social practice provided the

Kunvald community with its viability. The Unitas Fratrum severely criticized the Waldensian priests for their apparent failure to practice communist ideals. In 1471 the Czech communists, in their tract Kterak se lidé mají míti k ímské Církvi (How people should conduct themselves toward the Roman Church), launched a forceful attack against the Waldensians. "They take from their people and, neglecting the poor, amass much wealth. For it is indeed not only against the faith for a Christian priest to lay up treasure from earthly things, but even to inherit property from his parents. Rather should he distribute it as alms, not forgetting the poor in need, for otherwise -- according to the writings of the apostles -- he has abjured the apostolic faith and thereby excluded himself from grace."* Unlike the Adamites, the Unitas did not advance communist notions about the dissolution of the traditional family unit or the communal sharing of women. Unmarried members lived and worked together according to gender. The Rychnov Synod in 1464 emphasized mutual obedience in religious and communal affairs.*

By 1467 the Unitas Fratrum instituted their own separate priesthood at the Synod of Lhotka near Rychnov. The reform community elected Matj as their leader. He was consecrated by Priest Michael of amberk, a sympathetic Roman priest.* With Matj at the helm, together with Prokop of Jindichv Hradec, Martin of Krín, Tma Pelouský, Eliáš Chenovicky, Augustin Hala of Chrudím, and Veliký Vít, the Unitas progressed. Certain households [zbor] were designated as centres for the poor and elderly. Consistent with the rule established by Brother eho, the brethren continued to engage only in crafts and agriculture as occupations.* Despite sporadic persecution in the 1460s by both Roman and Utraquist Churches, the Unitas Fratrum flourished. In 1479 the brethren numbered probably fewer

than 2,000.* By 1500 that figure had climbed to about 10,000 with related communities in Moravia and Poland, in addition to those in Kunvald, Prague, Klatovy, Lenešice, Benatky, Nmecký Brod, Rychnov nad Knnou, Krin near Litice, Vinaice, and other unspecified locations. Moreover, the Unitas Fratrum had secured the powerful protection of families such as Kostka of Postupice, Krají of Krajek, and Ctibor Tovaovský of Cimburk.*

Like the Táborites, the Unitas Fratrum practised only partial communism. Even in the early years, private ownership was not forbidden in the strict sense and in time the principle was abandoned altogether, except among the clergy. The communal sharing of goods was more or less voluntary after the initial hard-line. The death knell to communist ideals among the Unitas Fratrum can be traced to three sources. First, the brethren had, through the consequences of industry, thrift and frugality, created considerable wealth and no mean reputation in the Czech lands, despite their association with heresy and separatism. Now, many people wished to join the brethren. This precipitated a relaxing of communal standards, especially concerning social issues. The Edict of Brandýs in 1490 allowed community members to hold public office and opened the door to further reforms of the social policy of the Unitas. The result was an irreparable split between the moderate Vtší strana (Major Party) and the extremist Menší strana (Minor Party). With the virtual extinction of the extremists many of the old communist ideas were deleted from the rule of faith of the Unitas Fratrum.* The texture of the apocalyptic thread had changed yet again.

As death neared, the leader of the Minor Party, Brother Amos, conferred priestly orders upon Jan Kalenec († c. 1547) and appointed him his successor. Jan Kalenec tried to

revive the old doctrines among the brethren without success. Kalenec established connections with the Moravian Anabaptists and the Habrovany Brethren and influenced significantly the social tenets of the latters practice.* These communities would enjoy a long, if troubled, history. From the late 1520s different forms of communal experiments were pursued at Slavkov (Austerlitz).* Kalenec also had contacts with the Brüderhofe, the communist experiments in Moravia under the influence of Jacob Hutter. Kalenec favoured communism but could never re-establish the practice in Bohemia. After his death the Minor Party, with its radical tendencies, disappeared altogether.

V

The idea of establishing a practical utopia through communalism in Hussite Bohemia may be traced to two main sources: religious idealism and economic considerations. The lure of primitive Christianity captured the imagination of those disenchanted with the late medieval church. The yearning for a better life, challenge of utopia, promise of the coming kingdom of God, and millennial reign were forces challenging culture and society. One way in which the Hussites believed they could achieve their goals was through communist experiments. The heady influences of the reform fervour from the 1370s onward prompted an intense search for salvation. This, together with the eschatological expectations of the Táborites, provided the movement with an urgency unmatched in the later period. There was a hidden order in the flux of the Hussite century. What made for stability in sectarian communities that were founded with radical social ideals and then compromised with individualism and private property? The answer must lie in some dimension of the persistent apocalyptic conviction which gripped, successively, each attempt to realize the kingdom of God through social renovation. The pursuit of utopia was prompted by the apocalyptic mood. That pursuit took different forms but the common quest remained.

Anti-Hussite crackdowns and royal repression from 1415 to 1419 served only to galvanize the heretics and strengthen their resolve to implement the utopianism they envisioned. Blood became seed and injustice was met by the world-denying scheme of communism. It was this consensus which became the explosive force in Bohemia and similar convictions led to the German Peasants' War in 1525. The communist-religious programme of the Hussites, which

centred in equality, became a defining feature and connecting link in the two eras of rebellion. For south Germany the link had been established through the disseminating efforts of the merchant and lay bishop Friedrich Reiser.*

Yet not all Hussites were motivated by religious concerns. In fact, it is not even safe to assume the majority were. The unstable economy rife with growing problems and rising discontent played a pivotal rôle in the appeal of Hussite communism to the average Bohemian and Moravian of the fifteenth century. Poverty, inflation, rising prices, static wages, debt, taxes, joblessness, political insecurity, social disadvantage, and cultural upheaval caused people under the Czech crown to consider the plans and promises of the Hussite prophets.* Economic concerns, however, did not become motivation for experiments in communalism all at once. The Bohemian economy experienced rise and fall for more than two generations. But there were extreme situations. Between 1400 and 1420 the Czech groschen had rapidly devalued by 20 per cent.* The year before the founding of Tábor taxes had been demanded seven times of the citizens of Prague.* The economic desperation of some provided sufficient impetus for the trip to Tábor. As in fifteenth-century Bohemia, so the reasons for joining communist communities in the sixteenth century were many and varied. Religious conviction, economic motivation, and social affinity seem to be the most common. Yet there were reasons altogether unedifying, like the men who abandoned wives, men and women who ran off together, outlaws, or those who for various and sundry reasons simply wished to disappear.*

Despite the religious and economic inducement, many in Hussite Bohemia did not exercise the radical communist

option presented by the followers of Hus. Puritanical intolerance, dogmatic uniformity, cultural isolationism, dictatorship of the communal leadership, and a stringent renunciation of all worldly possessions and alliances was too much for some. For others their allegiance to the Roman Church precluded fraternizing with condemned heretics. For still others the fear of an attractive, but unknown, situation was sufficient to keep them where they were, in an unattractive, but well-known context. The shortcomings, drawbacks, and essential nature of the communist communities of Hussite Bohemia reflect to large measure the same configuration of sixteenth-century communities in Germany, Moravia, Poland, and Transylvania.*

These brief analyses of fifteenth-century Czech communism make abundantly clear that these experiments at best were partial, inconclusive, and in a perpetual state of flux. Furthermore, in both cases -- Táborite and Unitas Fratrum -- they were vitiated by political and theological considerations. The inchoate communism which was realized at Tábor was possible because there was no hindering coercive force in the country powerful enough to disrupt the experiment. The Unitas Fratrum enjoyed the protection of King Jií of Podbrady in the early years and the patronage of powerful nobles later in the century. Certainly, the experiment at Tábor was the more intensive, dynamic and successful of the Bohemian attempts at communal living. Nonetheless, it was doomed by its early chiliast orientation. The failure of its communist ideals was joined to the conviction that the parousia was near. Hence, the necessary step from consumption communism to production communism was not considered -- indeed the very notion was a non sequitur in chiliasm -- until that transition had to be superseded by more drastic measures.

The Unitas Fratrum were not fuelled by the same apocalyptic-chiliast fervour as the Táborites. Instead, they saw the Utraquists as going back too close to Rome and thus, yearning for the perceived purity and simplicity of the early church, broke away from the Utraquist Church. Like the Táborites of old they abandoned the city of Antichrist and attempted to establish the city of Christ in the Bohemian hinterlands.

If communist principles were never fully achieved, the same could be said about egalitarianism. If communism at Tábor was oligarchic, it remained largely voluntary among the Unitas Fratrum. Tábor attempted to be more democratic and egalitarian vis-à-vis women, while the Unitas remained exclusively patriarchal. While there were schools for both boys and girls at Tábor, it was only among the extremist wings like the Adamites that women actually functioned in conspicuous leadership roles. These problems in the Bohemian experiments of the fifteenth century would be found among similar communities in the sixteenth century. Suggestions that Hutterite communities were democratic cannot sustain the contrary evidence which would seem to imply they were essentially oligarchic and patriarchal.*

It is fair to say that the driving forces at Tábor were more theological than social and primarily religious rather than economic. Among the Unitas there was a slightly greater social and economic emphasis, due to the influence of Chelický. Nonetheless, communism in Hussite Bohemia was religiously, more than socially, motivated. In the end, communism was little more than a sideline to the central Hussite agenda; it was not the heart of Hussitism. Important as it may have been -- and arguably it was very important -- communism was of secondary significance to following the teachings of St. Jan Hus, practising the cult of the chalice,

establishing and defending the Law of God and reviving the apostolic church in the gloomy dimness of "the night of antichrist."* Nevertheless, the communist ideals of Tábor and the Unitas Fratrum presented a challenge to late medieval Europe and in so doing facilitated social and religious reform which both captured the attention of Europe and the imagination of those seeking, in hope, the advent of a different world.

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