

SCIENCE GOES TO PEOPLE!

Popularization of science became one of corner stones of the new, communist society. Mottos such as “Science goes to people!” or “Science to help the country!” were a common part of everyday life of Czechoslovak society from the early 50s of 20th century.

As a part of Marxism-Leninism, esp. in the Lenin’s teaching, scientists were left their privileged position in the first stage of revolutionary struggle. As V. I. Lenin said in his work *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*, in the first stage of revolution it was necessary to maintain the exceptional position of scientists and intelligentsia because this specific group had knowledge unknown to the working class. Lenin approves of keeping the privileged salaries of scientists and engineers since he was aware of the fact that the state relying on the working class was in a very fragile situation.

CULT OF INTELLIGENTSIA

The situation in Czechoslovakia was not different and the privileged position of new intelligentsia, including its technical members, was maintained. The decimation of intelligentsia of non-communist nature can also be perceived this way – the only intelligentsia that can be re-educated and which can get to the working class is leftist intelligentsia. Thus, the image of intelligentsia in the context of its service to the working class, not as an independent group, but always related to the working class, prevails till 1956. Only in 1956, as a part of the de-Stalinization process of Central European science – and, after all, thinking – the cult of “a scientist of the people”, the prototype of which was Stalin (he hadn’t finished his theological studies, but he was an “excellent” linguist and historian), fell. The warning of the Communist Party that intelligentsia should not claim a privileged position in the society, pronounced by Marie Majerová at the Second Congress of Writers in 1956 (“Dear comrade writers, remember the great ambition of intelligentsia to become conscience of their people.”) was answered by Jaroslav Seifert as a speaker of Czechoslovak writers (“If only we, writers, were really conscience of our nation now, if only we were conscience of our people. For, believe me, I’m afraid we haven’t been it for more years, we haven’t been conscience of multitudes, conscience of millions, nor were we conscience of ourselves.”)

CONTINUATION AND SOVIETIZATION

The relation between intelligentsia and communist power went through a distressful development in the second half of 20th century; however, the character of essential premise of popularization of science, i.e. teaching the working class new knowledge, did not change. Furthermore, in the Central European space, the tradition of popularization of

science was firmly set, especially in the left-wing spectrum. In Czechoslovakia there was social-democratic *Working Academy* (founded in 1896), and also *Socialist Academy*, officially founded in 1935. After communism took over, they both were closed, as well as e.g. *Czechoslovak Freethought*, one of national branches of Freethought. Freethought was forced out from the popularization of science and a part of it was integrated in the new structure following the Soviet model, and the Working Academy was eliminated. The pre-war communist Socialist Academy became the foundation of the future system; however, the pressure on Sovietization of its activities was so strong that the Academy was dissolved and a new organization was founded – *The Czechoslovak Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge*.

This society was formed following the example of *The All-Union Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge*, which was introduced by Stalin in 1947–1948. The dimension of its activity and fast start were overwhelming; in 1950 the institution organized 933,000 lectures for 80 mil. people. Every month almost 90,000 lectures were given across the USSR. In the first half of 1950s its membership increased from 250,000 members to more than 500,000 million. The USSR Academy of Sciences took the main part since it guaranteed the expert level of the All-Union Society's activity and it also served as a basis for recruitment of majority of All-Union Society's top representatives, including its chairmen.

The origin of Czechoslovak Society was directly inspired by the All-Union Society, as proved by the archive records and detailed reports on structure of individual Soviet institutions which were shortly afterwards implemented in the Czechoslovak environment. After the First Ideological Conference in Brno in 1952, where a wide range of tasks that the Czechoslovak intelligentsia should focus on during the transformation of the Czechoslovak society was

set, a progress on ideologization of scientific community in Czechoslovakia and science indoctrination was made. This also included the area of popularization of science, where the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia decided and later initiated foundation of the *Czechoslovak Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge*.

STAGE OF BUILDING

In contradiction to the real situation, it was necessary to emphasize a voluntary nature of this initiative; therefore – as it had happened before in other cases – a spontaneous appeal to progressive intelligentsia was made a month after the conference in Brno. *Appeal for founding the Czechoslovak Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge* was published in *Rudé právo* on April 7, supported by 80 Czech scientists, who met for this occasion at Dobříš chateau. The appeal was aimed at representatives of Czech science and called upon the whole scientists' community to participate in activities of the newly founded organization. Soon the first, founding conference of the Czechoslovak Society took place in June 1952, where Vilibald Bezdíček (1906–1991) was elected chairman of the Society.

In the first stage, the Czechoslovak Society focused on building up its background. It took over the property of the Socialist Academy, a part of local facilities for public education, etc. At the same time it was necessary to build a steady expert team and set controlling organs of the Society. Apart from experienced resistance fighters, who proved useful for the Communist Party in WWII and had experience with agitational work, also new “cadres” whose profile corresponded to the needs of the new regime were engaged. Usually they were young comrades, graduates from universities such as the University of political and economic

science, etc., where Marxism-Leninism or political sciences related to it was taught.

This mixture of party members with merit, who needed to be offered a position corresponding to their service in WWII, and new cadres, who should build a new society, was completed by the members of academy across the whole country. An independent branch of the Czechoslovak Society was built from scratch also in Slovakia. This branch was chaired by Antonín Nedvěd (1899–1954), and Gabriel Čeněk (1900–1956) after Nedvěd's death.

In order to provide the highest possible level of professional prestige of the new society, also those scientist who did not affiliate to the regime were called for, since their proficiency and reputation was key for the Society existence. This was the case of Jaroslav Šafránek (1890–1957), an inventor of mechanical television set in Czechoslovakia – his ironic criticism of new conditions caught attention of the Society's cadres. However, the Secretary of the Czechoslovak Society said, "It was my mistake I hadn't discussed this issue with him. I thought I could have no influence on an old man (about 70 years) like him, but his expert knowledge was crucial for our institution."

DEVELOPMENT AND IDEOLOGIZATION

The activity of the Czechoslovak Society in the 1950s developed rapidly in both parts of the republic – the overall number of lectures in Czechoslovakia from 1952 to 1954 multiplied (in 1952 there were around 2,000 lectures, in 1954 their number crossed the line of 26,000); the number of audience increased rapidly, too (in 1952 it was 281,000 people; 1,290 mil. in 1953 and 1,762 mil. in 1954). In Slovakia the number of members doubled in the early 50s (from one thousand to two thousand members), the number of lectures increased (oscillated between 7,000 and 10,000) as well as the number of their audience (from more than 300,000 to 650,000 people).

A great part of this increase was due a mass spread of the Czechoslovak Society's activities in the country where it expanded after the Tenth Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1954, which claimed agriculture as one of the main priorities of further development and growth. Related to this requirement, projects such as *Scientists to help agriculture*, book series *Science helps practice* or *Science to help agriculture*. In total, as a part of a priority project *Science to help the country* 9,000 lectures were given in 1956.

The dissemination of scientific methods to the country was closely related to the ideologization of society, i.e. spreading of those scientific theories and paradigms that were observed as ideologically correct by the regime. E.g. due to the Czechoslovak Society's activities, Viliams's grass crop system, based on the application of Soviet research in soil biology, was massively implemented. Other Soviet theories, such as michurinism or lysenkoism, were also uncritically spread, however, this happened in "michurinists' clubs" and other organizations, in parallel to the Society's activities. In the political system, these clubs and organizations were under the auspices of public education and a part of activities of Czechoslovak Academy of Agricultural Sciences.

CHAIRMEN OF THE SOCIETY

After the resignation of the chairman Professor Vilibald Bezdíček in 1955, for which the main reasons were his working load and the fact he spent most time in Brno, not in Prague, a new chairman was to be elected. Even though Josef Macek (1922–1991), a historian and top representative of humanities in the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, was recommended for this position, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia gave preference to a scientist with a better reputation, as stated in the Party

documents, and therefore František Šorm (1913–1980), a biochemist and general secretary of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, became the next chairman. His strategy regarding the relationship to the political power was to yield to the Party requirements, but in reality, not to do anything. This became the reason for his replacement by a new chairman, Josef Macek, two years after he had been elected.

In the period of Šorm's chairmanship, the Czechoslovak Society managed to deal with the way it had run in the early 1950s and all theories suppressed or forbidden in the name of ideology. A strong criticism of the previous course and de facto the first refusal of the ideological attitude to sciences and power advocacy of paradigms or theories not based on scientific methods was heard at the meeting of board of the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Society. Thus, genetics or cybernetics were rehabilitated; and some Soviet theories and their global implementation in practice in conditions different from the Soviet ones were criticized for the first time.

In 1957 Josef Macek, an ambitious historian and a top representative of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, finally becomes chairman of the Czechoslovak Society. The Society and the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences were personally connected at the time of Šorm's election in 1955. The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia regarded such connection as helpful in engagement of a larger number of top scientists and anchoring the Czechoslovak Society in the area of scientific politics. However, František Šorm failed trust of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia since he subordinated interests of the Czechoslovak Society to those of Czechoslovak Academy of Science, and thus he significantly restricted the impact of ideology to the science itself. Josef Macek decided for a completely opposite course and under his direction, mainly scientists from the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences participated in the Czechoslovak

Society's activities. Josef Macek went to the USSR for a research fellowship and focused on the experience of the All-Union Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, which he implemented in practice after he returned to Czechoslovakia. E.g. Act 52 from July 9, 1959, On Public Education, which was repealed no sooner than in 1992, was initiated by the Czechoslovak Society delegation lead by Josef Macek. The delegation visited the USSR in 1957 and got acquainted with a new version of Soviet Act on Public Education, which was later implemented in the Czechoslovak legal system.

PUBLISHING POLICY

To Macek's credit we must say that under his lead, the Czechoslovak Society's publishing activity was stabilized and extended. Publishing became one of the organization's most important activities; it had the largest impact on the society. E.g. in 1960, the Czechoslovak society monthly churned out over 300,000 copies of journals, pamphlets and books published in various book series. The portfolio of journals published by the Czechoslovak Society included e.g. *Dějiny a současnost*, *Mezinárodní politika*, *Věda a život*, *Magazín aktualit a zajímavostí*, *Technický magazín* and *Domov*, but also Slovak *Príroda a spoločnosť* or *Svet vedy* and Hungarian *Természet és Tarsadalon*.

The Czechoslovak Society made a longtime effort to gain its own publishing house, which did not happen until 1968. Its series such as *Malá moderní encyklopedie*, *Polytechnická knižnice* and others were published in Orbis and in Státní nakladatelství politické literatury or in Státní nakladatelství technické literatury. In 1968 a new publishing house Horizont that came under the Czechoslovak Society was founded.

In its publishing policy, the Czechoslovak Society focused on titles whose structure was inspired, as well as the activity

of the whole Society, by the Soviet All-Union Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge. This meant publishing especially the above-mentioned journals with the structure adapted by all popularization-scientific organizations of the Czechoslovak Society kind in Central Europe (e.g. German Urania or Polish TWP), and also book series containing titles – such as *Malá moderní encyklopedie* series – following the practice in the USSR and its All-Union Society.

PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITIES AND ACADEMIES

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the Czechoslovak Society predominated over all popularization activities, and according to the new act on public education it also began to take over so-called educational houses and secured its position in the country. At the end of the 1950s, one of the most successful concept of work with the public was born – people's universities and academies. In fact these were of three types: people's universities, people's academies and youth universities. People's universities offered courses finished by an equivalent to the professional diploma, serving as a certificate for qualification enhancement; people's academies had a more liberal nature and offered various thematic series of lectures. People's academies were of two kinds – parental academies, film academies and agricultural academies.

Activities of these universities and academies were very successful. In 1960 there were more than 2,000 people's academies in Czechoslovakia, which provided more than 9,500 series of lectures. The number of audience officially enrolled in the academies was between 250,000 and 500,000 people from the end of 50s and during the 60s.

Series of lectures and courses of people's academies were centrally planned and authorized in advance. These lectures were structured in various branches of knowledge,

so the attention was paid to courses of scientific atheism, biology, nuclear physics and nuclear energy or lessons in parenthood.

SCIENTIFIC ATHEISM

One field of study was especially popular with the communist power since it was a necessary part of the very bases of its ideology – scientific atheism, which became the main activity of the Czechoslovak Society for the whole period of its existence. Scientific atheism was clearly approached in the way Marxism-Leninism defined relationship of mankind to religion. In their perception, religion was escape from real superstitions and obscurantism in the past, but when industrial society came, most unnatural phenomena were possible to explain. Education of scientific atheism meant an elaborate system of scientific lectures, the aim of which was to explain natural laws, physical phenomena, etc. to the public from the point of view of Marxism-Leninism. In Czechoslovakia much attention was paid to this problem, even though the proposal to build a museum of scientific atheism inspired by the similar workplace in Moscow was never realized. Thus, in the system, planetariums often fulfilled this function.

Planetariums appeared in Czechoslovakia before WWII, but their number significantly increased after the war. Even though this partly happened due to the interest of communist regime in development of scientific atheism, success of Sputnik satellite and conquering of universe in general took the main part. From the mid-seventies small planetariums should be in all regions, in distinct centres large planetariums will be built. This is at least what ministry directive stated in 1981.

COOPERATION WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES

The Czechoslovak Society for Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge, as an officially established organization, a part of National front from the beginning of the 1960s, with a firm ideological control of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, had many opportunities of foreign exchange programmes. However, the impact of de-Stalinization process appeared with delay; in 1957 the exchange ran between Czechoslovakia and the USSR and only a small amount with other countries of the socialist block. At the end of the 50s the exchange commonly took place with the states of the socialist block, but also with the states in Western Europe. Even though the main criterion for approval of such programs was “progressiveness” of foreign scientists (J. D. Bernal, P. Kapica, R. Garaudy), also non-leftist intelligentsia came.

For the domestic Marxist thinking all foreign visits meant an important impulse and a possibility to come closer to scientific and philosophical discourse of neighbouring scientific communities. It is an irony that one of the most distinct phenomena of Marxist thinking in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s – opening the question of relationship between Marxism and Christianity – originated in the Czechoslovak Society.

LIBERALIZATION IN THE 1960S AND NORMALIZATION

The development of situation in the Czechoslovak Society in the first half of the 1960s was perceived as too liberal by communist officials. Many of them severely criticized the activities of the Czech Society and its opening to the new outside impulses, which resulted in replacement of chairman Josef Macek by Ivan Málek in 1965. Ivan Málek only held the position of the Czechoslovak Society chairman until 1969.

The liberal phase of development of the Czechoslovak Society was in fact ended by normalization; however, from 1965 the effort to influence and “normalize” the Czechoslovak Society’s activities especially in its publishing policy was apparent. Thus, after a strong Party criticism of *Dějiny a současnost*, a flagship of the Czechoslovak Society in the area of popularization of history, the whole editorial board of the journal was replaced and the chief editor Zděnek Šikl dismissed. The number of foreign exchange programmes with capitalist countries was also cut down and the organization focused – especially under the direction of Ivan Málek – on the USSR.

The Third Congress of the Czechoslovak Society in 1965 dealt with the issue of “normalization” of conditions and thus it augured a change in the course of its activities, ironically a long time before the invasion. At this congress, the Czechoslovak Society was renamed back to its inter-war name Socialist Academy, inspired by its Soviet equivalent that changed its name to Znanije in 1963.

In 1968 several attitudes and decisions from the first half of 1960s were revised in the Socialist Academy. Upon request of its board, supported by the signature campaign of 330 historians, the former members of editorial board of *Dějiny a současnost* came back, and later, the post of executive secretary was filled by Robert Horák – a man that was dismissed after he and Josef Macek were accused of unfavourable political consequences of the development of the Czechoslovak Society in the first half of the 1960s. However, they stayed in their posts only for a short time since they were soon replaced within the normalization purge.

1968 AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

In 1968 the Socialist Academy joined the reformatory stream, and following the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences it formulated

its own Action Programme, defining its activity in relation to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, or rather its Central Committee, and demanded more autonomy when deciding about realization of various tasks etc. This was the first open disagreement with indoctrination of people, as spread by the Socialist Academy from the very beginning of its existence. E.g., until 1968, the educational activity of the Socialist Academy was not separated from the pre-election agitation – which was its duty before every election and which was easily coordinated due to its organization base. The claim to separate science, popularization, ideology and politics was first clearly formulated in the Action Programme of the Socialist Academy; in fact, the Programme means the end of the process of emancipating intelligentsia from the toils of ideology and political power, which this group of society underwent from 1956. However, it did not last for a long time – in mid-1969 the pressure on returning the activity of the Socialist Academy to its old ways increases.

Whilst 1968 meant confirmation of the Academy members' desire to liberalize its ideologically rigid educational activity and popularization of science, from 1969 it was clear that this trend could not be sustained any longer. The Left Front, an ideological institution of ultraleft-wing character, appeared on the scene, and many of its members were foremost critics of the Socialist Academy development in the first half of the 1960s.

Under the political pressure of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, both institutions were violently fused, and between 1971 and 1973 they formed one organization called *The Socialist Society for Science, Culture and Politics*. In 1973 the process of normalization and purge in both institutions ended and they returned to the former name – the Socialist Academy. This was a very carefully plotted move from the conceptual and ideological point of view since in 1971, both organizations ceased to exist in order to form a new one. Their fusion

guaranteed its neutralization, happening under the strict control of the Party authorities.

THE END OF HORIZONT

The fate of the management of the publishing house Horizont became a symbol of normalization context in the Socialist Academy. Horizont was officially founded as a publishing house of the Socialist Academy in 1968, where former members of the editorial department of the Socialist Academy worked as editors – Emanuel Mandler became director and Milan Churaň an editor-in-chief. Before Horizont, they both worked in the problematic journal *Dějiny a současnost*, the activity of which was first ended in 1965, then in 1968.

The first title published by this new publishing house in 1969 was – by no mistake – *Charter of Human Rights*. Nevertheless, in 1969 the whole management of Horizont was dismissed and replaced by normalization cadres. The planned series consisting of titles written by renowned foreign and Czechoslovak authors were stopped and the publishing house focused on series such as *To help political education* (1978–1986) or *To help national economy* (1971–1987) instead.

THE 1970S AND 1980S

In 1973, Vladimír Ruml (1923–1993), a Marxist philosopher and one of the top normalization figures of science and intelligentsia life in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s became director of the restored Socialist Academy, holding the office until 1989.

Under his direction, the activity of the Socialist Academy stabilized during the 1970s and 1980s, i.e. the Academy strengthened the control of ideological content of its activity, which focused on the popularization of science

as an ideological indoctrination of people and criticism of liberalism of the 1960s. The number of lectures and members stagnated; it reached its maximum in the 1950s and 1960s. However, even the attitude to the conception of the Socialist Academy activity stagnated, as can be seen on the example of one of the priority areas of the Communist regime – education of scientific atheism. The materials of the Ideological Board of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia stuck to repeating the necessity to avoid a direct conflict with religious feeling of people and need to proceed in re-education of people in a very cautious way, pointing out especially the scientific explication of various phenomena.

The stagnation and actually isolation of Czechoslovak science, including popularization of science, from the development in the world manifested in repeating titles of lectures or whole series, often formulated in the 1950s. The titles were rid of the typical “evangelical” poetry; they were rather named in a strictly technical or ideological manner. In the mid-1980s, as a reply to so-called restructuring, new attempts to grasp the social reality of the then socialist regime were born in the Socialist Academy. The published series brought titles dealing with topics such as care of disabled children, which had partially been a taboo, or environment protection. An independent federal section for environment was established as a part of the Socialist Academy. Even though an environmental group appeared before 1968, it could continue with its activities no sooner than in the second half of the 1970s, setting up after 1985 – between 1987 and 1989.

CONCLUSION

During its whole existence, the Socialist Academy was tightly related to the political power and to the Czechoslovak

Academy of Sciences. The political power fulfilled the part of ideological controller and it guaranteed access to the state budget; the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, as the main scientific institution in the country, guaranteed the professional level of popularization. The Socialist Academy activity itself therefore oscillated between the attempt of political power to indoctrinate people with Marxism-Leninism and the idea of offering a balanced image of sciences and their development to the people. The degree of ideologization of the Society depended on the degree of liberalization of the regime and political development in the country, and it also reflected the development of international relations. However, the content of its activity derived from the personality of its chairman – from 1955 these were usually top scientists or officials from the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences.

When looking back, the activity of the Socialist Academy and its predecessor may appear as one of the frequent, but unsuccessful attempt of the communist regime to indoctrinate people. In a long-term perspective and taking account of all tools that the communist regime disposed of, this attempt can be considered as very successful. This can be proved by today's statistics, according to which the Czechs lead in a degree of atheism in the society (which is a direct result of two generations growing up and educated in the courses of scientific atheism); they also place among top positions as for the number of advocates of peaceful use of nuclear energy (as a direct result of a carefully planned campaign in favour of nuclear physics and its peaceful use by communist scientists).