

NATIONAL SELF-DETERMINATION CONCEPT IN THE IDEAS OF CZECH REALISTS

TCHINYAYEVA LENA

The national question was a vital problem for the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as a multinational state. National movements existed as a destructive factor for the internal development and for the foreign policy of Austro-Hungarian state. There were two aspects of the National question. 1. the attitude of the government to the National movements and 2. methods of the struggle of the Nations deprived of their national rights.

Since the end of the 19th century a centrifugal tendency had dominated and had been a characteristic feature of the National question in Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Every Nation of the Monarchy tried to find its own way and to use its own means of self-determinational self-determination at the beginning of the 20th century.

In general we can underline the following subjects that were indisputable for the Czech bourgeois political parties and their leaders. To keep Czech lands and territories as an integral part of Austro-Hungarian state, an improvement of the political system, peace with Germans living in Czech lands, federalization of the state. That is why it is common knowledge that a reformist way of transformation towards a federalist model was the main goal of Czech bourgeoisie.

But the question of the methods and means of the political self-determination achievement was effectively discussed in Czech society. The problem of the Czech lands juridical status was the central one.

Rightwing forces proceeded from the notion that the independent czech political status had already existed and it was the only one task to take possession of the governmental structures gradually. But that understanding led to a sacrifice of democratic demands such as an absolute establishment of the universal suffrage.

Radical forces tried to reach the independent political status by means of obstruction of the central Austro-Hungarian government and by means of people's revolt force this government to recognize Czech independence. They used demagogy, Anti-Semitism and other anti-democratic slogans with the purpose to organize rebellion.

Czech Realists followed another way of transformation. They completely realized they saw it as a final goal of a socio-economic, cultural and political development. The basic idea of Czech Realists proceeded from the explanation of Natural Rights of every Nation as rights for independent cultural and political existence. On this way Czech Realists could find allies among other Nations of Austro-Hungarian state (for example Slovaks).

These original ideas with an accent upon social and democratic tasks were expressed in the Programs of Czech People's Party and also in the works of its leaders – an outstanding public figure and statesman, professor of Prague (Karlov) University, future president of Czechoslovak Republic T. G. Masarik (1850-1937) and Czech journalist A. Hajn (1870-1953).

Realists understood the role of the State as an instrument of social and cultural measures, of economic potential strengthening and widening of the political rights. Therefore the demand for Czech autonomy in the Program of Realists (1900) was not formulated as a political slogan but only as a condition for social and cultural development. Following this way Czech Nation could receive a status of a fullright part of a federation.

The credo of Czech Realists was expressed by A. Hajn: The question of Czech State Rights is a question of real power and strength but if we have neither power nor strength it is necessary to achieve it gradually by our all – round political activity”.

These ideas were investigated by Masarik in his works “Humanitarian Ideals” (1901), “Problems of the Small Nation” (1905). He stressed that every person or even Nation has its essential Natural Rights and such rights could be achieved only by means of love and friendship. The meaning of the Nation differs greatly from the meaning of the State and every Nation has a right for its own development. Natural Rights of the Nation prevail over the State Rights. Masarik underlined that all Nations were equal and every Nation had its own task and could solve that task by its own means. Masarik had already written in his earlier work “Czech Question” (1895) about humanitarian essence of Czech history (from Gusits till Buditel) whose traditions Realists tried to continue. Masarik had pointed out that Czech national problem could not be decided without hard work in various fields of public life, especially in a sphere of education and culture as a profound premise of economic and social prosperity.

To make this program come true it was vital to mobilize the strength of Czech people. That is why the nearest goal of Realists was a universal suffrage. A universal suffrage became not only a political demand but also a national one.

By means of a universal suffrage and on its base Realists aspired to provide several reforms such as: democratization of juridical institutions, of the Army, of the Constitution. Transformation of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy towards a federative state could be seen as a result of such democratization.

As a tactical step to federalism Realists wanted to organize a union of Austro-Hungarian Slavonic Nations on a basis of two principles: freedom and equality of Nations and freedom and equality of all citizens. The purpose of such a tactical step was to take possession of the central power institutions and to establish a universal suffrage through them.

An Austrian federation had to consist of three integral but fullright Nations. Dalmacia was intended to be joined with Horvatia, Slovakia – with Czech kingdom, Romanians of Bukovina – with Romanians of Hungary.

A. Hajn stressed that a union of free federative Nations could become the only one way to prove Austrian existence, to prove an Austrian idea to be protection of small Danube Nations and to keep the balance of forces in Europe.

General democratic demands had a priority, and prevailed over national demands. Moreover democratic reforms could set up a real opportunity for a national development.

Realists attempted to accord their position with social-democrats to spread democratic outlook among people. They even tried to establish their own party.

The way of democratic reforms was the most promising one for the inner development of Austro-Hungarian multinational state. And those were Czech Realists who displayed that tendency.

Hard resistance of the conservative forces in Austro-Hungarian state to democratic transformation and rapid changes of the internal and external political situation as the results of the World War brought to another way of realization of the national development Programs.