

Dissertation: Abstract

Jakub Rákosník: Changes of Czechoslovak Social Law in Years 1945 – 1956

The postwar popular democratic regime in Czechoslovakia was based on a strong social consensus which provided opportunity for leading political parties to realize extensive economic and social reforms. It was not only the nationalization of the economy (this task, in the case of large enterprises controlling two thirds of the Czechoslovak labor force, had already been finished before the communist coup d'état in February 1948), but also generous reform of social insurance towards the universal welfare state protecting all citizens and not only those insured. This program was inspired on the one hand by the long domestic tradition of social policy and also by the new postwar British reform made by the program of William Beveridge on the other hand.

The dissertation is concerned especially with the analysis of continuity of social law. The structure of the welfare state in particular countries is a considerably lasting matter of fact. Even though the governments of various ideological orientation permanently carry out partial reforms of individual fields of welfare policy, the general range of expenses and the system of relations in between particular branches of the welfare policy embody a great extent of persistence. From this point of view the Czechoslovak republic between years 1918 and 1956 is quite unique and remarkable. The general findings of this dissertation indicate that Czechoslovak social policy had high quality in comparison to other European states as early as between two wars. One reason was relatively well developed prewar Austrian-Hungarian system of social law. Second reason was based on strong political consensus between Right and Left in the First Republic during years 1918–1924. Especially during these years were implemented all important social reforms. On the other hand these reforms usually showed the strong continuity with the prewar tradition of Bismarck-Taaffe corporatist welfare regime.

After the World War II the system of social law was changed much more fundamentally. There were three welfare regimes in Czechoslovakia during nearly one decade (1945–1956). During years 1945–48 continued the prewar system with some not very significant changes (employment policy was the exception). It was still Bismarckian corporatist system of social insurance. At the same time work-merit features of an actual social insurance weakened as much as particular benefits of individual social classes got levelled out. These egalitarian

tendencies during the Third Republic facilitated subsequent social reform. In year 1948 was implemented the national insurance scheme inspired by Beveridge. The communists despite of the fact that they had finally made a model of a socialist dictatorship continued in their social-reform struggle initiated already in previous period. They did not have time enough to prepare new, more „Soviet“ welfare regime. Therefore they accepted the national insurance as their own program. After the year 1951 started process of reforming the national insurance in order to establish the Soviet scheme of social security. This process was finished in year 1956. Practically it represented a gradual decomposition of insurance principles in the system and their replacement with a state-paternalistic model imported from the Soviet Union. The social protection of the population started being finance thoroughly from the state budget. The decrease in living standards caused both by huge investments into production capacities of the heavy industry in previous years (1950–1953) and due to an influence of the Monetary Reform lead after 1953 to growing efforts to improve the quality of life of the population by means of growing consumption. This was carried out in following years by repeated drop in prices and partial improvements in supplying. In 1956 new laws were passed as for retirement pensions and health insurance. They however stood only for finalization of a hitherto trend adopting the Soviet model of the social security initiated already in the early 1950s.

We can indicate that some branches of social law (especially health care) were based on very high and effective standards in worldwide perspective during 1950s, other policies (specially housing policy) were not built up in such a satisfactory manner. On the one hand, the popular democratic state in Czechoslovakia was able to establish a welfare regime with relatively high standards of protection. On the other hand, it instituted the system of strictly nationalized centrally planned economy that was not able to satisfy increasing demands in social care during the later decades of the communist dictatorship.

This dissertation defends two key propositions. First of all: forming of the universal welfare state in Czechoslovakia in year 1948 was primarily conditioned by the type of the political system as it was being formed as a consequence of the World War II. Second: despite of these quick and radical changes of the whole system of social policy within the first postwar decade there still remained a whole range of features showing a clear continuity with the previous periods, especially being it then the time of Nazi occupation.