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The Political Thought in Bohemia and Moravia of the 16th and 17th Centuries

In the early modern history of European countries, the common attitude to the ideas of Niccolò Machiavelli can be found as a very important criterion of the level of the thought on state and politics. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the view on Machiavelli or rather Machiavellism was fully negative in two southern parts of the Bohemian Crown, i.e. in Bohemia and Moravia. One of the first and most famous Czech readers of Machiavelli's works — Antonin Brus of Mohelnice (1518–1580), archbishop of Prague in 1561-1580 — attended the Trent ecclesiastical council as a delegate of Emperor Ferdinand I and president of the commission, that compiled the *Index librorum* prohibitorum. Brus refused all Machiavelli's writings without any exception, while Guidobaldo II. Duke of Urbino, asked for a limited tolerance at least for Discorsi and Arte della guerra. The intransigent prelate went through with an uncompromising project of total prohibition of Machiavelli. Nevertheless, not only this Czech prelate, but also other clerics, burghers and noblemen (e.g. the last lords of Rožmberk/Rosenberg in the second half of the 16th century) had some Italian, Latin and French editions of the works written by the founder of the Renaissance political science in their libraries. These collectors and bibliophiles, however, could not and also did not strive for a fundamental change of the attitude of the Czech milieu to Machiavelli. In the 16th and 17th centuries, this Florentine thinker represented to the Czechs — both Catholics and Hussites or Protestants — a synonymum of a criminal egoism in political affairs and he was found to be in contrary with the genuine Christian religion¹.

The development of the political thought in Bohemia and Moravia was very different from the Italian Renaissance, although the Czech political leaders visited Italy since the mid-16th century and accepted many elements of the Italian life style of the

¹ J. Macek, Osudy Machiavelliho v Čechéch (The reception of Machiavelli and his work in the Bohemian Lands), «Český šasopis historický», 88, 1990, pp. 72–84; cf. also M. Jedličko vá, Romberská knihovna a katalog Váciava Březana (The Library of the Lords of Romberk/Rosenberg and the catalogue written by Václav Březan), «Knihovna», 4, 1962, pp. 187–214.

late Renaissance, Mannerism and Baroque². The Czech political thought after the Hussite Revolution (1419–1436) had focused on two constant topics: the religion, and the estate society in the struggle against early absolutistic tendencies of Bohemian kings, especially of Habsburg dynasty (since 1526)³.

A new perception of the estate society devided into two or more religions was prepared in a very complicated way, from the religious wars to the religion peace of Kutná Hora (1485). No original thinkers, but pragmatic political leaders from the highest class of nobility (the lords represented in the diet, land lawer courts and estate governments) formed the political thought both in Bohemia, where the religious tolerance was based on a written compact, and in Moravia, where a common law played a significant role. A long isolation of two "heretic" (Hussite) lands from the Catholic Europe and a partial disintegration of the Bohemian state (in the period of wars and interregna) motivated Vilém of Pernštejn (1438–1521), the most famous of the Bohemian–and–Moravian lords of Jagellonian period (1471–1526), to systemize his experience and general political ideas in his letters⁴.

In a striking contrast to his political contemporary — Catholic and pro-absolutist lord Bohuslav Hasištejnský of Lobkovice (ca. 1461–1510), author of an epistolographical analysis of political affairs from 1499⁵ —, Vilém of Pernštejn devised a well-balanced conception of state policy in the Bohemian Crown. Pernštejn was an advocate of effective dualistic system under rather strong royal power attended by inviolable rights of estates based on a common law and secured by various law institutions (especially the land diet and the land court of justice both in Bohemia and Moravia). Pernštejn's idea of constitution of the state — divided in five autonomous lands in the case of the Bohemian Crown — emphasized the integrity of the single state

² Z. Hojda, "Kavalírské cesty" v 17. století a zájem české šlechty o Itálii (The "Cavalierstours" in the 17th century and the interests of the Bohemian nobility in Italy), in Itálie, Čechy a střední Evropa, Praha 1986, pp. 216–239; Id., "Voyages de chevaliers" du Bohême au XVIF siècle, "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Prace Historyczne», 88, 1989, pp. 99–105; J. Pánek, Výprava české šlechty do Itálie v letech 1551–1552 (The expedition of the Czech nobility to Italy in 1551–1552), Praha 1987; Id., The expedition of the Czech noblemen to Italy within period 1551–1552. A contribution to history of international relations in the field of culture, politics and finances in the 16th century, "Historica. Historical Sciences in Czechoslovakia», 30, 1990, pp. 29–95; Id., Spedizione della nobiltà boema in Italia negli anni 1551–1552 e contatti tra le Terre boeme e il Mediterraneo, in Rapporti Genova — Mediterraneo — Atlantico nell'età moderna, ed. R. Belvederi, Genova 1990, pp. 511–525; Id., Reisende aus Böhmen im Europa der Renaissance. Reisen als kultureller Faktor und Katalysator der politischen Integration, "Bohemia», 32, 1991, pp. 338–367; Id., Das Reisen als dynamisierender Faktor der frühneuzeitlichen böhmischen Gesellschaft, in Studien zum Humanismus in den böhmischen Ländern, T. III: Die Bedeutung der humanistischen Topographien und Reisebeschreibungen in der Kultur der böhmischen Länder bis zur Zeit Balbíns, hrsg. von H.-B. Harder und H. Rothe, Köln 1993, pp. 129–149.

³ F. Šmahel, The Idea of the "Nation" in Hussite Bohemia, «Historica. Historical Sciences in Czechoslovakia», 16, 1969, pp. 143–247; ibidem, 17, 1969, pp. 93–197; Id., La révolution hussite, une anomalie historique, Paris 1985.

⁴ W. Eberhard, Konfessionsbildung und Stände in Böhmen 1478–1530, München 1981; Id., Entstehungsbedingungen für öffentliche Toleranz am Beispiel des Kuttenberger Religionsfriedens von 1485, «Communio viatorum», 29, 1986, pp. 129–154; Id., Zu den politischen und ideologischen Bedingungen öffentlicher Toleranz: Der Kuttenberger Religionsfrieden 1485, «Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego. Prace Historyczne», 100: Studia Germano-Polonica 1, 1992, pp. 101–118.

⁵ Bohuslai Hassensteinii a Lobkowicz Epistulae, edd. J. Martínek et D. Martínková, t. I: Epistulae de re publica scriptae, Leipzig 1969 (Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum at Latinorum Teubneriana); J. Martínek, Quo modo Bohuslaus Hassensteinius in patriam animatus fuerit, «Listy filologické», 93, 1970, pp. 37-43; J. Martínek, D. Martínková, Quo modo Bohuslaus Hassensteinius a Lobkowicz res Vladislao rege Hungariae et Bohemiae gestas aestimavit?, «Zborník Filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského v Bratislave, Graecolatina et orientalia», 6, 1974, pp. 81-103.

bound together by common social composition and common idea. In this sense Pernštejn proceeded from the Hussite idea of nation as a community of the same language and homogeneous legal system. He formulated the idea of the Czech national state (with regard to nationality minorities) in Bohemia and Moravia as a nucleus of the "crown patriotism". Therefore Pernštejn can be seen as a principal advocate of the "crown thought", a higher degree of political consciousness than the particular "land thought" in the single country of the Bohemian Crown⁶.

Vilém of Pernštejn, the highest steward of the Bohemian Kingdom and the richest magnate in Bohemia and Moravia, was a supporter of the post–Hussite religions, i.e. of the Utraquism and the Unity of Brethren, but at the same time he was very tolerant to the Catholic minority in Bohemia and Moravia. While far from Machiavelli's ideas, Pernštejn defended the principle, which required subordination of all churches to the state and personal religious faith as a gift of God. The recent interpretation of the Pernštejn's religious orientation proved, that the basis of non–confessional Christendom can be found in his political thought. The network of religious tolerance, balance of royal and estates' power and social paternalism, which Vilém of Pernštejn pursued in his practice as well as in his theoretical thinking, was the most interesting project in Bohemian–and–Moravian political thought at the beginning of the early modern period⁷.

After 1526, it appears that the situation in the political thought changed. Bohemian and Moravian lords and other estates fell under enduring and systematic oppression from the side of Ferdinand I and other Habsburg rulers, and, a little later, the newly created bureaucratic institutions that established a proto-absolutistic regime. The estates' political leaders were obliged to pass from an offensive programme to law conservativism. The one-sided defence of the "old rights", i.e. the dualistic distribution of the state power and the religious liberty, retarded a regular development of political thought in Bohemia and Moravia, if we compare it not only with Italy, but also with Poland. Therefore the Czech political writings of that time were very weak, the main interest of Czech thinkers being focused on questions of religion. Nevertheless, we can find thirteen estates' programmes written in the period 1526–1619, where the most discussed problem of the 16th-century policy — the distribution of the state power — was at least partially formulated.

⁶ J. Válka, "Politická závět" Viléma z Pernštejna (1520–1521). Příspěvek k dějinám českého politického myšleni v době jagellonské (The "political testament" of Vilém of Pernštejn from 1520–1521. A contribution to the history of the Czech political thought in the Jagellonian period), «Časopis Matice moravské», 90, 1971, pp. 63–82; Id., Moravia and the Crisis of the Estates' System in the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, in Crown, Church and Estates. Central European Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, ed. by R. J. W. Evans and T. V. Thomas, London 1991, pp. 149–157.

⁷ J. Válka, "Moravanství." v 15. století. Komplikace ve vývoji české nacionality (A "Moravian" political thought in the 15th century. A complication in the development of the Czech nationality), «Sborník prací filosofické fakulty Brněnské university», C 31, 1984, pp. 145–154; Id., Die Stellung Mährens im Wandel des böhmischen Lehensstaates, in Europa 1500. Integrationsprozesse im Widerstreit: Staaten, Regionen, Personenverbände, Christenheit, hrsg. von F. Seibt und W. Eberhard, Stuttgart 1987, pp. 292–309; Id., Dějiny Moravy I. Středověká Morava (History of Moravia I. Moravia in the Middle Ages), Brno 1991, pp. 203 sq.

⁸ J. Pánek, Das Ständetum und die Gesellschaft in den Böhmischen Ländern in der Zeit vor der Schlacht auf dem Weißen Berg (1526–1620), «Historica. Historical Sciences in Czechoslovakia», 25, 1985, pp. 73–120; Id., Zápas o vedení české stavovské obce v polovině 16. století. Knízata z Plavna a Vilém z Rožmberka 1547–1556 (The struggle for a supremacy in the Bohemian Estates' Community in the mid–16th century. Princes of Plauen and the Lords of Rožmberk/Rosenberg within period 1547–1556), «Československý časopis historický», 31, 1983, pp. 855–884; Id., Republikánské tendence ve stavovských programech doby předbělohorské (The republican tendencies in the political programmes of the Bohemian–and–Moravian Estates within period 1526–1620), «Folia Historica Bohemica», 8, 1985, pp. 43–62.

A critical analysis of these programmes of the Bohemian-and-Moravian estates reveals the weakness of the Czech political thought in the period well-known as the "pre-White-Mountain-century". The authors of these manifests tried to provide reasons for free election of the king and for his responsibility before law, for substitute government of the estates' representatives in the period of interregnum and, above all, for inviolability of the estates' and religious rights. In comparison to the adjacent Hungary, there was a very long way to the promulgation and legal adoption of the "ius resistendi" in Bohemia and Moravia. The Czech estates expressed at first the right of insubordination (*ius non oboediendi*) and then the right of defence (*ius defendendi*) to a king violating the old laws⁹.

Only at the beginning of the 17th century, the radicalization of the estates' movement led to the idea of a Protestant "estates' state within a state", i.e. within the Habsburg Monarchy; the Evangelic estates were to establish special laws, a special representation and institutions, to administrate state treasury and to arrange a military power. This theory of 1609 (the period of a great crisis of the Habsburg dynasty) was incompatible with the very existence of the Habsburg Monarchy. An extreme tension between the king and estates' opposition issued into the uprising of the Bohemian estates in 1618. On the eve of this revolt three potential solutions of the dramatic situation existed: 1. to abolish the institution of the king and to substitute it with collective estates' representation; 2. free election of such a king, that would have accepted the religion of the non-Catholic majority and, however, the principles of the dualistic system; 3. violation of the estate's power by the king and a complete subordination of all estates' institutions to the royal power. All these theoretical models came true been realized in Bohemia and Moravia in a very short time; the first model during the republican government of the estates (30 elected directors headed by a president) in 1618–1619; the second one under the reign of the elected king Frederic of the Palatinate in 1619–1620, and the third model after the military defeat of the Bohemian-and-Moravian estates in the battle of the White Mountain in November 1620¹⁰.

The radical programme of the Bohemian estates from 1609 (represented by Václav Budovec of Budov (1551–1621) and other adherents of the Unity of Brethren or Lutheranians—cum—Neo-Utraquists) and 1619 (i.e. the Bohemian Confederation) applied the West-European principles of the *monarchia mixta* and partially also the ideas of monarchomachism. Both important programmes kept fidelity to the tradition of the defensive political thought of Bohemian and Moravian estates and did not penetrate into society deeper than foreign influences. Only the Confederation of 1619 can be estimated as a relatively original solution of political problems of the Central-European countries. Therefore none of the pragmatic Bohemian—and—Moravian political leaders

⁹ J. Pánek, *Das politische System des böhmischen Staates im ersten Jahrhundert der habsburgischen Herrschaft (1526–1620)*, «Mitteilungen des Institututs für österreichische Geschichtsforschung», 97, 1989, pp. 53–82.

A. Gindely, Geschichte der Ertheilung des böhmischen Majestätsbriefes von 1609, Prag 1859; Id., Rudolf II. und seine Zeit. 1600–1612, Bd. I-II, 2. Aufl., Prag 1868; Id., Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges, Bd. |/1-3, II/1, Prag 1869–1880; J. Glücklich, Opravomoci dané defensorům na sněmu r. 1609 (On the authorities given to the Defenders at the Land Diet of 1609), Praha 1913; Id., Koncept Majestátu a vznik Porovnání [The draft of the Majestätsbrief and the origins of the Compromise between the Evangelic and Catholic noblemen), «Český časopis historický», 23, 1917, pp. 110–128; Id., O defensorech a českém povstání (The Defenders and the Bohemian Uprising in 1618), ibidem, 27, 1921, pp. 63–93; Id., Majestát Rudolfa II. z r. 1608 o nekonfiskování statků (The Majestätsbrief of Rudolf II of 1608 on the non-confiscation of noble property), in Od pravěku k dnešku II, Praha 1930, pp. 15–29.

of the 16th and 17th centuries can be found in the list of important representatives of the political thought in the early modern Europe¹¹.

Nevertheless, one of the most important thinkers of the 17th-century-Europe, the great humanist, philosopher, theologian and world-known pedagogue Jan Amos Komenský-Comenius (1592–1670), the author of an original concept of the political culture, was born in Moravia and closely tied with Bohemia.

The political thought of Jan Amos Comenius grew out of the ideas of late Renaissance and Manneristic society as a labyrinth, which was for the people in the Bohemian Lands of the 16th and early 17th centuries, a state of things where irrational and uncontrollable by human forces prevailed. The understanding of public life and political events as universally chaotic appeared widely in Europe of that time, but in the Czech environment they were strengthened by an extraordinary escalation of antagonism inside the state's estate—based political system and the final breakdown of it. The real decay of the state and estate structures did not, however, made it impossible for Comenius to come out of the existing political relationships and to attempt to resuscitate the situation that had existed before the battle of the White Mountain of 1620¹².

Comenius' continued attempts to influence actively political events in the course of the Thirty Year's War and through next twenty years failed to achieve a single significant success. His theoretical abilities contrasted with his unwillingness to accept mechanics of the pragmatic political leaders of that time, revealed by his use to very traditional, even antiquated methods. He was reliant on dynastic continuity, arranged marriage alliances and appealed to the historical anchors of international solidarity; for emotional reasons he overvalued the objects of his own interests (the question of Bohemia, confessional interests) and undervalued the real economic and political interests of states and other important groups in the existing power relations. As a religious exile he was severed from the Czech political environment, the one he wanted to help, but he also ceased soon to understand as well. He lacked the gift of diplomatic conduct and was not consistently loyal to the governments from whom he had expected support for his political purposes. As an wholly powerless man in terms of power politics he could only use his scholarly repute and propagandistic force of the Revelations. He could not, however, carry out even a fragment of his ambitious plans ¹³.

¹ R. Stanka, Die böhmischen Conföderationsakte von 1619, Berlin 1932; K. Adamová, K otázce konfederačních snah v českém státě na počátku 17. století (On the problem of the confederation tendencies in the Bohemian state in the early 17th century), «Právněhistorické studie», 27, 1986, pp. 57–96; Id., politickému programu městského stavu v české, státě v roce 1619 (On the political programme of the royal-towns-estate in the Bohemian Crown), ibidem, 31, 1990, pp. 169–175; J. Válka, Morava ve stavovské konfederaci roku 1619 (Moravia in the Estates Confederation of 1619), «Folia Historica Bohemica», 10, 1986, pp. 333–349; cf. also N. Rejchtová, Václav Budovec z Budova (Václav Budovec of Budov), Praha 1984; Ead., La pensée eschatologique de Václav Budovec de Budov, «Communio Viatorum», 18, 1985, pp. 129–137.

¹² M. Blekastad, Comenius. Versuch eines Umrisses von Leben, Werk und Schicksal des Jan Amos Komenský, Oslo 1969; J. Polišenský, Jan Amos Komenský, Praha 1973; J. Pánek, Comenius. Teacher of Nations, Košice 1991; J. Kumpera, Jan Amos Komenský, Ostrava 1992; Jan Amos Comenius und die Politik seiner Zeit, ed. K. Mack, Wien 1992.

¹³ J. Válk a, Obsah pojmů národ a vlast u Komenského ("Nation" and "mother country" in the political thought of Comenius), «Vlastivědný věstník moravský», 22, 1970, pp. 281–290; Id., Glosy k interpretaci sociálního myšlení J. A. Komenského (Some remarks on the social thought of J. A. Comenius), «Studia Comeniana et historica», VII/16, 1977, pp. 76–90; Id., Komenského pojetí politiky a pokus o překonání machiavellismu (Comenius's concept of the politics and his attempt to surmount the Machiavellism), ibidem, VII/17, 1977, pp. 105–113; Id., Problém výkladu revelací v Komenského životě a díle (Problem of interpretation of the Revelations in the life and work of Comenius), ibidem, pp. 114–118.

Even if Comenius emerged above the standard level of statesmen of the 17th century, he could barely pursue his goals, as the question of Bohemia had been negatively adjudicated already at the beginning of the Thirty Year's War and new balance of forces in Central Europe gave no hope for the renewal of the anti-Habsburg coalition. However, by non-standard proceedings Comenius managed to hold up the inner freedom and spiritual integrity that enabled him to devise a new vision of the political culture for future.

In The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of Heart (in Czech original Labyrint světa a ráj srdce) from 1623, Comenius decomposed the whole policy, in theory a "good and usual activity" into constitutive elements with a predominantly negative evaluation: corruption of morality, of institutions and communication between rulers and their subjects¹⁴.

In many later works Comenius tried to solve some particular questions of political activities and to explain the policy as an integral part of the universal reform. A synthetic solution can be found in the *Panorthosia*, which is a reply to the political question of the *Labyrinth*. The main task of the policy is to overcome the confusion ("turbatio") of the World–Labyrinth, by the right policy (politia vera) in several successive steps: in the man, in the family, in the school, in the church, in the state, and finally in the world. Comenius saw the starting point of the new political culture in surmounting of the past through the general amnesty and application of tolerance, through superiority of moral rather than through positive — and always differentiated — right 15.

The four basic conditions of new interhuman relations and political culture were extraordinary important for him: 1. the simplicity of the political life; 2. well—organized interhuman relations; 3. spontaneity; 4. universal reform of political (and other) institutions. All these conditions stand in a clear contradiction to the political reality of the 17th century: 1. no simplicity, but coming of the very complicated world—wide system of the Early Modern times; 2. and 4. an idea of a well—organized and universal political life contrasted with the rash development of European states to the antagonistic groupings with opposite interest in politics, economy and territorial claims; 3. the idea of spontaneity was contrary to the general power regulation of interhuman relations to the process of so called early modern "social disciplining (Sozialdisziplinierung)". Under these conditions, the idea "Omnes politiae fiant politia una, sub uno optimo monarcha, Christo, optima" had to stay only in the realm of political dreams of the 17th century.

Comenius's vision of political culture was, however, a long-termed project for the future times. He has created a framework based on two fundamental principles: 1. the equality and liberty of all people: "omnes ex aequo boni politici, liberae Reipublicae Mundanae cives" ¹⁷; 2. the experience of the Evangelic estates that they were taught by the development of Moravia and Bohemia through the 16th and at early 17th centuries:

¹⁴ Joannis Amos Comenii Opera omnia, t. III, Praha 1978, pp. 265-412 (edition of the Labyrinth by J. Kolár), espec. pp. 329 sq.; cf. also J. Pánek, The Labyrinth of the Czech Lands in the Period before the Battle of the White Mountain, in Symposium Comenianum 1986. J. A. Comenius's Contribution to World Science and Culture, ed. by M. Kyralová and J. Přívratská, Praha 1989, pp. 15-24; A. Kostlán, The Way Out of the Labyrinth in Post-White-Mountain Bohemia, ibidem, pp. 25-34.

¹⁵ J. Pánek, Jan Amos Comenius: Zum politischen Denken und politischen Handeln, in Jan Amos Comenius und die Politik, cit., pp. 55-74.

¹⁶ J. Comenius, *De rerum humanarum emendatione Consultatio catholica*. Editio princeps, t. II, Pragae 1966, p. 272.

the necessity of separation of the political and confessional interests (Moravia) and the institutionalization of these interests (Bohemia). Comenius's idea of three world organizations (and analogical institutions on the national, regional and local levels) was inspired significantly by alternative structure of the Bohemian political system created by the Protestant estates during the struggle for the "Majestätsbrief" of Rudolf II, i.e. for the religious liberty in Bohemia. Here we can see similarity between the Evangelic university at Prague and the world College of the Light (Collegium Lucis), between the Bohemian Protestant consistory with elected defenders and the World Consistory (Consistorium Oecumenicum), and finally between the newly constituted Protestant—and—Catholic Court of Justice at Prague and the World Peace Justice Court (Orbis Terrae Consilium). With these new institutions, a new type of the political culture would be established, respecting morality in the policy — making as a "praxis mundi moralis" 18.

The improvement of the political culture was an integral part of universal reform for Comenius. His ideas represented a peak in the development of the Czech early modern political thought. Comenius tried to integrate it into the framework of the universal reform, although his ideas were and had to be very contradictory to the prevailing tradition of European political thought, especially to the Machiavelism and the idea of "ragione di stato". It was impossible to realize these ideas in the social and power—political circumstances of the 17th century, in the era of Cartesianism and optimism of the Early Modern times. The principles of universal world—view, simplified concentration to the main problems of humanity, and spontaneity of a liberated man are able to represent, however, an inspiration in the postmodern time, when the hopes of progressivist optimists seen to be exhausted.

This very short outline of main tendencies the early modern political thought in Bohemia and Moravia might not point out some interesting details, e.g. foreign inspiration of literary works written by Czech intellectuals. This inspiration was limited mostly to quotations and had no important influences on the local political life. The most characteristic feature of the Bohemian–and–Moravian political thought was its retardation in comparison with Italian, West–European and Polish development. The main causes of this phenomenon were long post–Hussite isolation of Bohemian Lands, focusing of the Czech thinkers on the religious question only, and Habsburg repression against free political writing. Nevertheless, the radicalization of the estates' opposition at the beginning of the 17th century opened new possibilities that Comenius, educated in Germany and the Netherlands, could employ not only as a participant of the political life in his country, but above all as an exile in Poland and Western Europe. It can be said that Comenius' work is the most valuable legacy of the Czech political thought in the 16th and 17th centuries.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 286; cf. notes 13 and 15.

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