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## ARNOŠT BLÁHA AND SOCIALISM

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In this paper I propose to deal with a practical-political episode of Bláha's activity taking place in the period of 1925—1928. Bláha's attempt to enter active politics was stimulated by the situation which reached its climax before the parliamentary elections (i. e. elections for the House of the Representatives and the Senate) planned for Sunday, November 15th, 1925. It stands to reason that the government coalition, controlled firmly by the Agrarian party (both the Prime Minister A. Švehla and the Minister of the Interior Jan Malypetr were agrarian topmen) did not seek only to keep but also to strengthen its positions. The National Democratic party led by Karel Kramář was in a very difficult situation, because it had been innerly split into two wings: the right wing which more and more turned against "the Castle" (i. e. against President T. G. Masaryk and his supporters) and in which fashistic tendencies became more and more marked; and the left wing, "Moravian", called "the progressive left wing" in the National Democratic party. The left wing stood in opposition against the wavering Kramář's policy with which it was dissatisfied. It was led by Jaroslav Stránský who, finally, decided to found a party of his own — the National Labour Party. Among its candidates could also be found Karel Čapek. Although in the background there were antagonisms between two strong groups of capital (textile and iron), outwardly to many people the situation appeared to be mainly the concern of intellectuals. The National Democratic Party had of old been called "the party of the inteligentsia" and its members were proud of this fact. There was, however, no factual contradiction between the programmes of the two wings. They both accepted the idealistic programme of the National Democratic party. Yet, the split off left wing started to emphasize, that they did not mean to take it as empty rhetorics any longer, as it had been done so far. It stands to reason that Jaroslav Stránský made an effort to win a marked victory. He even gave up his mandate to show that he had nothing in common with the coalition in power. However, the Agrarian party had a trump of its own. Unexpectedly, they sought to hit the opposition with an amendment to the electoral act. First of all, they threatened that a political party would only then be represented in the Parliament if it got 100.000 votes in the elections; later on, they increased the number to 150.000 and even to 200.000 votes.

Eventually, however, each party had to win the so-called electoral number in one constituency in order to be able to reckon with votes given up for it in all

other constituencies (according to the principle of the proportional representation). If a party could not win the electoral number in any constituency, all votes given up for it would be lost for it in the second and third scrutinies and would go over to the successful parties according to a proportional code. J. Stránský was afraid of this threat — and with right. He was soon to know his isolation, even before the general elections, at the Brno convention. He was supported there only by Professor Jaroslav Kallab, his colleague at the Faculty of Law of the Masaryk University of Brno. In spite of this, Stránský reckoned with an electoral success, because he could assume that he had a probable decisive change in the Prague district. But the agrarians knew the ropes. At the last moment Prague was divided into two constituencies which meant an end of all hopes of the Labour Party. The electoral number was not attained and the Labour Party lost its *raison d'être*. Stránský acknowledged this fact and entered the National Socialist party.

Along with the Labour party Professor Bláha failed too, for he stood as a candidate for his own party on a common electoral list with the Labour party. Bláha gave his party the name of the *Progressive party* reminding thus of the party of the same name, once formed and led by Masaryk. Some analogies can be drawn. To begin with, there existed a movement, or at least a political programme, before the party was founded. Besides, there was a certain element of crisis which brought about the change of the movement into an organized party. In the case of Masaryk in 1899—1900, in the time of the so-called Hilsner's affair<sup>1</sup> a critical realistic movement began gradually to form itself politically. In the end Masaryk decided to found a political party on the initiative of young people above all. At the convention constituting the party in the spring of 1900, The Skeleton Programme of the Czech People's (realistic) party was proclaimed. This programme was revised later on in 1912. Bláha's proposal of a programme for the Progressive party was submitted to the preparatory meeting of the party on September 6th, 1925 and in many respects followed the lines of the above Masaryk's skeleton programme and of the later Programme of the Czech progressive party. Bláha's political programme had scientific foundations in his sociological knowledge. In a popular form his ideas had already been accessible to the general public. I mean two booklets published by the "Občanská knihovna" (The Citizen's Library), namely *Základy mravnosti* (The Principles of Morality) and *Současné názory mravní* (Contemporary Moral Ideas), both in 1923.

In 1925 with a view to elections, the programme of the Progressive party was distributed to the public together with a programmatic pamphlet *Zásady pokrokové politiky* (Principles of Progressive Politics) published in 1926 by the Brno *Pokrokový obzor* (The Progressive Horizon), a weekly in the service of Bláha's party. In the same year another "realistic" weekly in Prague was added to it with the title *Kritika* (Criticism). It was the third volume of the magazine edited in the first two years, 1924 and 1925, as a monthly by Rudolf I. Malý and his board of editors to which belonged Josef Bartoš, Vilém Dvořák, Otakar Fischer, František Götz and F. X. Šalda. The character, content and external form were now altered of course. The board of editors consisted of R. I. Malý, K. M. Landa

<sup>1</sup> In this affair Masaryk fought against antisemitism which on no sufficient grounds accused a murderer of Jewish origin of a ritual murder. Editor's Note

and J. Dobrovolný. The magazine disappeared after Vol. 5, i. e. in 1928 when Bláha's party was liquidated.

The above publications are the source of our further considerations on Bláha's principal ideas in the time of the existence of his Progressive party.

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Since his very beginnings Bláha conceived of society as a whole the parts of which should be in harmony. He used to speak of a harmonious consensus of all components and of their mutual cooperation or synergism. An ideal state results when no organic part suffers from atrophy or hypertrophy. Bláha is convinced that at the moment society suffers from an insufficient harmony of its different parts. While the economic and social factors are satisfied in a certain way, such is not the case as to cultural and moral problems which concern him most. On all sides he sees only people seeking for the satisfaction of material needs (he even speaks of a "materialized" society), but everywhere he misses respect for moral values. As moral cannot be designated the narrowly utilitarian morality of political parties which is conceived egoistically by various social groups, estates or classes. To stress it is — according to Bláha's view — the specific task of the intelligentsia, should it fulfil its function in society, i. e. the rationalizing and solidarizing functions. Accordingly, Bláha reckons in his party with the *intelligentsia*, conceived of course in a broad sense. An intelligent man is not the one who has got higher education, but anyone who knows that in life spiritual and moral values should be given preference before material ones; anyone who fulfils his cultural mission relying in a gradual process of denaturalization, i. e. spiritualization. Without sacrifices to such ideals no benefit for the Republic or democracy is possible. A veritable human welfare needs *order*. If the intelligentsia does not fulfil its duties in this meaning, if it is no "asserting unifying" force in society, then it betrays its mission and its historical responsibility for the sake of the nation. Again and again Bláha rejects empty rhetorics and draws attention to the fact that history is made even today, i. e. at every moment. And democracy requires of everybody not to think of oneself, of one's rights only, but also of others, of the social whole. Bláha repeatedly rejects laziness in social life. Consequently, he cannot accept when the so-called decent people abstain from politics. In this way they cannot get rid of their responsibilities for society. It is the *public* life, above all, which needs brave and fearless men and women.

Should politics fulfil their true function they will have to be made political. Only genuine politics support, at every step, justice and, thereby, the right functioning of the social whole. However, this is not possible if the state is misused for particular, party interests and, consequently, citizens are politically passive.

We cannot dwell on partial problems a number of which can be found in the programme of the Progressive party. Let us limit our discussion to main points. Bláha says explicitly that his programme is Masaryk. He refers to the latter's works of the last period, mainly the *Světová revoluce* (*The World Revolution*)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In this book which appeared in 1925 T. G. Masaryk gives an account of his political activities during World War I. But the work also contains analyses of many broader sociological and philosophical problems connected with Masaryk's political activity, and the last chapter is devoted to the problem of democracy and the idea of humanity. Editors' Note

which was then published. Bláha also draws attention to the Washington Declaration containing in a condensed form Masaryk's main political principles.

Being a sociologist Bláha founds his political programme on scientific knowledge and warns against any "half-science" as the worst thing; he also emphasizes, like Masaryk, that genuine politics are both science and art. In theory he acknowledges critical realism as scientific politics. He takes critical realism to be a principle which is in agreement with the Czech natural character as proved by our history. Whenever we have turned away from realism in politics it proved fatal for us. Such realism in politics, Bláha goes on to say, presupposes "good leaders, good party membership and a good practice". Plans are not enough unless we know sufficiently given materials and the necessary instruments. In the spirit of Masaryk Bláha also shows that all kind of dogmatism must be rejected. Never must we stop, we must go on thinking over problems to be solved, for even old questions need new answers. From Masaryk Bláha also learned to connect theory with practice. He demands of politicians to let theoretical problems change into practical ones. At the same time, he reminds us of the necessity of patience, for "life does not proceed at such a quick tempo as the idea does".

In the contemporary fight of individualism and collectivism Bláha stands on neither pole. He proclaims *realism* against both extremes. Realism is an "epistemological trend of cognizing reality"; briefly, realism is a *method* for him. Both factors, individual and collective, are concerned, the aim being their harmony. However, for Bláha realism means simultaneously an orientation "towards socialism, towards the people".

He expresses the view that the problem will be solvable "when socialism becomes a power problem of the majority"; when "the necessary conditions are brought about through the power pressure of socialism" so that individualism, a privilege so far, will be liable to be socialized. But let us leave socialism for the time being and turn to some specific problems on which Bláha expresses his ideas in his programme. Some of them are clearer to us today, and have practically lost their importance in consequence of the changed situation in our country. So, for instance, the problem of religion and of its being misused in social life, of clericalism and church dogmatism, unless *per analogiam* we wished to see them in quite other spheres. Even the question of patriotism is practically quite clear to us. Bláha rejected any empty cosmopolitanism as much as nationalism and chauvinism. He knew a genuine internationalism could be attained through national values only. In national history Bláha saw a veritable "*cours au flambeau*". And every generation is responsible for "its glow and the vigour of its gleam". Common culture, national spiritual and moral ties were considered by Bláha as the main link binding the members of a nation in the best of ways. For we must not forget, he says, that on the world forum we are victorious on account of these values. In this way, like Masaryk, Bláha submits the national idea to the idea of humanity.

The "highest attribute of a nation" is for Bláha "independence, stateship", i. e. the independent state as a manifestation of national freedom. However, the national and state liberty is not guaranteed by the mere existence of certain democratic orders and institutions. Bláha proceeds beyond this. He demands also "an individual independence of every member of the state". "Without individual liberty there is no free state". However, political autonomy is not

enough for individual independence as has often been believed. The individual — the citizen must be free in all respects, should be serve the interest of all, of the whole. Again, Bláha stresses the moral aspect, the necessity “of getting rid of all inner lack of liberty”. He warns: “If there is no inner liberty, even the others can get lost.” Without this inner liberty no real democracy can be imagined.

The term of state poses questions as to its administration and power. All means of power which do not serve the welfare of society should be rejected. The material force, violence is somehow connected with aristocratic, absolutistic policies. A democratic policy demands “ability, knowledge, effort and morality” as its prerequisites. Above all, however, “truth and morality” must never be sacrificed to force. The programme of Bláha’s party contains the following emphatic paragraph: “In politics we want truthfulness, intellectual purity of policies and of the whole life. For us politics are no cunningness, no ability to deceive, to dupe. Lie is a violent means. Not to be afraid nor to lie! For “politics, actually progressive and democratic, cannot be in contradiction with moral principles.”

Finally, let us mention the problem of socialism. In the time of the first republic, the distinction used to be made between bourgeois and socialistic political parties. In his electoral campaign Bláha stood on the side of socialistic parties. Who knew Bláha at that time as we — his university students — did, is acquainted with Bláha’s ideological inclination towards the social democratic party. His relationship to socialism was of the same kind as once that of Masaryk. He did not accept marxism, although he did not close himself with respect to the knowledge which he could win from it. In general he took marxism, especially in its dogmatic forms, as a survival. That is why he sympathized with people who wished to revise the marxist programme from the standpoint of the new times. He used to blame marxists because of their clinging to the letter of Marxian doctrine and to out-of-date knowledge. At the same time, he admitted that many things could be taken over from the “living Marx”. By a revision of the socialistic programme Bláha understood “its adjustment to the new social realities”. Bláha even claimed to be “an ideological socialist” meaning thereby that he was no socialist “in the sense of today’s theoretical socialism but in the sense of the future development stage of socialism”. To this effect he wanted to work in his political activity.

When we read Bláha’s programmatic declarations today, we estimate many of their items in another way than previously. when many a thing eloped our understanding. So, for instance, we can see that he was not so unjust to marxism as we, his young students, were then convinced. Bláha writes e. g.: “Man deprived of the ownership of economic goods and of the advantages of education is as unfree socially as that one who is deprived of political rights.” He also admits that socialism is right when declaring “that a new economic and cultural order will not be brought about through a philanthropic benevolence of the economically and culturally privileged strata of society, but only through a power action of those who are still excluded from the ownership of the economic and cultural power”. “Only by means of a power act of society,” he continues, “can the new order of ownership of the means of production be established” together with a new social order. In this sense there should be one socialism only. Yet, there are many socialisms. The dividing line between them is mostly the answer to the question: Which tactics should be applied, evolutionary or revolutionary?

Bláha rejected revolution. In this case he again followed in Masaryk's footsteps. At best he saw in it irresponsible hazards and immoral violence. Yet, he did not close his eyes before the other pole, the evolutionary conception. It stands to reason that he was afraid that the socialists taking part in the rule with the bourgeoisie and, accordingly, in the power, would necessarily get corrupted. would get lazy and, because of that, conservative. That is why he appreciated "the conscience of the opposing socialism".

As a scientist Bláha took the marxist theory of society, *historical materialism*, seriously. It represented to him one of the sociological theories which emphasize the importance of the material factor, economic in this case. That is why it can be called "economic-sociological objectivism". Bláha considers it as correct to emphasize the economic factor, because "a new economic-social order is a necessary precondition of a new order of law, reason and morality". He even stresses the point that "without economic democracy it is impossible to bring about cultural democracy, the intellectual autonomy of the individual". He emphasizes, too, that morality itself "needs certain necessary material conditions", should it make itself valid. In the end Bláha blames marxism for "its taking a condition for a cause". Let us have this issue undiscussed, but Bláha is convinced that the term "historical" or "economic *materialism*" is not proper; that it would be more suitable to speak of an "economic *idealism*", because socialism does not strive for material welfare because it is material, but because material welfare is the condition of attaining ideal values. As to the social becoming in general, Bláha repeats his sociological formula that "it is effected through a harmonious influence of material and spiritual, individual and collective factors". In this way "a new social synthesis" will come into being which Bláha intends to assist through his political activity. And he repeats again that "a new economic (underlined by L. S.) order is necessary which would give an equal opportunity to all. Let us remark that this idea corresponds to the theory of historical materialism! But Bláha is dissuaded from marxism by its method through which it wishes to attain all this, i. e. by revolution. Against the marxist political method Bláha places "critical historical realism as a scientific method" starting from what Bláha calls "a critical cognizance of realities brought about by the historical development, and practical measures taken in agreement with this knowledge".

When forming his party, Bláha made several remarkable observations which became topical since, when many a thing has been taken into account which we did not, or refused to, see before. One of Bláha's remarkable observations is that under the influence of failures we start to feel the necessity to think of possible errors in our ideology, tactics and methods. Or another observation: You can't go on making revolution because, in its substance, it is destructive; after it you have to start to "construct" which is pretentious and responsible. It cannot be disputed or turned aside. And above all: the cult of revolution and violence is disastrous and fatal. Bláha asks with Sombart: "Can culture be created by violence or just drill?" This deserves to be thought about.

We have seen that Bláha does not refute the importance of the economic basis and that he even intends to supplement political democracy with the economic one. However, he is convinced that all this forms but prerequisites of progress. The leading social forces are, according to Bláha, "spiritual and moral interests". "They bring about progress." Among Bláha's ideas again and again is repeated the conviction: "to seek for a spiritualization of socialism." How it seemed

idealistic to us at the time! Today we see this and many another thing in a new light. Many a thing can be accepted now.

What has happened? What has changed? First of all, the whole our social situation has been changed. As far as I can judge, the crucial question of today is not: a gradual development or a revolutionary violence? Socialism has been victorious in our country institutionally, although it is deformed and threatened by difficulties and dangers. But the socialistic basis exists. We need not fight for it, but only defend and improve it. But if once social and economic preconditions for the building up of socialism exist, many a problem — once important in principle — falls off, though its solution used to be a cause of quarrels among socialists. When the most disputed questions are settled, such as seemed of second importance, become actual. Today socialism has become a “majority power factor”, which is the situation conditioning many a thing, according to Bláha. Today “the power pressure of socialism” (although Bláha had quite a different idea of this pressure) has brought about those “necessary prerequisites” required by Bláha for the socialization of all spheres of our social life. Bláha sought to help them to originate in his own way which could be expressed by Comenius’ motto: *Omnia sponte fluant, absit violentia rebus*. In spite of that, I contend that Bláha who dreamed of social justice in our country, can be considered as a true adherent of socialism.

#### ARNOŠT BLÁHA A SOCIALISMUS

Článek připomíná prakticko-politickou epizodu v Bláhově životě v letech 1925–28. Rozebírá program Bláhovy tehdy založené politické strany, zvané Strana pokroková, a konfrontuje jej zvl. s programem marxistickým. Upozorňuje na rozdíly v nazírání na některé problémy před vítězstvím a po vítězství socialismu u nás. Problémy tehdy druhořadé stávají se dnes pro nás po zabezpečení socialistické sociálně ekonomické základny problémy aktuálními. Z připomenutých Bláhových názorů a ideálů vyplývá, že byl přívržencem socialismu, který snil o sociální spravedlnosti v naší zemi.



