

Eva Broklová: Československá demokracie. Politický systém ČSR 1918-1938 (Czechoslovak Democracy. Political System of ČSR 1918-1938)

Praha, SLON 1992, 168 p.

As we are informed by "the editorial note" of the authoress, the text presents, to both professional and general public, basic theses that have been formulated as early as the end of 1967 as study material of the interdisciplinary team on "The development of the political system." The fact that the core of Eva Broklová's book is more than 25 years old is meant not as an excuse but, rather, just as a sigh over the observation that political history often proceeds more slowly than intellectual history.

If the present form of this text is already a result of current changes (they can not be, after all, always overlooked) it is still necessary to acknowledge the things that are independent. By this the lasting and to a certain extent, timeless validity and attractiveness of the subject is meant. The necessary and special topics of description and interpretation of the First Republic's political system has an unbiased view of its merits and weaknesses. This gives the book its more stable values. Information and data, either historical or systematic, always have relevance. No doubt this book will be thoughtfully considered not only by experts in the field of political and legal history, social philosophers, sociologists, and others, but also by people that have just a general interest in politics. Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge its subject content given by our contemporary situation. The political changes in our country, transformation of its institutions and orientations, require a more solid ground for interpretation.

The book consists of three relatively independent parts. The first one, entitled "The Czechoslovak Political System: Basic Characteristics," has its focus on a historical and systematic interpretation of basic postulates of the First Republic's constitution and the

resulting establishment of relations between legislative, executive and judicial powers.

The book comes, therefore, from the classic methodological differentiation of three elements of political power, the differentiation that is always partial to a certain "suppression" of the smallest political "units," i.e. citizens themselves, of their rights and, in particular, their duties such as, e.g., their right to vote, their public service and their non-political activities and, above all, the exchange of information and persons within a political, business and academic sphere. This is connected then with the problem of professional politicians and their independence. The system thus remains as though superior to an individual. The definition of political system, therefore, coincides here in principle with the concept of the state and is understood as the structure of all relevant and concrete relations between the upholders and the addressees of power in organized society (comp., e.g., p. 11). The authoress herself is well aware of the asymmetry between the specification of democratic postulates and mechanisms, the concrete course of political events, and possibilities of understanding them. While interpreting the course of political events she includes the democratic system as defined by a constitution and further, a system of political parties, a sphere of democratic culture and last, but not least, a problem of a democracy crisis and possible solutions (to this comp., e.g., p. 160). It thus involves a systematic mediation of what is sometimes called "the governmental system." Greater attention is, naturally, paid to political power (vertical) structures than to communicative consensual (horizontal) structures, which are important not only in legitimative processes but also within the enforcement of concrete power measures. That is why, e.g., problems of caretaker governments and so-called "the five" (later on "the six" and "the eight") are systematically related to questions of their constitutionality and further problematized as, to a certain extent, "anti-parliamentary" (in the case of caretaker

governments) or even as "a mark of tendencies to the oligarchization of democracy" (in the case of "the five"). Yet their virtual role for stabilizing the self-regulation of a system is, at the same time, neither ignored nor underestimated (to this comp., e.g., p. 45).

Even though the presentation of the subject is rather narrative (or "descriptive") than theoretically analytical in the strict sense of the word. (This is made obvious, e.g., in the categorization of democracy, the content of which should coincide with a political system: for a generation of builders of the First Republic this has been a category of democracy, a world view and a philosophical standpoint in everyday manifestations of the way of life). One asset of this work is its attempt to show not only systematic, logically legal mechanisms of the constitution, laws and institutional operation, but also to portray these mechanisms on the background of historical events of the Czechoslovak democratic formation of the pragmatic orientations of their makers. Note, for example, the connection of the emergence of the idea of an independent state to Masaryk's transition from the concept of historical state law, widely acknowledged in prewar Czech politics, to an argumentation of what is naturally legal for the position of the Slovak nation within the framework of Provinces of St. Stephan's Crown (p. 19).

No less important is, furnished by archival documents, the certain inertia in social political relations, and in particular, of "traditions of constitutional conditions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in which Czech politics also participated and from which it could draw upon (p. 22). Often it seems that more attention should be paid to the politically stabilizing potential of regulations and rules of "the old regime," and not only of the post-coup period. A considerable ambiguity in "the acceptance" of post-coup changes, i.e., in the behavior of the lower levels of administration, even when preparing and enforcing constitutionally legal documents. This seems to be important both for the indication of spontaneous political conservatism and for more general conservative interpretations of the relation between

the old and the new, tradition and progress, the system and possibilities of its change and, especially for the interpretation of the conservative conception of the value of social change.

However, it is necessary to see this approach (both on a practical and theoretical level) as a stabilizing power that leads to true state building. For the benefit of interpretation, it is placed in a historically ideal context as a "moral" anticipation of Czechoslovak democracy. This regards, e.g., the conviction of the state formulators and the relevance of long historical time (and evolved Czech mentality)

"a democratic form appears, for the Czech nation, to be the most appropriate one, in a view of the fact of its role in past centuries, of its national history's spirit, of a historical development of this country, of a contemporary structure of the population and of political, social and cultural requirements of the new state" (p.16).

Historically narrative evidence of the cause and effect of ideas, events, facts, decisions and formulations is sometimes, in the book, so strong that it makes its systemic position and synchronous relevance unclear. The authoress remains here too much devoted to her historical guild, sometimes even at the expense of clarity and comprehensibility to the untrained public.

A philosophically systemic legitimization of the new state through abstract democratic postulates such as those "that played a decisive role in the origin of American democracy" (p. 160) and that have, in the republican manner, turned against monarchic regimes of a decayed old world, is thus complemented with historical legitimization. By this, it undoubtably differentiated itself from initially analogic attempts in other successional states of defeated powers. However, it shared with them this ill-stated connection of nationalism and democratic political forms.

The authoress stresses, as the hallmark and the basis of power in Czechoslovak parliamentary democracy during the interwar period, a tension between the executive and the legislative. "The center of political grav-

ity" was located in the parliament, but "...the parliament was, in fact, systematically restricted by the government" (p. 28). The question remains, to what extent can "a superiority of the executive power over the legislative power" may be taken, in "modern states." Some formulations seem to indicate this power hierarchy (e.g., on p. 37) and to what extent it has this state of affairs. It is tied to more fundamental discrepancies such as national ones above all, but possibly also socio-political ones, which space and time have allowed for a new state and which are analogic, to some extent, with the present situation.

What I have in mind is the non-existence of a state-forming opposition, which the authoress seems well aware of. The government needs to resist a strong negation of the old regime from the adversaries, not only "national minorities but also a considerable section of the 'governing nation,' i.e. communists and a part of the People's Party" (p. 43). This opposition has been not only against the government but, above all, anti-democratic.

In this situation, there is an understandable tendency toward both a representation and a political system, arising from elections and which identify themselves with the government and the regime. The effect of that may be a special kind of fear of change. A rotation of the voters' deputies in the legislative body may appear to be something very controversial, something that is going to not only destabilize the regime but also the whole state.

"In the Czechoslovak situation, the actual impossibility of defeating the coalition was influenced also by the existence of numerous non-loyal oppositions (both left and right) and, in the second decade, a non-existence of a loyal opposition. Thus, it was impossible to form any other coalition from the so-called 'general coalition' that had existed there since 1929" (p. 38).

The authoress finds this in a rather different context and shows an imperative solidarity. From the non-existence of alternative solutions, the necessity has arisen to substitute a democratic principle of majority rule by a principle of "unanimity through the help of

mutual compensations" (p. 39), by the seeking of compromise solutions and by the establishment of agreements on the basis of an alliance. The Czechoslovak system of "the only possible majority," thus called in 1927 by Emil Sobota is, so far, something quite different from merely merging legitimacy and legality. The system, as the highest expression of a modern liberal democracy, has been enlightened to various points by, for example, Max Weber and Carl Schmitt. This particular analysis of the unmediated separation of the government and the opposition (a reminder of the impossibility of an opposition as well as a danger of defeatist conception of democracy in governmental parties and in the government itself) is among the most interesting, the most topical and the most useful interpretations of this book.

The whole analysis of the First Republic's political system, from the creation of a political will through a system that stabilizes the rights of the president and his control functions; through an independent judicial system and the enforcement of human rights and protection of minorities; through decentralization of public administration (no matter how the full democratic self-administration collides with a complicated national structure or even with a non-loyalty of minorities) finally proves its vitality and its ability to cope with internal systemic crisis.

The second part of this book is devoted to the political party system in Czechoslovakia. The pre-Munich republic is, at the same time, characterized as "the Party State." From a point of view of a plebiscitary democracy it thus represents the most rationalized form because the general public has participated in the establishment of out political will. But, at the same time, according to the authoress, the state has been taken beyond its limits and started, "to a certain extent," to contain "features of the Czechoslovak republic as a parliamentary democracy" (p. 74) and led to some "dictatorship of the parties" in public life. This dictatorship manifested itself as a more disintegrative factor the more the division of parties depended on their nationality. The pluralistic party system has been constantly weakened by a large number of parties whose proliferation con-

tributed to the proportional electoral system. At the same time, the authoress points out the fact that some of the drawbacks of the pluralistic party system, such as slow regeneration of the parliament and party disintegration, influenced negatively an evaluation and an acceptance of the First Republic's political system after the Second World War.

The relative independence of each particular part of this book is clear in the third part called "The Crisis of Democracy," especially in view of the scope of problems of a crisis of democracy that oversteps the bounds of historiography towards political science, sociology and philosophy. In this part, with certain implications, the whole structure of interpretation culminates. It concludes that

"a category of democracy which we, in its general and common sense, understand as controlled power circumstances, appears to be the real reference system of existence and non-existence of the First Republic, i.e. of functional national society, its history and its interpretation" (p. 10).

The question of the failure of the First Republic represents for the Czech political nation its greatest complex of century, and it has been used as the basic background for the interpretation of its history several times. The other issue is how a phenomenon of democratic crisis is interpreted and explained. Here the authoress works with much too broad and abstract a framework, including unwanted side effects of social modernization that might be possibly valid. These effects may also be valid for a majority of industrial states in the first half of this century, but they have not always been accompanied by the same political and structural crisis phenomena.

The idea of the democratic crisis, despite the problems of unmanageable economic growth, is connected here with the problems of a "mass nation." (p. 100). This interpretation was formulated for the first time within the framework of a conservative cultural critique by Ortega y Gasset in his "The Revolt of the Masses" and further exploited in H. Arendt's famous book "The Origins of Totalitarianism," concerned with

the problems of the origins of a mass society. It seems to be a drawback that domestic attempts of that period for reflections on these questions are not more deeply considered in this work, as in the two-volume book "The Crisis of Democracy," of J. L. Fischer. It could have been also interesting to point out Peroutka's small work, towards the end of the twenties, called "Who Has Liberated Us," which has distinctly shown a non-democratic feature of historical political discourse and which has been helpful for the analysis of parties and their relation to the presidency.

The Czechoslovak democracy crisis is revealed, in the first place, from the level of a general crisis of democracy that itself, according to the authoress, was caused by crisis of social structures, by unbalanced economic development, and by a loss of faith in democracy (p. 145). It becomes apparent that this concept concerns primarily forms of political life. Every political intervention of definitions and interests, as, e.g., reflections of "radical democrats" on possibilities for "democratization of property," (This is, by the way, an illusion coming back into Czech liberal and democratic ideas in this very century) actually disintegrate those forms.

Democracy is thus losing its character as a regulative system of political negotiations that is superior to various interests, particular requirements and reactions in the sphere of politics and society. It fails to be something that lives on the reflected tension of its own concrete realization. In a later evolution of political theory, therefore, the concept of democracy has been more and more related to problems of "open society" and to Popper's concept of the superiority of freedom to truth. Often it has been interpreted on the basis of a certain political anthropology. In this context, some of the authoress' explanations of the crisis of democracy seem to be a bit too abstract and indebted to a historical "anatomical formula," in which, on the basis of a unique result of a concrete historic event, a general value is interpreted.

The special question is then a coincidence of internal and external crisis of Czechoslovak statehood and its general crisis of democracy. The possibility to show problems of Czechoslovak inter-war development

as an individual expression of the general crisis of democracy caused by a crisis of social structures and by the establishment of mass society is not sufficient from the point of view of a contemporary experience. This would permit standpoints that are, to a considerable extent, antiquated such that "dictatorships find their sources in the imperfection of parliamentary democratic regimes and, in particular, in their incompetence to overcome any exceptional difficulties... Dictatorships are a reaction to liberal maladies, economic and social ones, in particular" (p. 101).

It seems that the immense regenerative ability of liberal democratic systems is rather neglected. Towards the end of this century, these systems have, after all, won recognition against all the attempts for alternative political and economic solutions. Francis Fukuyama, for example, in his famous essay (and, later on, in his book "The End of History") has tried to emphasize this fact. Furthermore, the dictatorships and totalitarianism regimes, most often, have headed toward situations that have had relatively little, if any, historical experience with democratic solutions to political problems. It seems then that emphasizing external and internal conditions realying of democracy which may stand against its conception (whether it refers to the establishment of a mass society, an unbalanced economic development or national problems) is not as important as the question of a certain spiritual or, if you like, cultural preconditions of democracy and, in

particular, the question of establishing democratic mentalities.

It is therefore possible to agree with the authoress when she says that

"it is necessary to see the imperfections of the democratic governmental system of the First Republic in the context of problems which the establishment of democratic regimes always run into, without exception for its upholders. The opposition of non-Czech nationalities during the formation of the state was followed, immediately afterwards, by a weakening of foreign policy. A short stabilization had been replaced by an economic depression and by a following growth of a direct threat to the state" (p. 114).

But the fact remains, that this actually concerns the reason, "a short time," for the development and expansion of real democratic mentalities which could live through a post-revolutionary disintegration of democratic institutions. The authoress herself formulates it, for that matter, as follows:

"No resolution or, in fact, the actual impossibility to solve fundamental discrepancies, led to the elimination of a democracy without any guarantee from dictatorships or a totalitarian regime, either left or right, that usually replace a democracy, to moderate or to eliminate special problems; they, for the most part, just suppress their existence. In the case of Czechoslovakia, democracy was eliminated from the outside, while the elimination from the inside proceeded as a long-term decline with a peripetia covering whole decades (p. 146).

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