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## **APOLITICAL POLITICS AND POLITICAL REALITY (MASARYK'S HUMANITY OF HISTORICAL MOMENT)**

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Humanist Masaryk made every effort to persuade heads and hearts; he created an image of a citizen and civil society by philosophy of humanity and apolitical politics. Masaryk's apolitical politics interfered with the political reality and economic instability of the state built in the spirit of democratic humanism.

**Key words:** Humanity, apolitical politics, Masaryk

*Thereby, as a result of current economic conditions,  
a general dissatisfaction inevitably develops,  
which in many cases steps in weariness of life.*

T.G. Masaryk

### **Introduction**

Masaryk was a man with exceptional cultural, social and political range of knowledge, he was a man of action, humanity and a philosopher of everyday life. It is said that a man is a man as many times as many languages he knows. If this is true, then this educated and combative man lived at least five lives. Besides his native language, Czech, he could speak German, French, Russian and English and also Slovak, Polish, Latin and ancient Greek. He was a diplomat of reason and empathy, in the international sphere he was a true ambassador of the Czech and Slovak peoples, an intellectual with the power of moral consciousness and own practical experience.

## Journey to a democratic humanism

Masaryk adopted philosophical dialogue which opened to his view the historical perspective and a deep study of Plato became for Masaryk what Platonism was for Galileo, as emphasized by Jan Patočka, because

(...) absolute certainty is not possible to man, every, even the strongest, conviction based on the most important and, putting it in modern words, most objective examining, will remain affected in these matters by the breath of risk of high determination.<sup>1</sup>

Focused search led Masaryk from religious uniformity and continued in philosophical reflection of a young intellectual on evolutionary maturation of each idea that defies ritual rigidity of organizational slavery of invariability and torpor of the infallibility of the Church Order. A new era of his intellectual horizon led by detour to the national awareness of the real wealth of Czech history and to the personage which became its symbol – Master Jan Hus. Masaryk's love of truth and his faith in her victory was the result and consequence of his struggle for a sense of historical consciousness, the meaning of human life. According to Masaryk, all our aspiration should be founded on philosophical grounds, and the one who really thinks „(...) he possesses it, he must possess it.“ [Idea of Humanity].

Masaryk's humanistic ideal is associated with free-thinking movement in Bohemia, with the Czech Reformation and, of course, with the traditions of the legacy of the Unity of Czech Brethren, with the personality of its last bishop Jan Ámos Komenský and with image of Jan Hus as a fighter for the truth of conscience. Thus, he became the successor of the noble aspirations for human consciousness and conscience, freedom and free thought. At the key points of our history, Masaryk stands fearless and fighting in defense of Jan Hus, a symbol of the values of truth and justice. He suggested building a monument to Jan Hus and he personally contributed financially to the issuing of Hus's writings. Here we come to the bolt, the future Platonic philosopher sitting „on the throne“ with the personage of Komenský at the time of the 300th anniversary of his birth. This pilgrim on the road of hope was considered dangerous by the Austrian authorities – his life and work was unacceptable. It was officially prohibited throughout the school network to even mention him and his name should be deleted forever, just as it later recurred during the period of a cult of personality in the fifties. Masaryk took revivalist mission and lectured on Komenský, not only as a teacher, but also as the symbol of the true, genuine patriotism carrying

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<sup>1</sup> J. Patočka, *Platón*, Praha 1992, s. 287.

the symbol of hope and faith that „(...) the government of your affairs will again be returned to you, oh Czech people.“

In his lectures on practical philosophy, Masaryk seeks the ideal of true perfection. The reason is his understanding of humanity and democracy: „sub specie aeternitatis“. This view derives from the category of humanity and the course towards human perfection which, according to Masaryk, reflects in our actions. The course to human perfection is, according to both Masaryk and Komenský, a process of human improvement, subjective activity in our daily lives. The line of this process is, before it reaches the feeling of eternity, accompanied by the values of our life: humility, moral responsibility leading to universal consonance and harmony. People in this stage of their own existence come to „(...) the understanding of the world, social development and improvement.“<sup>2</sup>

Masaryk's ‚humanistic fellow-citizenship‘ accompanying a person as a source of moral support is a necessary and indispensable part of moral perception and action and also the source of satisfaction in our lives. On the other hand, morality is not the only characteristic of this concept. Masaryk here returns to the moral personality of Jan Hus. Considering the historical background, he comes to the conclusion that the moral reversal stems from Hus and comes to its peak in the reform efforts of the Czech Brethren. Therefore, Masaryk always turns to Hus and Komenský in his thinking and practice because it in their lives he finds his basic postulate about the meaning and mission of religion and he states that „(...) a religion that does not strengthen and improve morality is not a pure religion.“<sup>3</sup>

Journey to morality is contained in the national idea and fills our history with valor, courage and sense of purpose. Besides the images of Žižka, „a man of granite blocks“, Chelčický, Hus and Komenský stand out with their determination, dedication, morality and humanity.

In religion, morality must be the deciding factor. Morality means the relationship of neighbour, it means energetic work for the neighbour; today we would describe it as social issues solution.<sup>4</sup>

Social awareness is contained in the idea of a moral basis of Christianity. With reference to the writings of Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky, Masaryk notes that for those „most downhearted“ it fans the spark of humanity which burst into flames cleansing their souls. Human degradation and humility, sadness and pain do not lead to hatred, anger and turning away from this strata of society, but ultimately they reveal the moral basis

<sup>2</sup> Z. Franta, *Mravní názory*, Praha 1923, s. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 19.

<sup>4</sup> T.G. Masaryk, *Mistr Jan Hus a česká reformace*, Praha 1919, s. 23.

of Christianity which sees charity „in the love for the weak, poor, afflicted, worthless; since is not hard to love the powerful, rich, cheerful, beautiful and good.“<sup>5</sup>

With philosophical insight, Milan Machovec points to the key of understanding the personality of Masaryk. Masaryk was not only recognized, but also defamed, a person with a gloriole of a patriot and a national hero, but also a man with a crown of thorns, condemned by statements about his actions and withdrawn to the edge of society. We can never estimate the fame or shame of such men on the basis of single, separated and isolated statements. Masaryk was (as pointed out by the already cited author of the monograph on his life and work) „(...) just a philosopher of authenticity of human existence.“<sup>6</sup>

Masaryk's philosophical position is always in the plane of human existence, morality - the value of a humanistic man, pure humanity which is the final goal and the fulfillment of individual human endeavor. His thinking about the source of morality belongs to the emotional depth of feeling and understanding of our relation both to the created world and humans. Masaryk's expression of Christian concept of neighbour has nonreligious content. It exceeds one-sided relation to love, human passivity, humble relationship with God. In first place stands the love of neighbour, of another person. Our moral values leads there in the form of „efforts for truly democratic social and political reforms.“<sup>7</sup>

Diligence and perseverance, love of one's own life and lives of others, feeling bereft of sentimentality and selfishness are the philosophy of „our path in life,“ says Masaryk, a lover of learning and confessor of power of wisdom, follower of Komenský, builder of a new image of life and morality of man and the world. He built the power of morality on a strong foundation of education and human communality.

We should seek not only practical education, but also general and philosophical. Today in particular, education should also be historical and political. Today, morality means political morality to a great extent. Let us not make any difference between politics and morality.<sup>8</sup>

Love, a human bond and the source of our emotion, humanity, honesty, nobility and morality twines around the relation to our neighbours. Actual morality has its foundation in this feeling and understanding of our relation to the world and neighbour. Ethical aspect of political and philosophical dimensions of the concept of the basis of religion also brings

<sup>5</sup> ČAS, 1892, s. 18.

<sup>6</sup> M. Machovec, *Tomáš G. Masaryk*, Praha 1968, s. 132.

<sup>7</sup> T.G. Masaryk, *Americké přednášky*, Praha 1907, s. 30.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 14.

a new perspective on the relationship between religion and politics. Masaryk's conception of humanity creates the substantive basis of his ethics filling our everyday life with the moral content. Masaryk quite rigorously rejects the concept of politics as a representative of technology of power and a symbiosis of religion and politics. Masaryk, the philosopher, recognizes only a single measure of verity in our actions; scientific knowledge and science as the criterion of our environmental attitudes and a tool of everyday existence.

Masaryk was a realistic politician, with high moral credit of apolitical politics in the spirit Havlíček Borovský and spiritual ethos of the truth warrior Master Jan Hus. Masaryk, however, was a particularly strenuous creator of the new national and patriotic statehood, the intellectual creator of the idea of a democratic state founded on the humanistic and social principles in the spirit of Jan Ámos Komenský's legacy consisting in unity as the common ground for understanding, tolerance and love for our fellowmen.

According to Masaryk, the concord, harmony of emotion and reason are the basis of morality and the recognized legal rule „Love thy neighbour as thyself“ is its inseparable part. The ideal of „humanity“ and respect for „mankind“ is basically a humanistic ideal and it is associated with love as a positive incentive – the active, positive love, love as the basis of the moral world.

## **Czech state and its everydayness**

On 18 October 1918, in the conclusion of the Declaration of Independence, the creator of the Czech state and statehood expressed his vision of a new, state-forming state: „We believe in greater and greater democracy and liberty.“ Masaryk's concept of politics was specific, historically and philosophically anchored, expressed in his credo that the basis of the realistic policy is a „secure knowledge“ of the belief that „The Truth Wins!“ In his first message to the nation (December 22), the President used the words of the prayer of Jan Ámos Komenský:

I too believe in God, that after the passing of the storm's anger, brought down on us by our sins, the government of your affairs will again be returned to you, oh Czech people.“ This prophecy, the Komenský's prayer, was fulfilled literally and our nation is free, independent and enters into the society of the European nations with respect and supported by the general sympathy (T.G. Masaryk).

The first few days have shown that the work to create a new republic won't be trouble-free. As a process, building democracy meant not only

civic coexistence but also personal commitment, activity of the citizens and the creation of civil society. „Now that we've won the war, we must not lose the peace. Now we are on the hill, we must not slide down.“<sup>9</sup>

According to Masaryk, the democracy is not boundlessness. Tasks are distributed and must be filled in a way to achieve harmony and concord. A new role of the state and its citizens emerges together with the need to identify oneself with the state's mission. Citizenship means an individual initiative and activity. Masaryk returns to the idea of Komenský that the task of our existence in this world is the constant striving for perfection of the man and the world. To reign means to have accountability and the process of democratization is not levelling. Harmonisation of society means a proportional degree of inequality. Masaryk has always emphasized democracy as discussion where the true strength of the arguments and the power of knowledge applies. In accordance with the example of Komenský, Masaryk has always point out the importance of learning and education and he served as an example of the fact that the wisdom of power is an expression of power of wisdom. In his life, wisdom was connected with high morals. In this sense, democracy is a way of our life, of our existence in this life. Penetration of the religious morality into the life of the state and people is a proof of human wisdom and humanity. Masaryk was convinced that women play an irreplaceable role the civil society. Today, the fact that it was Masaryk, who enforced that the equality of women was contained in the Constitution, almost falls into oblivion. Respect for the woman as a mother, a symbol of life, a cornerstone of both family and civil society, is something that was a commonplace and necessity for Masaryk.

Democracy is a process and Masaryk was aware that we need a long time to implement it. He estimated fifty or at least thirty years. We have not reached even the shorter time dimension. There was too little time and it was passing very quickly. Moral and political game started at the very beginning. President bore the idea of balance, harmony and connectedness fully on his shoulders. His idea of civil society was based on the principle of organization that is not only mechanical and economical but also moral. Practical philosophy, ethics, great personalities, according to him, they all

recognize that conscience is so well established fact like other facts and phenomena... especially the stat and the law are entitled, not only to their benefit, but also morally. It is not true that from the rise of the civilization and the state the society have been organized amorally.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the clarification of the term of morality in the resulting social climate is not only important, but is, in a sense, essential.

<sup>9</sup> Z. Mahler, *Ano, Masaryk*, Praha 2007, s. 81.

<sup>10</sup> T.G. Masaryk, *Ideály Humanitní*, Praha 1898, s. 571-572.

Masaryk dealt with the problem of the class nature of morality in 1901 and he got into controversy with the socialist concept defending the thesis that morality and ethics are always of class nature because the class struggle is the foundation of any society. According to Masaryk, the outcome of this concept stems from a mistaken conviction that specifics of the classes bring insurmountable conflict of interest. It is ignored that there are universal moral principles which are the basis for necessary compliance. Not the class struggle, but the harmony of interests in the universal moral awareness. „(...) Each one has its own manners, its own way of life that has been passed down for generations, and the classes differ in this regard.“<sup>11</sup>

The issue of the state building had moral dimension because it required not only domestic, but also foreign activities. From winter 1918 to spring 1919, Prime Minister Karel Kramář and Foreign Affairs Minister Edvard Beneš stayed in Paris. Peace agreements also affected the Czech Republic with still-undefined borders. There have been considerable discrepancies of opinion between Mr. Kramář and Mr. Beneš.

Let us make a few notes on the resulting clash of opinion and personal animosity between the two protagonists (Beneš and Kramář), to describe the atmosphere of this troubled time.

At this time the fight for the intervention in Russia was at its climax and Mr. Kramář, seeing that the situation here is definitely against him, was very indignant and he sharply criticized our policy.<sup>12</sup>

The interventionist politics of Russia was the cause of this dispute. Kramář told Beneš that some Russians contacted him and asked him to visit Denikin. According to Beneš's claim and a letter to the President it was expected that Kramář went to Russia straight from the Peace Conference to be able to assess imminently the newly arising situation. And here we come to the core of the dispute. At the end of September Kramář returned to Prague.

Without any further comments we accept the Beneš's explanation of the cause of escalation of the problem of the Czech intervention in Russia, the axis Kramář's russophilic policy. In the already cited explanatory letter, Beneš wrote to the President:

(...) I asked him (Kramář) specifically not to visit Denikin since it would have serious political consequences that it would stimulate even more ardent political fight against him ... Mr. Kramář told me then that would visit Denikin.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> T.G. Masaryk, *Ideály humanitní*, Praha 1901, s. 13-14.

<sup>12</sup> J. Stříbrný, *Kramářův soud nad Benešem*, Praha 1938, s. 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 16-17.

We have to note that Karel Kramář has been the chairman of the Czechoslovak government for nearly nine months. At a conference in Paris (July 8, 1919), he received an official letter announcing that he ceased to be prime minister. He also received an explaining letter from the President T.G. Masaryk:

My dear friend,

new stratification of political forces and parties caused by the election brought about the reconstruction of the Government; Member of Parliament, Mr. Tusar, shall be the Prime minister as a member of the largest political party. Therefore, I thank you for devoting your entire political authority to organisation of the first government as a powerful agent, and undoubtedly an opportunity will soon emerge for you to continue to act publicly for the benefit of our country. I gratefully acknowledge the merits you achieved in Paris; I know how successfully you have worked in the field of economics and diplomacy. Your T.G. Masaryk.<sup>14</sup>

The Prime Minister was deeply touched by this fact and his relation to the republic he helped to establish as the leading figure of the local resistance was deeply struck. The conflict evolved further resulting in accusations that Ministry official Jiráček was willing to raise the necessary funds for the election of Beneš for President. According to Karel Kramář, the money came allegedly from commissions on Paris sugar sales and participation in profits promised by Beneš (total 300,000 tons). The whole affair ended in Jiráček's arrest and trial. Alois Jiráček is convicted and „the court reiterates that the credibility of Mr. Beneš is adamant and there is not the least cause for doubt.“<sup>15</sup>

Let us not mention other possible affairs. It was already sufficient to show that the Masaryk's life motto „Not to fear and not to steal!“ was in practice „torpedoed“ by the invisible hand of the market. Masaryk's apolitical policy still had the form of a humanizing vision of the future civil society.

Masaryk made great themes of politics and morality, democracy and morality clear already in 1896. Like Havlíček, he was a follower of reasonable and honest policy that applies to political parties and governments – „every dishonest government plunges the land and nation, and finally itself into disaster.“<sup>16</sup>

Masaryk had already spoken publicly against practices when people like to hold to the lies and violence. His idea of truth leads him to a definite conclusion that a lie is nothing more than a kind of violence. To formally abolish the old system of absolutism and yet continue to secretly hold to

<sup>14</sup> V. Sis, *Dr. Karel Kramář, život-dílo-práce*, Praha 1936, s. 229.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 114.

<sup>16</sup> T.G. Masaryk, *Ideály Humanitní*, s. 267.



„constitutionalism and parliamentarianism“ means, according to Masaryk, preservation of absolutism, obsequious obedience and pretense that something new was created. Service to lies and violence is clothed in the guise of progress. This relations to politics can be seen both in Havlíček and Masaryk: the tendency towards apolitical politics. Havlíček understood that „moral revival may only arise from commitment and actions of individual citizens and the joint efforts of individual citizens and organizations and thus the whole nation.“<sup>17</sup>

Masaryk was entirely on the side of the concept of apolitical politics, the politics that is sensible and honest, the politics for the people and the nation, public, civil and civically fair politics. They mentioned „Augurs“ are of a different opinion, and Masaryk writes that despite „they will not be willing to understand it for a long time, still it is true.“<sup>18</sup> This relates to the moral education of the nation, as pointed out in his book, *Our Time* (1894), in belief that the constitution formulated in this way can create moral basis of the new state for its democratic development.

However, the apolitical politics of the Castle hinted at obstacles. Apart from many opposing and burdensome external factors, the problem was that the president actually dealt mostly with foreign affairs and has become an internationally recognized personage. The essential drawback was that, between the Two World Wars, Czechoslovakia had no politicians at European or world level. In addition, during the span of the Masaryk's seventeen year long Presidency eight Prime Ministers held the office. In five cases, they were members of the Agrarian Party. Antonín Švehla held the office twice for more than seven years (from 1918 to 1935) and was the only man with both the „undisputed state-forming talent“ and the confidence of the President. Antonín Švehla and Edvard Beneš, were the only political authority at this time.

After 1920, the post-war revolutionary wave had begun to ebb both in the Czechoslovak Republic and internationally. In 1924, we can already identify the onset of „temporal and relative stabilization of capitalism. Period was characterised by optimal economic development of both production growth and the growth of the international exchange. Financial markets were stabilized, the profits grew, the unemployment rate decreased and domestic trade flourished.

On the other hand, in international economic frames, the development was considerably uneven. In 1929, the volume of industrial production increased by more than 50% above the pre-war level in the U.S., while the UK it was less than half and in Germany it was less than one fifth.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 268.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 269.

How was this economic instability manifested in Czechoslovakia? First, it lacked long-term economic concept.

Masaryk left the dealing with national issues to Prime Ministers and to the government of the Republic. He concentrated, together with Foreign Affairs Minister Edvard Beneš, on foreign policy issues. In the international world, he was a renowned and respected politician with a broad philosophical range of knowledge and diplomatic reputation. At this time, it was favourable, but on the other hand, should be made clear that the Prime Ministers, with the exception of Antonín Švehla, had neither innate political authority nor charisma. The President lacked sufficient physical strength to deal with complicated economic policy and frequent changes of Prime Ministers reflected the fluctuations of national and social conditions. The heads of the five „constituent parties“ were mostly members of the Agrarian Party and in that period of escalation it was Jan Malypetr (October 1932-1935), indistinctive and little recognized by the President, followed by Milan Hodža.<sup>19</sup>

The Basic Law of the State, the Constitution, has become another major theme, a challenge for the new state. The interim constitution of 28 October 1918, which was prepared by five men of the October, lasted for fourteen months. The building of the state required not only domestic, but also foreign activities. From winter 1918 to spring 1919 Prime Minister Karel Kramář and Foreign Affairs Minister Edvard Beneš stayed in Paris. Peace agreements also affected the Czech Republic with still-undefined borders. Later it turned out that the length of the border granted was, from a strategic military point of view, „hardly defendable.“ Masaryk remarks it very laconically, that the boundaries that is no need to defend are the best.

At the Peace conference in Paris there were considerable disagreements of opinion between Mr. Kramář and Mr. Beneš. In the monograph *Dr. Karel Kramář*, edited by Vladimír Sís, it is expressed as follows:

In Paris, he (Kramář) tried to harmonize his policy with the interests of the Slavs as a whole. He tried ... to organize an event in Paris for the liberation of Russia from the Bolshevik yoke. Unfortunately, his efforts failed to resistance, which came mainly from his country that was already driven by a completely different policy than Karel Kramář promoted. He was even forced to resign.<sup>20</sup>

Disagreements between them culminated in a deep contradiction and hatred until the end of the former Prime Minister's life. From 1921 until his death, Kramář „could not and did not want“ to shake hands with Beneš. Masaryk watched the whole affair. The President requested the opinion of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and he also received compre-

<sup>19</sup> A. Klimek, *Boj o Hrad*. Díl II, Praha 1998.

<sup>20</sup> V. Sís, *Dr. Karel Kramář*, s. 167.

hensive explanation from the former Prime Minister. Beneš expressed his disappointment over the fact that the political contradictions occurred so early in the forming of the democratic republic.

What are the essential differences and strengths of his personality?

Masaryk, a politician and thinker, is a very original personage and as a founder (or in his own view a „restorer“) of the state in all of world history he is a unique case. The philosophers usually pondered the ideal state; the opportunity to create it by real political events was given only to one thinker in history – Masaryk.<sup>21</sup>

Masaryk's national philosophy, anchored in the moral ideals of the revolutionary upsurge of the human spirit, is the basis of his vision of apolitical politics.

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### Apolityczna polityka i rzeczywistość polityczna (humanistyka Masaryka)

#### Streszczenie

Humanista Masaryk poświęcił swoje życie dla zmiany społecznej; stworzył obraz obywatela i społeczeństwa obywatelskiego przez filozofię człowieczeństwa i polityki apolitycznej. Apolityczna polityka Masaryka zakładała ingerencję w rzeczywistość polityczną i gospodarczą państwa poprzez zbudowany w duchu demokratycznym humanizm.

**Słowa klucze:** humanistyka, apolityczność polityczna, Masaryk

<sup>21</sup> J. Patočka, *Platón*, s. 24.

