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Michal Šimáně

## Restoration of Secondary Vocational Education after World War II during the Third Czechoslovak Republic (1945-1948)\*

**Key words:** secondary vocational education, *matura* certification, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union

### Summary

The paper focuses on the post-war restoration of the system of secondary vocational education, redressing the wrongs caused by the Nazi regime and visions of its future direction during the third Czechoslovak Republic (1945–1948). The paper is based on the study of legislation and journals of this period. The author observes the transformation of secondary vocational education on the background of important historical milestones of the development of Czechoslovak society during the three years after the end of World War II. In this context, he wonders, for example, how secondary vocational education developed during this period. What social circumstances led to this development and what were the consequences of the close orientation of Czechoslovakia towards the Soviet Union in vocational education development?

### Introduction

The end of World War II marked, among other things, a new beginning for many countries around the world. The fall of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Fascist Japan brought new challenges for these countries, taking many forms. These ranged from the material reconstruction of infrastructure, settlements, etc., damaged by wartime events, to the rectification of various injustices and wrongs within many social and cultural spheres (see, for example, Diefendorf 1989; Eichengreen 1995, etc.). Unsurprisingly, one of these spheres was the field of education, which is the focus of this study. Specifically, the following text focuses on the post-war restoration of the system of secondary vocational education, redressing the wrongs caused by the Nazi regime, and visions of its future direction during the Third Czechoslovak Republic (1945–1948). The paper is based on the study of legislation and journals of this period. The text observes

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the transformation of secondary vocational education on the background of important historical milestones of the development of Czechoslovak society during the three years after the end of World War II. In this context, the development of secondary vocational education in this period is explored also focusing on the social circumstances that led to this development and the consequences of the close orientation of Czechoslovakia towards the Soviet Union in vocational education development.

The circumstances of the end of the First Czechoslovak Republic and the course of World War II also adumbrated Czechoslovakia's development after its liberation in 1945. It was obvious that the return to the First Republic system would be difficult. The shaken confidence of the Czechoslovak population in the West European powers following the Munich Agreement in 1938 and the liberation of most of Czechoslovakia by the Red Army of the Soviet Union foreshadowed the future gradual orientation of Czechoslovak society – the orientation towards the Soviet Union. After all, even before the end of fighting on the territory of our state in the spring of 1945, the so-called Košice Government Programme was adopted, announced in Košice, but symptomatically approved earlier in Moscow (for more see, e.g. McDermott 2015; Rychlík 2020).

The government programme outlined several reforms to help Czechoslovak society overcome war hardships and to pave the way for further development. These did not offer much hope of building on the traditions of the First Republic. On the contrary, for example, instead of the pluralist system of political parties typical of the interwar Czechoslovakia, an association of political parties called the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks was created. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCZ), preferring deeper cooperation with the Soviet Union, had a significant say in it (for more, see, e.g. Rokoský 2018).

The orientation towards the Soviet Union was, however, interwoven in many points in the Košice government programme. Those concerning Czechoslovak education were no exception (see, e.g. Šimáně 2021; Zounek, Šimáně, Knotová 2017, etc.). In the first years after the liberation, it was in poor shape due to various Nazi interventions (e.g. closure of Czech universities, changes in the teaching content, etc., see Bosák 1969). Therefore, the first thing that had to be done was to restore the entire educational network to its original extent throughout the entire territory of the republic, including the border areas that had been directly part of Nazi Germany since the Munich Agreement. It is, therefore, no coincidence that a few days after the liberation in May 1945, the Ministry of Education and Enlightenment took several steps in this connection by means of its decrees. The first step was to encourage active-duty teachers to return to their posts and

begin teaching wherever possible, given the local situation. In doing so, they were to cooperate with the newly formed national committees. Students were, of course, equally encouraged to return to all types of schools. Students who had been expelled from school for various reasons during the Nazi occupation or prevented from studying at those schools by the Protectorate legislation were also allowed to return (*Učitelstvu* 1946).

The second decree (*K zahájení*, 1946) was more specific. Its content suggests that the break with the traditions of the First Republic, at least in the field of education, was not entirely unequivocal. It stipulated that teaching in schools should be based on the standard curriculum in force before the occupation. After all, the implementation of any new school reform<sup>1</sup> was not a priority in the first post-war years in Czechoslovakia, given the overall post-war situation in society. That is similar to, for example, the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, when in the early years, the teaching was based on the legislation in force during the Austro-Hungarian period, and more significant educational reforms were adopted in the later period (see, e.g. Šimáně 2019). Therefore, only the curriculum was to be continuously adjusted for the time being. Moreover, it was to be adapted as much as possible to the new social conditions (*K zahájení* 1946).

In other words, the system of Czechoslovak education remained the same in the first post-war years in Czechoslovakia as at the end of the first Czechoslovak Republic. It included considerable fragmentation accompanied by the so-called two-track system of education, where different types of schools existed side by side involving students of the same age (see, e.g. Šimáně 2019). That was, of course, also true of secondary and vocational education. After all, in addition to secondary schools, by which we mean grammar schools, real grammar schools, and reformed real grammar schools, there existed several types of technical schools attended by adolescents. These ranged from three-year vocational schools, where apprenticeships were obtained, to two-year master schools connected to these schools, to four-year industrial, engineering, or economic schools (Budina, 1947). In addition, however, there were also elementary technical schools, provincial folk schools, forestry schools, trade schools and academies, institutes for the training of kindergarten teachers, teacher training institutes, nursing schools, institutes for midwives training, and many other vocational schools, such as conservatoires, etc. (Boháč et al., 1982).

Similarly complicated, compared to the education system of the time, was

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<sup>1</sup> As in the pre-war years, in the first years after the liberation until the communist regime came into power, there was a lot of discussion about the reform, which was to reform the existing fragmented form of education and unify it into a so-called unified school. However, until 1948 it remained only a matter of discussion (see, e.g. Rýdl 2010; Vorlíček 2004, etc.).



the path to the *matura* certificate, or *matura* examination. That was generally referred to in this period as the maturity exam. However, many other types of school examinations were also referred to in the same way, but, of course, they did not entitle the student to enter university. An example of this is the maturity examination at teacher training institutes (*Předpisy o zkouškách dospělosti na ústavech učitelských*, 1947). In today's terminology, the *matura* examination, entitling entry to university, could have only been taken at specific types of schools, namely, at all the types of secondary schools at that time, i.e. grammar schools<sup>2</sup> and subsequently at some technical schools, such as four-year industrial, engineering, or economic schools (see, e.g. Budina, 1947). However, that did not mean that graduates of other schools were denied the *matura* examination. Their path was "only" slightly more complicated. In fact, it was possible to take the *matura* examination entitling one to study at a university externally at one of the aforementioned secondary schools at that time, provided that the person concerned had already passed one of the maturity examinations (not entitling entry to university) at another type of school. That was a remnant of the Austro-Hungarian system of supplementary examinations, which survived World War II (see *Předpisy o zkouškách dospělosti na gymnásiích*, 1947; Morkes, 2004).

The fragmented secondary and vocational education system, and the tangled path to the *matura* exam, were accompanied by a complicated and chaotic period of coming to terms with the injustices of the Nazi occupation. In the field of secondary schools and vocational education, that period was reflected not only in the return of teachers and students to secondary and technical schools but also, for example, in the recognition, supplementation, or expiry of the maturity examination. This was particularly the case in the first two post-war years. For example, students who had obtained a failing grade in the German language or national history, or both, during the German occupation had that grade retrospectively annulled, with the possibility of completing their studies by taking the maturity examination at a school of their choice. The same option applied to students who could not take the maturity examination, for example, due to expulsion from school for hostile acts against Nazi Germany or the Protectorate regime, or other persecution measures. This concerned students expelled for racial reasons and even students who, although successful, were excluded from further studies by the Protectorate's provisions on limiting the number of students

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<sup>2</sup> At that time in Czechoslovakia, there were four types of grammar schools, which differed mainly in the content of their educational curricula. These were either more humanities-oriented or more technically oriented. Specifically, these were the classical grammar school (*gymnasium*), as well as real grammar schools (*reálné gymnasium*), reformed real grammar schools (*reformní reálné gymnasium*), and real schools (*reálka*).

for each type of school<sup>3</sup>. Students from the border areas that were not part of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia but of Nazi Germany could also take the maturity exams (*Odčinění křivd*, 1946).

Redressing the wrongs of the Nazi regime also applied to students who had taken the maturity examination during the Nazi occupation but had failed. In such cases during the Protectorate period, they received only a so-called school-leaving certificate, not a maturity examination certificate. If, however, their failure was due to a failing grade in the German language or national history, or both, they could apply for an adult examination certificate. If their claim was accepted, they even did not have to retake the exam. It is interesting to note here that in such cases, their marks in those subjects were calculated (according to the First Republic regulations) based on their study results so that they succeeded in these subjects. That was the case even when the calculated average grade was found to be insufficient. If such a situation arose, the competent school authorities nevertheless wrote down a sufficient, i.e., the second worst possible mark, which, however, already allowed the certificate of the maturity examination to be issued (*Odčinění křivd*, 1946).

The flip side of the coin of redressing the injustices that occurred in schools during the Nazi occupation was, of course, the practice of the Czechoslovak education authorities in the early post-war years in Czechoslovakia of ordering the expiration of the validity of maturity examination certificates. For example, according to the decree of the Ministry of Education and Enlightenment of April 1946, any secondary school maturity examination certificate became invalid if it was obtained at schools with German as the language of instruction in the territory of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia during the period from 30 September 1938 to 4 May 1945 and at certain other types of schools, e.g. the Federal Russian or Ukrainian Real Grammar School in Modřany<sup>4</sup> between 1 September 1942

<sup>3</sup> For example, according to the 1941 reform, only 35% of pupils from the fourth grade of elementary schools (*Volksschule*) could move on to city schools (*Stadtschule*), regardless of their school results, and only 5% to secondary schools. The rest, i.e., about 60% of the children, had to stay in municipal schools (see, e.g. Bosák, 1969; Angelis, 1945).

<sup>4</sup> The reasons for not recognizing the education received at these schools can probably be seen in the fact that these schools were staffed by people who, in the eyes of the Soviet Union, were engaged in anti-Soviet activities. The headmaster in Modřany from 1938 was Hryhoriy Omelchenko, a Ukrainian native who, in 1917, became a member of the Kuban' Legislative Council and the Kuban' Regional Council and actively participated in the process of Ukrainisation of Kuban' education. During the Russian Civil War, he fled with his family to Czechoslovakia to escape the Bolsheviks, where he was granted Czechoslovak citizenship in 1937. In May 1945, however, he was taken back to the Soviet Union against his will, where he was sentenced to 10 years in the Karlag detention camp in 1947 for alleged anti-Soviet activities. He died there after only four months. The school was evacuated to Bavaria during the first days of May and left Prague (for more see, e.g. *Čechoslováci v gulagu*, 2020).

and 4 May 1945 (*Platnost vysvědčení*, 1947). It must be mentioned, however, that students whose maturity examination certificates were renounced in this way were able to complete the examination in the same way as students who, for example, were not even allowed to take the maturity examination during the Protectorate. For this purpose, a number of short-term (usually three-month) courses were implemented, which took place, for example, in the summer months, during the holidays. Students who were already employed were not forgotten and they had access to evening courses intended for such individuals (*Pokyny pro vydání vysvědčení*, 1946). The maturity examination was then conducted according to the latest First Republic regulations governing the maturity examination at secondary and technical schools<sup>5</sup>, except for the German language examination, which was not to be held (*Zkoušky dospělosti*, 1946). More significant changes in the area of secondary technical schools did not occur until after the February 1948 coup of the CZCP.

### Conclusions

The end of World War II in Czechoslovakia almost immediately brought urgent tasks in the field of education. Along with the consolidation of the country, both teachers and students were returning to schools. Secondary schools preparing youth for various professions or further studies at universities were no exception. Besides the problems related to the return of learners to the reopened schools, the liberated country also had to deal with the fragmentation of the secondary education system and many injustices caused in this area by the policies of Nazi Germany during the six years of war. However, new injustices also emerged, related to the gradual orientation of liberated Czechoslovakia towards the Soviet Union, which had largely liberated Czechoslovakia from Nazi oppression in 1945. An example of this could be the closure of non-German schools considered hostile to the Soviet Union by its representatives, or the persecution of their teachers.

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<sup>5</sup> Specifically, based on the Decree of the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment of 11 January 1938 on the regulations on the examinations of adulthood at grammar schools, real grammar schools, higher real grammar schools, reformed real grammar schools, and real schools (see *Ministry Decree*, 1938).

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## **Vidējās profesionālās izglītības atjaunošana Trešajā Čehoslovākijas Republikā pēc Otrā pasaules kara (1945–1948)**

**Atslēgas vārdi:** vidējā profesionālā izglītība, diploms, Čehoslovākijas Komunistiskā partija, Čehoslovākija, Padomju Savienība

## **Kopsavilkums**

Pētījumā uzmanība vērsta vidējās profesionālās izglītības sistēmas atjaunošanai pēc kara, nacistu režīma nodarīto postījumu likvidēšanai un vīzijām par profesionālās

izglītības turpmāko virzību Trešās Čehoslovākijas Republikas laikā (1945–1948). Darba pamatā ir šī perioda likumdošanas un periodisko izdevumu izpēte. Autors analizē vidējās profesionālās izglītības transformāciju trīs gadu laikā pēc Otrā pasaules kara beigām Čehoslovākijas sabiedrības attīstībai nozīmīgā vēstures posmā. Autors analizē, kā šajā periodā attīstījās vidējā profesionālā izglītība. Tiek skatīts, kādi sociālie apstākļi izraisīja un kādas bija sekas Čehoslovākijas ciešajai sekošanai Padomju Savienības paraugam profesionālās izglītības attīstībā.