

FEATURES OF SOLIDARITY IN CZECH CHRISTIAN SOCIAL UNIONS

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Studie přibližuje aktivity křesťanskosociálního hnutí v letech první republiky zaměřené k prosazování prvků solidarity.

Klíčová slova: Křesťanskosociální odbory; solidarita

The first Christian social union organizations in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia had already been created in 1902; the earliest one, "*Všeodborové sdružení křesťanského dělnictva pro Království české*" (the Union Christian Workers Association for the Czech Kingdom), was established on 12 January in Týniště nad Orlicí (near Hradec Králové). The impetus for the establishment of "*Všeodborové sdružení křesťanskosociálního dělnictva na Moravě a ve Slezsku*" (the Union Christian Social Workers Association in Moravia and Silesia) came from Zábřeh on 1 May 1902, and the Association itself was established on 21 July of the same year at Velehrad. Bohuslav Koukal was elected Mayor, Monsignor Jan Šrámek, General Secretary. About one year later (on 16 August 1903) they exchanged the functions at an extraordinary general meeting in Brno. After the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic a united catholic-oriented union organization based in Brno was formed in the Czech lands, named "*Říšská československá všeodborová komise křesťanskosociální*" (the Imperial Czechoslovak Union Christian Social Commission); it also included the Prague "*Všeodborové sdružení křesťanského dělnictva pro Čechy*" (the Union Christian Workers Association for Bohemia), which constituted its part. Outside the Czech trade union organizations, the German *Verband der christlichen Gewerkschaften in der Tschechoslowakei* existed in the Czech lands (based in Liberec, and then in Svitavy). To illustrate the position of the Czech Christian social organization among union organizations of the First Republic, we can, for example, provide the information from 1925, which was the time of the greatest expansion of this movement; then it occupied the notional fifth place among twelve organizations in the Czech lands (with the number of 113 869 members of the total of 1 664 388 trade unionists, i.e. 6,8%). It should, however, be emphasized that the core of the Czech Christian social trade union movement, headed by the Chairman (Mayor) J. Šrámek, was represented by the Moravian Regional Union organization, based also in Brno.¹

Since its establishment, the Christian social union movement (sometimes called also "black") had stood on the extreme right of trade unions in the Czech lands. It rested on the principles of the Christian world view and preached that the current economic and social order was in conflict with the Christian spirit. It sought to eliminate social inequality and create such a form of human community that would comply with justice; this was also connected with its different interpretation of the effectiveness of economic activities. The Christian social unions placed great emphasis on issues of morality and religion, and emphasized the principles of solidarity, the pursuit of cultivating people, the revolution of their inner thinking and the gradual

¹ ČAPKA, F.: *Odbory v českých zemích v letech 1918–1948*. Brno 2008, pp. 37–40; ČAPKA, F.: *K postavení křesťanskosociálních odborů na počátku 30. let 20. století v českých zemích*. In: *Teorie a praxe politického katolicismu 1870–2007*. Brno 2008, pp. 226–235.

transformation of society towards a more equitable distribution of the fruits of economic activity. They were considered as a kind of “agency of employers among workers” by the socialist unions (which were strongest, with social-democratic and national-socialist orientation) , and for this reason in the time of the post-war revolutionary wave the left-organized workers exerted pressure on the catholic-oriented workers to change over to their, socialist trade unions. In many places there were even conflicts between the catholic-oriented trade union organizations and radical social democratic groups. Similarly, pressure was placed on employers not to allow the establishment of catholic-oriented trade union organizations in their workplaces.

The vast majority of union organizations (despite their officially declared independence) were linked to some of the political parties of the First Republic. The same applied to the Christian social trade unions, where this “joining element” was the Czechoslovak People’s Party (CPP). The specific form of this interdependence was reflected in a number of facts, of which we should particularly mention the taking of the ideas from manifesto statements of the People’s Party and including them in the ideological principles of the Christian social trade unions or, in the personal sphere, frequent links of party functionaries to the trade union structures and vice versa (trade union bosses held positions in the Czech People’s Party’s candidates lists). The most striking example was the personality of Jan Šrámek – as the Chairman of the Czechoslovak People’s Party and at the same time the President of the Christian social trade union organization.²

The so-called “Christian solidarity” became the part of the official CPP manifesto; it could be characterized as a conservative neo-liberalistic socio-economic model based on the original so-called Christian socialism, in our conditions modified especially to cater for rural peasant classes. The principles of the Christian social doctrine (as it is commonly known) are based on the belief in the ‘personality being of man in the society’, which is sometimes called the principle of personality. Among the main principles of the Christian social doctrine there is the principle of solidarity, subsidiarity and public welfare. The solidarity itself represented a social political concept spreading from the turn of the 19th and 20th century. In direct contrast to the Marxist theory of the class struggle, it claimed the solidarity of its members to be the major factor in the life of each society. The postulate of solidarity was aimed not only against Marxism, but also against the individualism of the era of pre-monopolist capitalism. The solidarity spread mainly in the reformist form, developed by the right-oriented part of the social democracy, and in the form of Christian solidarity, which became the basis of the social programme of the Catholic Church. The theory of solidarity also served as a basis for fascist corporatism and to the concept of the “social partnership”.

The Christian-solidaristic concept, assumed by Christian social unions, enabled more optimum cooperation of the catholic social reformism with the state social policy. The Christian solidarity was based on the need of cooperation of all social strata on the basis of Christian doctrines. This also corresponded to the original ideas of the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII *Rerum novarum* (1891) and to the conclusions of the International Congress of the Christian Social Workers in Lucerne in April 1919.³ The essence of these ideas was peace and cooperation of all sections of the population, i.e. workers and businessmen, landowners, peasants and agricultural workers, in the interest of public welfare and peace. The Christian solidarity was supposed to be based on the new (Christian) economic system, the essence of which was the private ownership

² TRAPL, M.: *Politický katolicismus a Československá strana lidová v Československu v letech 1918–1938*. Praha 1990, pp. 12–15.

³ *Rerum novarum*. Encyklika papeže Lva XIII. o dělnické otázce z 15. 5. 1891. In: Sociální encykliky (1891–1991). Praha 1996.

of the means of production and economic autonomy of individual businessmen, who, however, were supposed to subordinate their interests to the society as a whole and to the “goal, which was social welfare”. It was the Christian solidarity which was supposed to become a mediator in all disputes between employers and employees; the first manifesto of the People’s Party in Bohemia of 1920 was compiled in this spirit, and bore the name “*Obnova lidské společnosti*” (*the Renewal of the Human Society*). The Moravian wing of the People’s Party issued its manifesto in May 1921.

The Christian solidarity was based on idealistic individualism, since it strove to reform the whole of human society and all its systems by the Christian moral correction of an individual. The Christian-solidarity manifesto in some cases agreed also with government actions against the abuse of private property “for exploitation or usury”, but it understood the exploitation in a completely different way: as “immoral behaviour” of individual businessmen. The Christian-solidarity idea placed emphasis on the distribution of estates in society and the need to organize the estates in the trade unions, chambers or interest groups – such as blue-collar groups, craftsmen (trade) groups, white-collar groups, or agricultural workers groups; in them, a new Christian and social order should have been implemented. Emphasis was placed on educational activities of the trade union membership “according to the global Christian view”; in this context it was planned to issue trade union literature, magazines of union, professional as well as social nature, and also to set up reading rooms and libraries. The manifesto intended to address the so-called ‘workers issue’ in a cooperative manner when the workers were supposed to become co-owners of cooperative enterprises. At the same time, they envisaged the setting up of cooperatives of different focuses: construction, manufacturing, purchasing, or sales. The Moravian modification of the manifesto was based on more modern principles, and emphasized the absolute necessity of private property accompanied by the acknowledgement of “certain limits” including the appropriateness of the collective reallocation “of natural resources and natural energy (i.e. parcelling of big farms and socialization of industrial enterprises)”; but this was not supposed to be the responsibility of the state at that time.

Other principles of the Christian solidarity from the manifesto of the People’s Party also got into the manifesto documents of the Christian social unions. They mainly included the rejection of inherent laws of social development or of the class nature of capitalism. They were based on an idealistic notion that exploitation could be eliminated by the moral reform of entrepreneurs. In a few places the Czech manifesto even idealized the Christian Middle Ages, especially its guild system. Despite all the platonic criticism of capitalism the Christian solidarity was, by its manifesto, clearly aimed against the Marxist socialism, against the class struggle. It clearly spoke in favour of the current social system with the elements of a social reform. In matters relating to the state system the Christian solidarity was supported by the existing parliamentary democratic system.

The second side of Christian solidarity consisted of the cooperation of different “estate” components in the party and trade unions. The Moravian manifesto of the People’s Party addressed this issue by adding to the brief municipal manifesto a special manifesto of individual interest constituents, which often diametrically opposed one another; it was an independent Christian social workers’ manifesto, in which the political demands of trade unions were addressed, and it particularly defined their certain independence within the People’s Party.⁴

In the social area the manifesto called for the introduction of social insurance, or for so-called socialization on a cooperative basis, the prohibition of night work for women and juveniles, etc.

⁴ Trade Unions Archive, Stanovy Československého odborového sdružení křesťanskosociálního, sign. 2150.

Trade unionists should have been provided free legal protection in disputes arising from wage labour as well as in other labour legal issues, such as unemployment, sickness, emergency situations, efforts to be granted unemployment benefits, etc. An important function of trade unions was bargaining with employers on wages, protective equipment for workers and employees and entering into collective agreements.

The ideas of Christian solidarity, incorporated into trade union programmes, were often vague and contradictory and enabled various modifications such as the primitive pro-industrial form, Christian social modernism which – by its infiltration into the labour environment – sought to achieve a better organized capitalist society, Christian democratism, seeking to build solid political positions within the democratic system of that time, and even clero-fascist estates corporatism.

In the field of education and culture, religious education in schools was promoted, as well as the freedom of the Church and its societies, equality of religions, protection of catholic families and indissolubility of marriage. Behind this whole issue was an attempt to avert the threat of separation of the Church and state.

The feeling for Christian solidarity and mutual self-help was particularly strongly manifested in the 1930s. It was the first time when it was connected with the years of the Great Depression, when the threatening unemployment rate was bound to provoke reactions both on part of the governmental bodies and trade unions. The government tried to resolve the situation by employing various anti-crisis measures, which included in particular the amendment of the Gent System introducing the extension of the payment of unemployment relief from 13 to 26 weeks, and along with it the extension of the payment of state contributions, bound, of course, to the payment of union contributions. In this difficult economic situation an internal split occurred in the Christian social trade unions at the end of the twenties, but it was quite quickly overcome. The newly formed common “*Říšská odborová rada křesťanských odborových organizací*” (*Imperial Union Council of Christian Trade Unions*) (in January 1930) together with the Czechoslovak People’s Party compiled its own programme of curative measures at the beginning of 1931, which – inter alia – expressed the requirements for increasing the state contribution to the unemployment relief, extending the scope of catering events, introducing a seven-hour working day, and also limiting any overtime. Another proposal sounded interesting: the reduction of the retirement age from the current 65 years to 60 years for men and 55 for women; this proposal was justified by the fact that “young workers should be enabled to start their employment earlier”.

Christian solidarity adopted a strongly political form for the second time when on the occasion of the celebrations of 1 May 1936 “*Říšská odborová rada*” (*the Imperial Union Council*) issued a call named “*Práci a mír. Obnovou křesťanské spravedlnosti k novému hospodářskému řádu*” (*Work and Peace. Achieving the New Economic Order by the Renewal of Christian Justice*). In this call the leadership of the Christian social unions clearly expressed their views in favour of the defence of democracy and state in the period of the growing fascist danger and deteriorating international situation. We chose only two major thoughts from this comprehensive document, consisting of a number of stimulating ideas: 1) The basic means of the national defence include a high moral will and resilience of the population which can be strengthened, by which it can be ensured that social conditions in the state will be regulated according to the principles of absolute social justice. 2) One who knows that the country gives him what he needs for his life and for the life of his family, i.e. work and bread, will fight for the country in the most convincing manner.⁵

⁵ Trade Unions Archive, Říšská odborová rada křesťanských organizací v ČSR, sign. 2169/167.

Conclusion: The principle of solidarity is based on a broader, overall understanding of man and human society, their purpose, destination and interconnection. This broader intellectual context was later formulated by Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in terris* (Peace on Earth, 1963); let us recall only some insights from it: "People are by nature social beings, and they must therefore live together and seek common good. Orderly coexistence therefore requires from them to respect mutually their rights and fulfil their obligations. It is also clear that everyone must contribute generously to creating a social environment where the rights of citizens are maintained in an increasingly better and conscientious manner, and their obligations are fulfilled in the same way."⁶ Also later Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (On Social Issues, 1988) tried to create a certain definition of solidarity: "Solidarity is not just a vague compassion or shallow emotion over evil affecting many people near or far. On the contrary, it is a solid and lasting commitment to seek the common good or the good for all and every one because we are all responsible for all."⁷

Shrnutí

Prvky solidarity u českých křesťanskosociálních odborů

Po vzniku ČSR se vytvořily v českých zemích dvě celostátní katolické odborové ústředny – česká (se sídlem v Brně coby Říšská čs. Všeodborová komise křesťanskosociální, jejíž součástí bylo i pražské Všeodborové sdružení křesťanského dělnictva pro Čechy) a německá – Verband der christlichen Gewerkschaften in der Tschechoslowakei (s poměrně slabší členskou základnou, se sídlem nejdříve v Liberci a poté ve Svitavách). Studie sleduje aktivity křesťanskosociálního hnutí v meziválečném období, směřující k prosazování myšlenek a idejí solidarity, provádí konfrontaci na základě rozboru politického programu křesťanskosociálního hnutí, tak jak reagovalo na vzniklé sociální otřesy v letech první republiky.

⁶ *Pacem in terris*. Encyklika Jana XXIII. o míru mezi všemi národy v pravdě, spravedlnosti, lásce a svobodě z 11. 4. 1963. In: Sociální encykliky (1891–1991). Praha 1996.

⁷ *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Encyklika Jana Pavla II. o starostí církve o sociální otázky z 30. 12. 1987. In: Sociální encykliky (1891–1991), chap. V, part. 38.