

# KAREL WEIGNER AND CZECH NATIONALISM

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***Abstract:** The aim of the paper is to describe the contribution of Sokol to the creation of the Czech national society. Especially the ideas of Karel Weigner, who was inspired by the leading First Republic humanists and democrats and has held the idea of the ancient kalokaghatia, will be put into the context of the form of national identity. This article is referred to the importance of national awareness and physical education efforts in the formation of a sovereign state.*

***Keywords:** Karel Weigner, nationalism, national identity, Sokol organization.*

## INTRODUCTION

Nationalism should be understood as a political doctrine, but also a state of mind and consciousness, that the state and the nation should form a unity. In this context, we have to distinguish the concepts of state, nation and culture. "A nation is a large group of people with a common culture, whose essential part is the common language, and also a group of people that understands a common culture as the reason for the existence of a common political unit." (GELLNER, E., p. 7). Terms that relate to explored issues, of course, is the whole series, the task of the paper, is not the analysis of individual concepts, but understanding the importance of national awareness through cultural and sport activities, especially in the period of the formation of our independent state. True patriotism should be manifested in particular by all public officials as a defense for all, especially the fundamental interests of not only selected, therefore, the privileged groups of citizens, but to the greatest possible number of people living in our country. Currently in the media and the public, there is increasing talking about the dangers of nationalism, which is waking up in the various countries of the world. Nationalism in Europe throughout the nineteenth and

twentieth century meant the threats to peace and culminating in the two world wars. However, even in the second half of the twentieth century, nationalism was appearing as a dangerous element that went against integrating efforts in Western Europe. If we are talking about nationalism in the second half of the twentieth century, it is necessary to point out that this is only in Western Europe, because Eastern Europe was under the influence of communist ideology, which is fundamentally international, and any nationalist tendencies have been very greatly punished. Inside the people, however, nationalism was kept, but it was reflected in most of the cases only with the fall of the socialist regime. Today's nationalism in contrast of the nineteenth century nationalism focuses primarily on the cultural fundamentalism and announces the fight for the purity of the nation and national culture. Clear manifestations of these tendencies are campaigns against immigration, minorities and Islam.

## NATIONALISM AND CULTURE

We know from history that not all of the pre-industrial states and culture became modern states. There is a great disparity between the number of states and the number

of the cultures that could be defined by languages. While there are 197 independent states in the world, about up to 8,000 cultures can be found in the world. Nationalism as a political ideology was a factor that led to the formation of nations and not vice versa, that the existence of nations would be the condition for the formation of the nationalism. There always existed populations in the world, which had a common culture (nation) but not the common state. On the territory of the same state, there were more nations and on the contrary, one of the nations resided on the territory of more than one state. At a time when the state already existed, there were many political units larger than the nations defined by culture – such as large multi-ethnic empire – and on the contrary, smaller, than the nations – for example, the city-states. Yet one of the most important prerequisites for the nationalist perception of the world is the existence of centralized state. Nationalism, therefore, defines the boundaries of the units, and at the same time assumes that the unit has the institutional leadership (the "state"). Important places in these power units should occupy the members of the national culture, which defines the unit. Nationalism mostly occurs in the environment, that perceives the states as a matter of course and necessity, which is not applicable to the whole of mankind. The absence of nationalism is apparent in many societies and many historical periods. Nationalists do not like to accept this idea, therefore they claim that in fact nationalism existed, but at that time it hibernated. In the central European nationalism concepts such as awakening and weaker etc. Followers of nationalism argue that nationality is pervasive, yet, despite his idiosyncratic character, from time to time it goes into a deep sleep. (GELLNER, E., p. 23) Gellner believes that nationalism is indeed high likely the fate of some of the people and its roots go back to the great depth and have for a given group of people considerable importance. Identification with the nation brings out the idea that the nation itself is a unique personality with specific

interests. Personalized nation responded as a persona, to promote its interests. We can understand the situation so that the increase of power of the nation, every one of its members should take it as the strengthening of personal power as well. (in: Nacionalismus, společnost a kultura ve střední Evropě 19. a 20. Století, s. 32). Speaking about the national movement, then in the vast majority of cases the national movement took interest in cultural and linguistic objectives first. In the struggle for language and cultural program leaders of the nation were formed and they gathered in the framework of its movement, a sort of monopoly of the intellectual influence without the immediate benefit of an asset or of power.

The culture was always a part of the equipment of the human kind. We are born into a certain culture presented by the current generations and handed down to the next generations. The results of this sharing are certain standards of conduct, general attitudes and also the expectations that our actions are unconsciously guided by. The culture of the people represents a shared way of verbal expression, facial expression, gestures and attitudes, way of dressing, preparing and eating meals; etc National identity is therefore based on the existence of a distinct culture that is different from the cultures of others, while the regional culture is usually part of one or several national cultures. Both of the identity in the cultural respect, do not exclude each other, but may instead be complementary. (HROCH, M., p. 28) Multicultural, a multi-ethnic community can live inside of the region. Due to the migration of the population certain subcultures are developing, which effect the transformation of national states in the multicultural states (e.g. Turkish subculture in Germany). "Culture can be defined as a system of norms, values and beliefs shared by a certain group." (PICHANIČ, M., p. 105) the Ability of the culture is conditioned genetically. People are able to master the language (NoamChomsky) and this statement can be extended to culture, in general, people are able to embrace the culture, which requires

genetic assumptions, which may be for all people identical (GELLNER, E., p. 16). The social life of human society cannot function without culture, but even without organizations, for mutual relations between the members of the group in the organization play a very important role in the sense of the fulfillment of the obligations, enforcing the rights, or expectation. Therefore the culture and the organization permeate all forms of social life. When we apply the concepts of culture and organization on the issue of nationalism, then we can perceive nationalism as a political principle, which of the cultural similarity makes fundamental social bond. Whether between human beings there are any principles of authority, their legitimacy depends on the fact that the members of the group belong to a shared culture, to the same nation. Cultural similarity is a precondition of legitimate membership. Extreme nationalists see nationalism in the fact that the national state can bring together all members of the nation.

## CZECH NATIONALISM

Medieval and early modern Bohemia accounted for a significant political entity with significant ties to the Czech culture and written language. In 17. century was religious wars, which have been concluded Vestfal peace and the Czech kingdom virtually disappeared from the political map of Europe. The Czech kingdom was part of the Habsburg monarchy. A new, geographically more extensive political unit lost the links to the Czech language, which has become largely a rural dialect. The industrial revolution, however, triggered a demographic growth and increased social mobility, so people who spoke Czech language and constituted the majority in Bohemia and Moravia gradually re-conquered the city and returned to the language of the original high role.

The most prominent figure in the history of Czech nationalism was of course, the first president T. G. Masaryk, who developed the theory, led the international negotiations and during that World War I he led the Czech

legions, which purpose was to promote and legitimize the requirement of national independence. Related to his name we are talking about feeling of affiliation to definite nationality also „constituted by language, economic and social conditions, poetry literature, science, philosophy, morality and religion.“ (MASARYK, T.G., 1990, p. 68) Masaryk's high moral nationalism consisted in the fact that only the general direction of history towards freedom and democracy validated the legitimacy of the Czech nationalism and independence as one of its tools.

Masaryk preferred the idea of austroslavismus, his vision was “podunajsky” state, which would grouped up the small nations of central Europe and protect them against the German extensibility. Up to 1st World War eruption he understood that monarchy can not be reformed and focused his activity on establishing independent state. Masaryk took the state as a category of culture, that is, something that has not existed, but was created by man. Masaryk was convinced that the political function of the state is one of the many features, which is related to the other activities of a cultur and that a state corresponds to a particular church and the views of the religious, at the same time, the views of the literary and the scientific, economic and commercial. (PECKA, E., p. 213).

An irreplaceable role in how to be national and to think nationally had of course, school. The pupils were there learning not only the language, history, and geography of the nation, but a part of national education is moral education. The nation for the children became a teaching aid to the expression of emotion, for pupils in the course of their school years together with beliefs of love to the amazingly beautiful country. Children are taught the homeland chanting in various songs. To create a sense of belonging, the possessive pronouns were used in the first person plural as our country, our homeland, thus pointing to the identity of the collective. (THIESSE, A.-M., p. 209).

## WEIGNER AND NATIONALISM

Czech Physical Education and sport according to their needs and mission, created within the bounds of the monarchy, Europe, own space. Palacký's idea of free development of all nations of the monarchy, namely, opened the perspective of a modern and balanced grouping of Europe, but the interests and aspirations of the Czechs and the Austrian Germans were so contradictory, that any reconciliation could have only a temporary character. Since the 60's., 19. Century in Prague, the social life of the Czechs and the Germans differentiated and initial contacts of sokols and turners gradually faded out. The Czech national movement was especially against the Germans and the sokol movement was not the exception, but the sokols and turners were constantly monitoring each other. The records of the invitations for Sokols to turnfests and turners to the sokol's meetings were found. However, the question remained, whether each other sent out the invitations to a meeting of decency or of rivalry, where they would show of in front of the other club. The result of the natural needs of the development of sport in Central Europe until independence of Czechoslovakia was the establishment of the creation of peculiar sports area, which was defined in the south by Vienna and Budapest and in the north by Berlin, where in the middle stood Prague, and not only geographically, but also sports wise. Thanks to the extremely strong member base in Prague was a benefit of Sokols to the creation of the Czech national companies, absolutely extraordinary. Equally unique was the mission of the Czech Olympic athletes who with dignity represented the Czech nation. (WAIC, M., 2013)

Sokol organization was dominating to the Czech social life from the end of the 19. century. For its actions it rightfully became, one of the mainstays of the national-emancipatory movement. The sokol should be a reflection of the national spirit, lay and democratic fraternity. It presented it even Sokols costume – red shirt referred to Garibaldi and his troops, the hat was

slavic, decorated with the French revolutionary cockade, then with liberal feather.(THIESSE, A.-M., p. 211) Miroslav Tyrš instilled sokol organization on membership mission and wanted it to be so perceived, even by the Czech public. This idea has been presented to the Czech public since the 60's. of 19.th Century through the print.Czech newspaper, which at one time was published by Gregř brothers, have provided a space to Sokols reports, thanks to which the Sokol received growing awareness of the Czech public. The representative of Sokol, among which we cannot just skip Charles Weigner combine devotion to the national interests and the creation of national identity. Most of the representatives and active members of the associations had major existential problems and have had plenty of time for the federal action. This fellowship activity since the 60's has become part of everyday life, but its overall look through economic development that brings groundbreaking inventions and technical innovations, had until World War I rapidly changed.. The progressive rise of the member base affects the abundant use of first the telegraph and from the 70's of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the phone. Economic development had brought not only changes of the social structure of the society, when as the mainstay of cultural life has become the middle class, but also lifestyle changes and conditions.

Karel Weigner was the founder of the Czechoslovak sports science and the creator of the system of state care for the physical education and sport and the system of undergraduate and postgraduate education system of physical education teachers. He also served in the leadership of the Czechoslovak Sokol, and he is also a nationally-emancipating movement. In connection with Karel Weignerem and his physical education efforts, we cannot fail to mention the personality of Miroslav Tyrš and the idea of the patriotic mission of a Sokol, whose ideas and suggestions Weigner, in his arguments, and works kept on.

An important and integral part of the activities of the Sokol was the publishing of journals. In 1871 Sokol organization emerged

with the new magazine of the Sokol. The first issue of Sokol was opened by the article with the significant title "Our task, the direction and the goal." Already characteristic of a solicitation mailing essays "Brothers and companions" give evidence about the fact that he held the idea of the equality of all people. Karel Weigner later understood this as one of the pillars of democratic beliefs and national education. Thoughts, which Tyrš fixed in the essays tells us also the following question, which was: "What do we want? Where are we heading? What is the truth of our role in national life?" (TYRŠ, M., p. 7) Tyrš stuck to the target to change the nation from the base of the re-educated to cultivate his physical prowess. He understood man as a being composed of the equivalent components: the physical, spiritual and moral, therefore, has always placed emphasis on the need to strength the physical and the spiritual, on the need for constant activity, perseverance, discipline, love for the homeland and the freedom (WEIGNER, K., p. 13). Tyrš put in the education of man special emphasis on the physical side, because the meaning of the national health, according to him depended on physical fitness and the "healthiness" of the individual. Miroslav Tyrš emphasized that the specified tasks, we should not deal with as individuals, but we can help each other, to help ourselves and try not only to your benefit, but for the benefit of the whole society.

The influential article "Our task, the direction and the goal" according to the Weignera is called Sokol the gospel as the fundamental pillars of the national education discipline, freedom, equality, morality, and fraternity (WEIGNER, K., 1937, p. 13-14). In 1931 Karel Weigner wrote an essay "Our task direction and goal after 75 years", in which in some points we can find the similarity of the above-mentioned article by Miroslav Tyrš. Weigner, in his essays, also referred to a number of well-known personalities, such as Karel Čapek and T. G. Masaryk's idea of democracy as a life view based on confidence

in the value of people on which he kept working.

The thoughts of Dr. Tyrš were according to Charles Weignera valid in 30's and 20's of the century. Tyrš in Sokol saw the means in the struggle for national self-determination and a separate national state, Weigner in it then saw the defense of its permanent retention. The guarantee for the healthy development of the nation should be strong and in perfect individual, savvy and a healthy family. Sense of the Sokol organization Weigner sees in the fact that he themselves willingly, voluntarily and wisely incorporates a duty of care on all-round development of the whole person (WEIGNER, K., 1937, p. 19).

After the World War I with its unprecedented consequences will once again be strengthened the importance of physical education as an essential component of the entire education and culture of man at all. Karel Weigner formulated the basic requirements for physical education. Physical education should be versatile, universal, and obligatory [WEIGNER, 1937, p. 20]. In the following of Miroslav Tyrš Weigner emphasized the crucial importance of proper physical education as an important component of a successful social development of the society, because the future of the society depends on the education of the youth. The care of the child in the broadest sense is the most important concern of every nation, (WEIGNER, K., 1912, p. 86)

## CONSLUSION

The World War I which ended in defeat for the empire raised again these questions and opened up the national and the sports movement the new field of tasks. The Czech Sokol movement before the first world war can be described as part of an integrative nationalism, which combined the civilian goals the objectives and darwinian ideas with the formation of a disciplined, healthy bodies. Sokol movement has fulfilled its function after the end of the World War I in "nation-building" in the newly formed the Czechoslovak national

state and launched a tradition that has survived the fascist and Stalin regimes. Sokol movement was restored in the Czech Republic in 1990, but in a modest scale. Karel Weigner in some episodes worked on the meaning and the mission of the Sokol as an organization, which, although already partly met its goal in the form of the formation of an independent national state, but in front of which lies another, perhaps even more difficult task, which is to keep this separate state still. Karel Weigner was inspired leading First Republican humanists and democrats and has held the idea of the ancient kalokaghatia (the consistency of the soul and the body) and the ideal of the Greek citizenship, i.e. a citizen of the broadly educated, physically efficient, self-conscious, which is to his state and nation linked by a strong bond of conscious identity.

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