

SUMMARIES

THE GERMAN ROMANTIC-LIBERAL VIEW OF HISTORY AND THE „SLAVIC LEGEND“

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In 1962, William E. Griffith called attention to the fact, that a solution of the German-Czech problem has been hindered by a myth-making process which could be observed on both sides. As elsewhere, it is necessary here too to clear away historical ideologies which do not stand up under historical verification. Among the ideologies which have poisoned the relations of the neighbours are, on the one hand, the romantic-liberal German view of history, in its special form of Pan-Germanism, and, on the other, the romantic Slavic legend and Pan-Slavism.

Ever since the middle of the last century, Germany's eastern neighbours have employed a historical argumentation and drawn their supporting evidence from the arsenal of the Slavic legend. In order to counteract these ideologies effectively, the Germans also had to make use of historical arguments. The resulting viewpoints on both sides could conceive of the encounter of the two peoples only in terms of a struggle, not in those of a peaceful resolution.

The national-romantic view of history originated from Herder's concept of „Volk“. Out of the latter developed both Germanism and Slavism. On the German side the national people's struggle for the linguistic border was frequently fought with a self-satisfied feeling of cultural superiority, and one spoke of a useless wasting of „cultural fertilizer“. On the Czech side, the Germans were, from Palacký on, regarded as mere intruders, who could lay claim solely to the right to be treated as guests. This, in turn, led to the union of the Germans in the Sudeten lands, who insisted on a right to homeland that had been gained as a result of „historic achievements“.

The theory advanced by B. Bretholz, according to which Germanic settlement in this area had predated the Slavic, was confronted by one, elaborated by Polish scholars, which attempted to show that the original population had been Slavic. When German students of Eastern Europe described the whole process of colonization as a resettlement, the Slavs sought to strengthen their position partly by means of the theory that the original Slav population had been exterminated, and partly by means of one of Germanization. In the research on towns, the two theories of evolution and colonization were sharply opposed.

Under the aspect of the Volkstum struggle, a theory of „Volk“ was developed by the German side, and the history of peoples placed next to the history of states. Already at an early date took place the merger of the Czech concept of „Volk“ with that of the state, following the French model, and a kind of nationalism was thereby created. German National Socialism, finally, was little concerned about national consciousness, placing rather its master-race ideology in the foreground.

As for the question of the sources of the above-mentioned components of national consciousness, it is established that its discoverers and first representatives, in the case of both the Germans and the Slavs, were members of the intelligentsia. While the traditions of the Polish and Hungarian intelligentsia were predominantly aristocratic, those of the Czechs were bourgeois. The aristocracy imparted to the peoples it led a feeling of superiority („Herrenvolk“) and a Kulturvolk idea. These ideas were also adopted by the Czechs, led by Palacký. The Poles and Hungarians have a great tradition of national uprisings against foreign domination, and the Czechs have that of the victorious Hussite revolution, whose results were undone only by the Battle of the White Mountain. In Germany, on the other hand, the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon, the Restoration and the Revolution of 1848 created a great national tradition in bourgeois liberalism.

The content of Germanism and Slavism, Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism in the 19th and 20th centuries did not remain stationary content: on the contrary, it developed and changed, thereby occasioning numerous misunderstandings on the part of the other side. While one's own ideology appeared just, useful and necessary, the other side's was termed untruthful, egoistic and harmful. However, if Pan-Germanism and Pan-Slavism are critically compared, it can be established that Pan-Slavism endeavoured to unite all the peoples of the Slavic linguistic family, for political, economic and cultural-intellectual reasons. The concept of Pan-Germanism, however, originated from a confusion between Teutons and Germans. Its ideology aspired not to uniting all peoples of Germanic origine but to uniting the Germans politically. This ideology was, however, in part combined with a feeling of superiority and cultural arrogance vis-à-vis the Slavic and Latin peoples. The central idea of the romantic-liberal view of history was the „Teutonic“, in which was seen the unalloyed, form of German character in all its primitive strength. The research on the working of the „Volksgeist“ and the Germanic inheritance thereby gained special significance and led to the rejection of the „un-Germanic“, into which category the „Latin and Slavic character“ was placed. This Germanic idea, which indirectly confirmed the national movements of the Slavs and the Latins, gained a devastating impact in the Third Reich, as an ideology and a racial faith.

The „Slavic legend“ is based essentially on Herder's historical interpretation of the Slavs. According to it, the industrious, peaceloving Slavs, who had lived from agriculture and trade, were exterminated or enslaved by the Germans, and their land distributed among bishops and noblemen, but the time

would come for these once happy peoples to shake off their slavish chains. The Slavic legend thus retained, next to its characterization of the Slavs, a prophecy, which appeared to find its confirmation in the events of 1918. Whereas previously, under the influence of Rousseau, the virginal purity of the virtuous Germany was praised, there developed from the same ideological roots, only with a shift in the periods of the process, Slavism. Whereas the German historical interpretation developed its ideal prototype out of the Germania of Tacitus, that of the Slavs had the Byzantine writer Prokopos at its disposal. The Czech missionary sense was fostered in a decisive manner by Hussitism. The far-reaching consequences of the Slavic legend for the Czech historical consciousness are shown especially by the fact that manuscript forgeries of Hanka (the Königinhofer and Grünberger manuscript) were decisive for Palacký's interpretation of early Slavic legal history and were considered up to the most recent period to be a national relic. These forgeries represented also a basic foundation for the theory developed by Palacký of the „eternal meaning of Czech history“ which he saw in the steady confrontation between Czechs and Germans. To this was added the religious tradition of Hussitism. Palacký saw in Hussitism the heroic age of his people. In it the two national principles of primeval Slavic democracy and German feudalism came into conflict with each other. Palacký's historical view shaped and dominated the view of history and national awareness of the Czechs. Even Masaryk, who recognized the manuscript forgeries for what they were, supported Palacký's basic thesis of the conflict between the Czechs and the Germans. Although already the Czech historian Pekař shook off the Slavic legend, the view of history of a large part of the bourgeois Czech emigration of today is still not free of it. Only in the last few years have there been the first signs, both on the German and the Czech side, of a de-politization of the historical judgement.