

“JÁNOŠÍČENIE” – REBELLING (ON THE CAREER OF ONE CONCEPT)*

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“Jánošíčenie”¹ is a term used in Slovak literature dealing with history. It means a form of social protest as well as a pattern of behaviour conditioned by a certain configuration of social forces. The author investigates its different uses by the historian Ľubomír Lipták and the essayist Vladimír Mináč. Lipták endeavours to explain the social situation to which it is applied, while Mináč tries to mythologize it.

The past as an object of the historian's interest is not a reality “lost” forever. It is the task of the historian not to allow it to get lost. A historian therefore writes, as Nietzsche expressed it classically in his work on the “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life”, depending on one's personal inclination and aim pursued in three ways: antiquarian, monumental, or critical. He “revives” the past, to affect the present. It could also be said as follows: the historian gets to know the past by weaving a web of stories of events, showing, as Ranke put it: “*wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*”, but also by choosing a problem he can trace over a longer period of time, trying to give an explanation why it is as it is. Let us say that there is history that is narrative and explanatory. The past becomes accessible, on the one hand, in the form of reconstructed, re-narrated events, giving accounts of the facts, and, on the other hand, in the form of the analysis of the surviving patterns of social orientation and behaviour that are difficult to change; that is, the modes of solving some life situations obtained and strengthened by training and through habits. The inertia and often enslaving force of habits is what is known as *longue durée* in French historiography represented by the Annales school. It is a tricky, resistant force operating in individuals and in social groups, maybe also within nations, constituting mentalities. Mentalities as the types of social practices are often so deeply rooted

* This paper was supported by Grant agency: VEGA No. 2-1105/21.

¹ Jánošík (1688–1713) is a Slovak Robin Hood, rebelling and robbing the rich to give to the poor.

that their force is not weakened even under the rule of controversial political regimes. They change "colours" but they hardly change their essence. The core of explanatory historiography consists in identifying the behavioural patterns and the habitual solution which can be called "verified", that is the realities of long duration and slow change and then finding the particular and appropriate names to label them. Talking about the events, we rescue the past, decoding it by discovering the mechanisms of long duration with hidden functioning. The historian faces the past in two meanings: as a sequence of events, vanishing in the inexorable flow of time, that is as "the past fading away", this being only one, so to say, phenomenal side of its being. There is, however, also the "persevering past", that is the past that "is present" in the structures of long duration, in mentalities, in the psychosocial equipment of individuals and groups as well as in the organizational forms of society. Georges Duby said that mental phenomena have the same determining force as the material ones, but they do not follow the same rhythm of development: it happens that their change is slower.

Some historians ascribe specific characteristics to Slovak history and these are often mythologized. The point is not that there are no such specific characteristics, but that they are not "uniquely Slovak". Their occurrence results from the situations that can be historically and sociologically exactly described with the configuration of forces operating in them. They can be described as a riddle, which can be answered correctly. Ľubomír Lipták also set off in search of the answer, addressing, in 1968, Slovak history, or better to say, the history of the Slovak nation to answer the question: "Opportunists or Jánošíks?"

The question is formulated in a suggestive way and the words symbolizing the Slovak context also engage attention. The terms derived from the name of the captain of robbers Juro Jánošík commonly belong to the vocabulary of the authors engaged in Slovak history. Ľubomír Lipták is no exception. Jánošík "the brave young man of freedom" represents the principle of the protest against the contemporary conditions and the effort to solve the unendurable situation by a "single" overthrow, or as Ľubomír Lipták puts it, by radical negation. It is a revolt incited by emotions, a great deed without much deliberation and without concrete ideas of future development. Such a deed destroys, without knowing what, if anything, will be constructed in its place. It is a social, apolitical romanticism: of course, not romanticism drawing on the ideals, but romanticism based on the momentary force of indignation.

Lipták's question is aimed at identifying the identity of a collective subject and the ways of its action. It is disputable whether such a subject exists at all, but there is no doubt that a certain type of historically verified and therefore applied way of solving both common and exceptional life situations prevails in every society. Lipták replied to the question posed. However, it would be wrong to expect an unambiguous reply, or to be less strict, waiting for such a one-sided answer would be rather in vain because the answer is: both opportunists and Jánošíks. But what does

the answer point out? The author's reluctance, hesitation? Neither of these. Both opportunism and Jánošíkism finally appear as apolitical attitudes. Moreover, the latter is not a constructive response to the excess of adaptability as a consequence of the undeveloped civic self-confidence or its loss. Both attitudes belong to the equipment of "subjected – non-civic" existence, reflecting premodern conditions. Opportunism – adaptability and Jánošíkism – radical rebelliousness denote patterns of both individual and group, social behaviour and action, that have common roots. Lipták described these patterns and tried to elucidate why they cling to life so obstinately. He explains the perseverance of the patterns by reasons deeper than the mere phenomenon of Slovakia "lagging behind" the development of the neighbouring countries. They are the consequences of "Slovakia's lack of sovereignty", "foreign rule", "national oppression", "bread dependence", "existential dependence of Slovak society on the state power", as circumstances generating situationally effective, but undesirable life strategies of excessive adaptability and radical rebelliousness. We could say that these are accompanying circumstances of uncrystallized political identity. The issue of opportunism and negativistic radicalism, for example rebellion, is not an isolated phenomenon: it refers to the issue of the organization and functioning of the basic structures of society, indicating that common social practices are not included into the institutional component of society, indicating their conflict with the desirable norms of social life. Consequently, the point at issue is the disproportion between the prevailing mentality of the population and the existing institutions.

By raising the question of opportunism and negativism, Lipták articulates the problem that is central to modern Slovak history. The problem was once named by Daniel Rapant as the problem of coping with the "secret complexes" of countries, within which Slovakia was "emerging" in an effort to establish itself, primarily to institutionalize itself as an entity through its national elites.

Institutionalization was the essential problem of modern Slovak history. What I see here as crucial, is Lipták's argument expressed in the discussion taking place towards the end of the 1960s: namely, that it was the absence of a "clearly formulated and institutionalized national interest" that was the source of historical, social and political misery.² This fact of absent institutionalization, not being used to its "own" stable organizational forms and to the observation of the norms of public life, the fact of non-acquiring the attitudes of civility is, in my opinion, the starting point for throwing light on the phenomenon of the surviving cunning adaptability and radical resentment, the tendency to instantaneous solutions, that is rebellion in social life.

The missing institutional anchoring of Slovakia as a political society caused the predominance of the factors of external influence and pressure, which, in combina-

² Lipták, Ľ.: *Oportunisti, jánošíci?* (1968). In: *Slovenská otázka v 20. storočí*. Compiled by Chmel, R.: Bratislava: 1997, p. 432.

tion with non-down-to-earth, fairy-tale, fabled, political thought, led to a sad reality of mass political alienation and persevering civic unconsciousness and immaturity, to life characterized by distrust of institutions and absence of the sense of responsibility for public affairs.

Opportunism, as stated by Lipták, adaptability, humility, bent necks, and their opposite – radical rebelliousness, resistance, radical negation can be made into pairs that make an impression of mutually exclusive attitudes, have, as has already been indicated, common roots. They refer to the status of weak civic awareness, the absence of the sense of common matters: an evidently surviving malady of Slovak life, already mentioned by Štúr. These attitudes, their incidence and density are not singular and rare, but the other way round – mass, even epidemiological in a way; this confirms the perseverance of pre-political and apolitical standpoints. Hannah Arendt alerted to the fact that, after experiences with communism, which destroyed the space of the civic public, it can be difficult to accept that politics is one of the signs of a humanely, nonviolently organized human world. According to her, the world is a space that is constituted by the fact that individuals cease to act as beings trying to ensure their survival, but instead begin to act as individuals occupied with the sense of creating the forms and contents of a common life. Civic humanism becomes important here. A common life, a sense of public matters is constituted by discussion, exchange of views, verbal duel, as a basis for creating the public – the space for communication between individuals. I want to refer to Immanuel Kant who, in his work 'What is Enlightenment' urged people to use their understanding in public, to think in public, because only such a form of using understanding means emancipation, leaving the status of immaturity, "being underage", that is the state where one is not able to speak for oneself, being either silent or obeying blindly or under pressure. We could say that the civic mind is being shaped by applying individual minds in public. The pre-political state of society is the state in which this has not happened yet, "the dark times" are, according to Arendt, the state when the sphere of the public is narrowing, fading finally away. The adaptation, opportunism as the attitudes of lack of individual consciousness, "non-citizenship" hinder the shaping of the political space and individual and collective rebellion (*jánošičenie*) – "outbursts" of the individual and collective resistance, simply, of "human", not political, discontent with the existing state of affairs – it is just a despair that grows into an antisocial rage. The indifference to the political space as the sphere of clearly defined institutionality, this "retreat from the world" is not a political performance; "the forest" is the place where only communities of robbers are being shaped. The political performance is the interest in a just and legal organization of the world – the political space. Thus, the rebellion does not constitute freedom of individuals – the bearers of the rights and duties in the world of laws. It destroys but does not build.

Because of having been exposed to the influences from the outside, Slovak history shows some rhythm. The changing situation outside and the weakening re-

gimes stimulate fantasy and inspire thought. These are interesting periods from the perspective of history. The second half of the 1960s can be ranked among such periods. It was the period when also Vladimír Mináč began to ask questions about Slovak history. He named them blowing the embers in his essays and the term “Jánošíčenie” – rebelling also occur there. It might therefore be interesting to look at the difference between Lipták’s spirit of explanation and Mináč’s spirit of ‘meditative blowing’, which is a sort of spiritual rebellion because it rebels against the tradition of the “weak” interpretation of the history of the nation. To put it in a nutshell, Lipták explains and rationalizes the rebellion, Mináč not only sings about it, he also cultivates it.

In his essay published in 1968 under the title *Where are our castles?*, Mináč writes: “The rebelling did not end in the eighteenth century, surviving inside us as a proclivity to an individual rebellion, as an inclination to change fate by slapping faces, as a belief that we can change the world order into our own order by a single blow or by stabbing with a knife.”³ It is an attitude of ‘misera contribuens plebs’, the existential, politically unrepresented, modus of which has no history. Mináč repeats Štúr and Hurban’s arguments of the Slovaks without history and is continuing the myth of simple, unrepresented duration, which is apolitical being par excellence. However, Mináč was not a historian, although there are some flashes of acumen bitter in their irony about the character of national history, or being without history. He also uses pairs of concepts recalling adaptability and rebelliousness, but for different purpose. Although arguing that the Štúr-Hurban tradition was not gaining knowledge but creating, Mináč tied into the narration about the nation, but, at the same time, he changed its modality and tonality. He transforms the myth of passive duration without history into the myth of the plebeian force of being, notwithstanding the times, neighbours, or the self. His opposite to adaptability is submissiveness as non-insisting on demonstrating its separate existence. However, he adds an adjective of refractoriness to submissiveness, converting thus the passive lot of duration in to mission: we are, in order to be. Duration itself is then a function of resistance: “The rock cracks, the oak breaks, only we stand still firmly, we stand and will stand, we are and we shall be, we exist and we shall exist.”⁴

As an antipode to “rebellion”, he introduced submissiveness as an equivalent of adaptability mentioned by Lipták. He changes the concept of apparent weakness into the concept of passive force and supplements it with the adjective of refractoriness. Mináč’s submissiveness as a social behavioural pattern has here the form of defiant submissiveness, giving it an attribute of the strong being. Defiant submissiveness – plebeianism emerges as the principle of a Slovak will to power.

³ Mináč, V.: *Kde sú naše hrady?* (1968). In: *Výbrané spory*. Bratislava: 1997, p. 16.

⁴ Mináč, V.: *Výbrané spory*, see note 2, p. 11.

Mináč rejects the idea of the Slovak dove-like character and declares: we are not a dovish nation, we are a plebeian nation”.⁵ The dovishness is the principle of bearing with the life of drudgery, the principle of compliance and acquiescence, plebeianism being the symbol of the clumsy force, defiance, “the lust for violence”, when it is worse than bad. A plebeian stands negative to those who rule, who is up, who is “master”: “it’s unjust to have a master, and still more unjust is to be master”! It remains to find out whether such an attitude “against masters” is a manifestation of real folk democraticism or just an expression of material discontentment and envy. To simplify matters, the point is whether the standpoint “against” means the cancellation or merely a reoccupation of the position of “master” in the system of values.

Mináč is a bard glorifying a special Slovak will to power, which, although it does not want to be romantic, finally is. The concept of long duration is applied in the national identity itself; its history might be, paradoxically, characterized as being without history. Such a “history” might be the history without “superstructure”, it is ontology of naked duration, but with regard to “durability”, still the history of strong being. The result of Mináč’s pondering over the nation is the defeat of the national-self-pitying pathos of the dominant Štúr-Hurban national tradition. He had overcome it by replacing the idea of a “dove-like” nation by the idea of the plebeian nation. He converted the idea of the duration without history, characteristic of Štúr and Hurban, into the idea of the plebeian, that is strong being; we could also call him the author of the plebeian national existentialism. The principle of plebeianness represents “position”: it is not the status of being left “to mercy”, it is not the status of helplessness. It is the position of resistance:

“We have also been disgusted with endless complaints. We did not want any more to get up from the last bench and to state what we are short of, with a feeling of everlasting, fatal, unwashable guilt – like a child, whose wetting its bed is pathological. We want to stop everlasting lamentations and crying, with our history waving and shaming – the bulky collection of elegies for every occasion.”⁶

These words are evidence of the advent of self-complacent “plebeiannes” as well as a document of Mináč’s “spiritual rebellion”, that is of the re-interpretation of the Štúr-Hurban national tradition, to which he tied in, so as to re-evaluate it finally. He put an end to the cult of grievances, crying, requests, and romanticizing. He changed the way of thought: he does not build on emotional desires, he does not dream of the future, he builds on the resistance and impertinence, he takes an attitude of pride, but reactive pride based on resentment. His words and his sentences often sound big, his irony being harsh, his intellect sometimes loudish.

⁵ Mináč, V.: *Kde sú naše hrady?*, see note 2, p. 17.

⁶ Mináč, V.: *Slovensko a jeho život ekonomický* (1967). In: *Vybrané spory*, see note 2, p. 21.

Mináč preserves the central principle of the Štúr-Hurban doctrine of being without history. The same starting point generates, however, different standpoints: he concludes from the ideology of duration without history that the duration itself discloses the force, which is the reason for being proud. Of course, Mináč is not so short-sighted not to be aware of the fact that there is no reason for being satisfied: duration and persistence shows a deficit of consummation. Existence for the sake of existence is, in his way of understanding, the cornerstone of the nationalism of strong, or, to be more precise, of big defence, but not a reason for satisfaction. He therefore thinks that “the meaning of the nation lies not only in, or, chiefly in, its existence itself and in motion; it consists in coexistence with other nations, with which it will create a work of civilization. And we just begin to realize ourselves in this sense.”⁷ But it was not said how.

Lipták’s and Mináč’s discourse was an occasion to make us familiar with the concept of “Jánošíčenie” – rebellion. Both of them, Lipták rather implicitly, Mináč rather explicitly, work with the concept of “rebellion” as with the form of social process. But Mináč also applied strategies of resistance and protest, against the tradition of grievances and philosophy of desire which results in the re-interpretation of the Štúr-Hurban ideology of being without history, to be more precise, of historical being without history, because the “status of being stripped of history” is stated on the basis of historical reflection and recollections of the former loss. The state of being without history has, therefore, “historical” foundations, because the authors of the idea felt the need to historically legitimiz the nation, in the shaping of which they had participated; and being without history was, paradoxically, regarded as a stimulus to derive a historical imperative, to become a subject of history. Mináč addressed Štúr’s group with the remark that they had “cultivated historical feelings, not a history”, that they had not explored, but had looked for, but did not find. However, this is also valid for him, although with some objections. The objections concern his remark that “it is the peasant’s way of life that is reflected in the national character”.⁸ National character is a disputable category, but the statement confirms the recognition of the importance of the problematic form of the life of peasants and its ideology accompanying the transformation of the peasant population into a modern nation. Ernest Gellner wrote about Ruritaniens of Central Europe and the American historian Eugen Weber about the modernization of rural France under the title *Peasants into Frenchmen*. Our point is the very complicated issue of *peasants into Slovaks*. Peasants – the core of the nation have not automatically thought the same as the nationally conscious intelligentsia. The world of a peasant and the world of intelligentsia were two different worlds. Mináč stood between them. He became bard of the rural world and life also in terms of the fact that

⁷ Mináč, V.: *Tu žije národ* (1965). In: *Výbrané spory*, see note 2, p. 98.

⁸ Mináč, V.: *Tu žije národ*. In: *Výbrané spory*, see note 2, p. 98.

the means of expression, cognitive impulses and attitude motivations used by him in literary expression are characteristic of this world of thought and action, which is shattered by modernization, in doubt and in danger. And that was not merely the case of Central Europe, but, in the truest sense of the word, it was the global situation.

Let us look at the career of the pair of concepts opportunism – radicalism, submissiveness – rebellion in Slovak literature. The indignation over the state of life conditions, institution- and system-indifferent, is humanly motivated, so to say, “non-political”, that appears in the Slovak literature as “*Jánošíčenie*” – rebelling. The two pairs of concepts are not the absolute opposites of the behavioural patterns of their bearers, they have common roots in the situations with the dominating non-placement in the formal institutional frame works of the organization of social life. Simply saying, both “opportunists” and “*Jánošíks*” “play off-side”: they are in play, but they do not take part in making the rules of the game. They are an object not a subject. Dissatisfaction with such a fate can lead to outbursts of anger; but such an explosion is just a temporary relief that does not solve anything for long. It is not an act of generating and acquiring a new game with generally valid and binding rules. Occasional or even systematic deception of the “referee” and avoidance of the rules does not mean victory and profit – it is the emergency strategy of non-emancipation. The way to solve this state of non-emancipation, which is the state of political alienation, is not a conception of the ideology of force, but, in fact, the ideology of big words. The conclusion that “*Jánošíčenie*” – rebelling is a negative consequence of unaccepted or uncreated institutionalization means decoding of one mystery of social life; a discovery and glorification of the principle of life can, on the contrary, be regarded as the “encoding” and mythologizing of social reality.

The past traced by history has its surface in the form of events and its depth in, at first sight, undistinguishable structures, which influence “invisibly” and for long the behaviour and actions of individuals and of social groups. There is no privileged mode of studying the past. But, if there is no uninterrupted tradition of development, and, indeed, there is no such tradition of “historical growth” in the countries of Central Europe, then the cultivation of historiography is necessary to hold up a mirror to the societies that are in the stream of their transformation. To this effect, Lipták’s essays from the last decades are such an attempt.