

SECONDARY SCHOOL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE YEARS 1945 - 1989

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Abstract

The paper outlines development of secondary schools in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War until the fall of socialism in 1989. It shows the efforts of governing garniture to adjut secondary schools to the ideological aims of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and their impact on the school system and the quality of education.

Key words: *secondary school system, socialism, grammar school, school transformation*

Introduction

Our European society as well as the world society has come through extensive and profound changes in the recent centuries which are related mainly to the scientific development and they influence almost all the parts of the social life. It is necessary to keep focusing the education quality improvement so that all the pieces of knowledge could be used. In this process the school has the key role as an institution which quarantees the certain level of the population education.

The period of socialism had an interesting tone of the changes which were not really related to the effort to improve the quality of schools as rather to the efforts to adjust education system to the ideology.

Secondary school system in the years 1945 - 1948

The Košice's Government Program became the key resource for the development of the school system of Czechoslovakia, which laid out the main task of education democratization. In July 1945 the demonstration congress of teachers took place in Prague which claimed main requirements of teachers in the liberated country. Setting university education for teachers and foundation of the Pedagogical Research Institution were both announced by Presidential Decrees. However, the Unified School Decree was not passed because it was not agreed unanimously in the National Front government. That is why Ministry began preparing a new law about the unified school but it was not passed either. This law was not passed until 1948.

There were rather important changes in 1948. The law dated from April 21 1948 about the basic change of unified education is a historical landmark in the history of Czechoslovak school system because it did not establish the unified school system. The same education base and education access were guaranteed which was related to nationalization of schools¹. The unified pedagogical and educational system was established by the law Nb. 95/1948 Coll. , as well as:

- Four grades primary schools
- Four grades secondary schools (= the second grade of compulsory education)
- Four grades grammar schools²

Czechoslovak school system transformation was proceeded fast and it was not given enough time to be finished and put into practice. The transformation and development difficulties were considered as organic insufficiencies and faults and therefore a new “key” solution was made, which was really a step back, as it was proved later on³.

The situation of education can be documented by one of J.Hofmanová's memories (In Bílková, Carda, Čeliš, 1999, pg. 154)⁴: „In September 1952 there were celebrations of the 650th anniversary of the town of Jičín taking place. The most expected moment was unveiling J.V.Stalin's statue. ... This was the way how to lead and educate school children. We learnt a fantastic Societ “biologist” T.D.Lysenko's theory of nonhereditarily gained qualities. This theory believed in the possibility to transform, for example, wheat into rye, and pine into spruce and so on. The scientific genetics was laughed at as a supposed „against marxism bourgeois pseudoscience “leading to the sabotage of Societ economy. ... If some of our classmates showed his interes in for example only jazz or dared to enter the classroom wearing fashionable narrow trousers fitted with coloured striped socks and with some gel in his hair, he was described as a bourgeois student supporting the declining West by a school management member.”

A new school law Nb. 31/1953 Coll. was passed in 1953, which caused important changes in the organization of Czechoslovak school system and intensified the efforts to unify the school system. The compulsory school attendance was shortening from nine to eight years and comprehensive secondary school was shortening from thirteen to eleven years. Eleven-year schools were followed by eight-year schools, whereas the ninth up to eleventh grade provided preparation for university studies.Eleven-year school provided basic education in the first eight

¹ A. Holendová, M. Mauzová, K Dějinám Českého Školství a Pedagogiky v letech 1945 – 1975, Praha 1982, p. 9; Somr, M. a kol. Dějiny školství a pedagogiky. Praha 1987.

² V. Blecha, V. Vávrová, Vývoj Středního Všeobecně Vzdělávacího Školství V letech 1918 – 1972, Praha 1973.

³ Kol. Dějiny učitelstva ČSR 1848 – 1968. Osnovy. Praha 1968, pp-64-65.

⁴ E. Bílková, V. Carda, J. Čeliš (red.), Jičínské Gymnázium 1624 – 1999. Almanach k 375. Výročí Založení. Jičín : Lepařovo Gymnázium, 1999, p.154.

grades as eight-year secondary school and higher general education in the last three grades (see the Supplement number 11). As Gobyová and Jelínková (1980) say: “Joining all the secondary schools streams have a great importance in overcoming existing inequality in the level of education provided to the youth preparing for labour professions as well as the youth of other secondary schools” (pg. 23). I. Matějka also describes his view of this period in his paper *Memory of The Fifties* (In Bílková, Carda Čeliš, 1999, pg. 149)⁵: “The extreme of absurd school reorganizations in the fifties was the complete cancellation of grammar schools and introducing new eleven-year secondary schools.”

But the situation kept changing. Resolution made in 1955 by The Central Headquarters of Czechoslovak Communist Party criticized a serious lack of curriculum and textbooks. The XIth Czechoslovak Communist Party Congress in 1958 was also dealing with the school problematics. The necessity of prolonging compulsory school attendance was emphasized here. Three grades of twelve-year school were to follow nine-year school, comprehensive schools and establishments (Holendová, Mauzová, 1982, pg. 13-14)⁶. As Blecha and Vávrová (1973) also mention, one of the main goals was to join school education and practice.

Stanislav Mařan also describes the given situation. According to him one of the mistakes of our secondary schools after 1945 was that secondary and comprehensive education unity was not appreciated. Neither grammar school dated from 1949 nor eleven-year school dated from 1953 solved the general and technical education rate. General and polytechnic education is proceeded at secondary school by the system of educational subjects which contain all the basics created by mankind. If we compare secondary schools curricula, we will come to this order: only philosophy out of philosophical subjects was introduced at Grammar school from 1949 to 1953, which included psychology, logic and dialectical materialism together with philosophy history. These subjects disappeared gradually at eleven-year schools. Mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology were taught as part of sciences. Drawing and descriptive geometry were joined to mathematics. Astronomy was separated from physics as an individual subject in 1953. Among languages there was always mother tongue, Russian and another language. Latin was converted from a compulsory into an optional subject in 1949. Social sciences still contained history, geography, mainly economic geography. There were no subjects in technical area. Arts were represented only by music studies in the first and second grade and art studies in the third and fourth grade from 1949 to 1953. Physical education was a part of all curricula and in 1957 the subject of civil defence was joined to PE (1960, pg. 278-288).

A new school law was passed based on what has been mentioned above. According to this law Nb. 186/1960 Coll. the whole school and education system was changed. The type of nine-year elementary school was introduced, followed by general secondary school with three grades (see the Supplement nb. 12). But it was

⁵ Ibid, p.149.

⁶ Holendová, Mauzová, Obcit, pp. 13-14.

proved in the practice that three years were not sufficient to complete secondary school education and what is more, there was a lot of pressure mainly from teachers to return to the traditional title – Grammar school⁷.

It is interesting to read how the situation was commented in the newspapers. *Učitelské noviny* writes in the article General comprehensive secondary school (1965) that: General comprehensive secondary school has been a very sensitive part of our school system since its foundation in 1961. Our public observes General comprehensive secondary school (GCSS) changes from the last years carefully because leading representatives of our future national economics and culture are prepared for their university studies at these schools. The other development of our socialistic society and its transformation to communist society depends on the quality of their education.

That is why The Central Headquarters of Czechoslovak Communist Party gave many tasks to the Ministry of Education and Culture in its resolution from October 23 in 1964; these tasks were to set better conditions for effective school work. The tasks concerning curriculum and its differentiation were especially important for the further GCSS development. These key tasks were necessary to be solved on the base of careful and long term scientific research related to the conception of elementary school of nine grades education regarding university studies needs. Since some specific situations, for example, limited possibilities to set suitable conditions for productive work in the factories and the need to increase the level of university studies preparation immediately, which needed an immediate solution, the Ministry of Education and Culture had to solve the given tasks in two periods. In the first period beginning on September 1 in 1965 the general comprehensive secondary school studies changes set up by curriculum differentiation and introduction such syllabus which prepared the best conditions for their graduates to study at universities. Together with these changes it was also guaranteed that research pedagogical workplaces would prepare their proposals of new conception and studies at GCSS by the time of three years regarding the tasks which were set up by the The Central Headquarters of Czechoslovak Communist Party resolution at the first period schools, the second period schools as well as universities.

The Ministry of Education and Culture solved GCSS changes according to the rules which had been discussed with pedagogical and school staff at meetings and which had been agreed by the ideological Central Headquarters of Czechoslovak Communist Party committees. Following these rules the GCSS studies were differentiated into two streams – sciences and humanities. This basic differentiation was set up mainly regarding university needs. It was possible to improve the level of university studies preparation during three years studies only by adding more mathematics and sciences lessons in the sciences period and adding more humanities and foreign languages in the humanities syllabus. However, the

⁷ V. Jůva, Z. Veselá, *Dějiny Výchovy, Školy a Pedagogiky*, Praha, 1988.

time pressure did not allow differing two main subjects in spite of introducing two main streams (compare Nováková, 1971)⁸.

The secondary differentiation of optional subjects enabled to meet the specific interests and needs of individual students regarding their future studies or practical career after passing their secondary school leaving exam. This differentiation completed with optional subjects was established according to the work results of the Pedagogical Research Institution in Prague which show that optional subjects were not to be generally important or cultural related to the future career of only a few students (music lessons). The optional subjects were defined as the subjects not related to further studying and career. Concerning the number of optional subjects, the mentioned research showed that the higher number of optional subjects was useless because the wide range of choice could not be put into practice in most of schools from organization reasons. These subjects were the ones which broaden, complete or profound the syllabus of compulsory subjects (foreign language conversation, sport games). Regarding the mentioned research the optional and not compulsory subjects do not overlap each other in the syllabi.

Some subjects, which had not been taught at GCSS so far, were introduced into the syllabi according to university studies needs. These are mainly civics, philosophy, psychology, ethics and logics. These were taught in two lessons a week in the second and third grade. There were also the subjects of mineralogy, petrography, geology and paleontology which were introduced into the third grade syllabus. They became a part of biology lessons. In syllabi of both branches there were the subjects excluding technical drawing (this was only an optional subject for scientific branch). Latin, which had been not compulsory subject at GCSS curriculum so far, became compulsory for humanity branch taught in two lessons a week in all three grades. For scientific branch, Latin was an optional subject taught in two lessons a week in the second and third grade. The subject of descriptive geometry was taught as a compulsory subject for scientific branch and optional for humanity branch in the same extension.

The numbers of scientific branch students should be double humanity branch regarding university needs in the whole country. This can be proved by these figures – the rate in the school year 1965/66 was 50:50. To compare the school year 1979/80 the rate was 10:90 in favour of scientific branch⁹.

Political liberalization caused that on September 1 in 1965 the Ministry of Education and Culture resolution about GCSS curriculum differentiation could come into force including extended language education (English, French, German, Russian) (Jazyky na SVVŠ, 1966). According to Holendová and Mazová (1982) this period represented diversion from the unified school. Adopting the law Nb.168/1968 Coll. was positive as it re-established four-grade grammar school instead of three-

⁸ Hana Nováková, Polytechnické Vzdělání Jako Kvalitativně Nová Složka Středního Vzdělávání, Pedagogika, 1971, Vol. XXI, Part 1.

⁹ J. Gobyová, V. Jelínková, 35 Let Školství v Čssr, Praha, 1980, p. 30.

grade general comprehensive secondary school. The task preparing the new education conception dated from 1970 caused that the GCSS organization was changed as well. In 1968 a new law concerning four-year grammar school was passed (see the Supplement Nb.13), so all the GCSS schools became grammar schools with wide range of differentiated curriculum in the school year 1969/1970¹⁰.

It turned up that other changes would be necessary. According to Koutun (1984, pg.37) a high level of society structure changes inevitably asks for reconsidering the total preparation system into the separated periods of social practice. This requirement is answered by the file The Further Czechoslovak Education System Development, in which a new period of our education system is described as following: „Nine-year elementary school has represented the completed education grade so far. This comes from the fact that secondary schools did not follow elementary schools in the full extent.

As Koutun and his team mention (1984), branching grammar schools into sciences and humanities is not in accordance with university studies differentiation and that is the reason why this is not convenient and practical. For example, in the school year 1971/72 80% applicants decided for a humanities branch. Although headmasters regulated the rate 2:1 in favour of a sciences branch, the rate was not still satisfying. These changes, concerning mainly grammar schools education, were justified that there would university graduates required for the future, especially for scientific-technical subjects. As a modern solution turned out that the branches would be united under one mathematics-scientific base, and students' individual interests would be satisfy by optional subjects which would mean to support polytechnical education (pg. 52-53).

A lot of experts, especially those from the practice, were not satisfied with this situation. According to Jarošová and Nováková (1971) „The current grammar school conception does not guarantee a systematic youth education to their professional orientation. There are tendencies towards humanities resulting in a high number of humanities branches (almost 50%). 20% GCSS graduates study humanity subjects at universities. Grammar school should not only prepare students for university studies but it is necessary to prepare students for the practice, only 52% grammar school graduates are accepted at universities. One way how to improve this situation is, to add practical subjects into the curriculum. “Another article in the newspaper Učitelské noviny called Development, current situation and other tasks of Czechoslovak school system (1973) is written in a similar way.

According to the law about elementary and secondary schools system arrangements dated from June 21 in 1978 introduction of ten-year compulsory school attendance in eight elementary school grades and the first two secondary school grades was the key change in our education system. The law equals with

¹⁰ Jůva, Veselá, Obcit, p. 183; V. Blecha, V. Vávrová, Vývoj středního všeobecně vzdělávacího školství v letech 1918 – 1972, Praha, 1973.

regard to society and contents and brings three secondary schools streams close together – grammar schools, comprehensive schools and educational establishments – which will provide the complete secondary school education finished by school leaving exam in their first two grades. These changes will be introduced gradually, educational establishments, which are a new school type preparing labour youth, will become the main secondary school stream¹¹.

The last important change was passing the law 29/1984 Coll. on March 22 in 1984 about the elementary and secondary schools system (compare see the Supplement Nb.14). The compulsory ten-year school attendance was legalized and all three secondary school streams - grammar schools, comprehensive schools and educational establishments were equal¹². Another important change was adding subjects as technical preparation, information technology and computers which reflected the society requirements on a new profile of a graduate¹³. This was to be done by adding practical lessons, laboratory practice and technical practice.

Now, let us have a look at the secondary school situation from the view of statistics. According to the available figures¹⁴ in 1950 the number of secondary school graduates was 5,1%, in 1961 it was 9,0%, in 1970 it was 13,6% and in 1980 it was 17,1%. We can read from these figures that 2,1% people reached secondary school education (it means grammar schools), in 1961 it was 2,9%, in 1970 it was 3,4% and in 1980 it was 17,1%. It is obvious from these figures that the number of secondary school graduates increased quite rapidly. From the secondary schools point of view the increase was not so dramatic, nevertheless, the increase of inhabitants who had graduated these schools was quite steady.

Conclusion

We can say that the period in the years 1945 – 1989, especially after 1948, was the period of a great stagnation and absurd changes in Czechoslovak school system, which had been considered as one of the most developed systems before the Second World War in Europe. Within many meaningless changes based mainly on communist ideology, the highly-developed school system, which had been established during the previous decades, was destroyed. As Skutil mentions (2004), the only thing which survived socialist changes, were graduation rituals which have continued at schools till today.

¹¹ Holendová, Mauzová, Obcit, p.20; J. Koutun, a kol. Gymnázium – Jeho Profil, Miesto a Úlohy v Školskom Systéme, Bratislava 1984, p. 20; M. Bulíř, Zprávy a Rozbory. Gymnázia a Školy Gymnaziálního Typu (Retrospektiva Let 1788 – 1990), Praha 1992.

¹² M. Somr, a kol. Dějiny Školství a Pedagogiky, Praha 1987, p. 314.

¹³ Analýza Československé Výchovně Vzdělávací Soustavy, Praha 1988, p. 59.

¹⁴ Srb Vladimír, Obyvatelstvo Československa v Letech 1918 – 1978, Demografie, 1978, roč. 20; L. Fialová, et al. Dějiny obyvatelstva českých zemí, Praha 1998.

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