

# The Communist Organization of Children and its Discourse in Czechoslovakia between Two Wars

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## Abstract

The submitted study focuses on the issue of the discourse and practice of the children's and young people's movement, which was organizationally connected to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC). Through descriptions of the organizational base of this movement and an analysis of its discursive and social practices it strives to search for answers to the research questions on the share of the children's organizations in the creation of the radically left-wing activist milieu around the CPC and the importance of indoctrination in order for it to work. Based on an analysis of the discourse of the children's party press, flyers, etc., just like the breakdown of the everyday experience of the youngest activists, it uncovers the significance of institutions, such as the family, school, and not least the party in the real world of politically active children and their parents. The article is divided into three parts. The first part describes an organization that was able to capture only a fraction of the young population compared to its liberal nationalist (Sokol) or Christian (Orel) competitors, despite its considerable efforts. The second part presents an analysis of the discourse. It is organized around three themes: firstly, images of an antagonistic class society; secondly, categories that form class consciousness; thirdly, the depiction of competing images of reality as forms of false consciousness. The third part focuses on the practice of the children's movement, in which discursive symbolic images of discourse were realized with varying degrees of success.

**Key words :** Czechoslovakia; Working Class; Communist Party; Social Conflict; Ideology; Children.

## Résumé

Cette étude se concentre sur les discours et les pratiques du mouvement pour les enfants et les jeunes organisé par le parti communiste tchécoslovaque. À travers une

description de l'activité organisationnelle de ce mouvement et une analyse de ses pratiques discursives et sociales, elle cherche à répondre aux questions autour de la place de l'idéologie dans la société et autour la part des organisations de jeunesse dans la constitution d'un milieu activiste d'extrême gauche. À partir d'une analyse des discours des tracts et de la presse du parti pour enfants, ainsi qu'une analyse des ruptures dans l'expérience quotidienne que représente pour ces jeunes activistes l'engagement du côté du parti communiste, elle interroge le rôle d'institutions comme la famille, l'école et le parti dans le monde concret de ces enfants et parents actifs en politique. L'article comprend trois parties. La première montre que l'organisation, malgré ses efforts considérables, n'a été capable d'attirer qu'une fraction des jeunes et qu'elle est restée loin derrière ses rivaux libéraux (Sokol) et chrétiens (Orel). La seconde présente une analyse des discours qui est organisée autour de trois thèmes : premièrement la représentation d'une société de classes antagonistes, deuxièmement les catégories qui doivent former la conscience de classe et troisièmement la création d'images au sujet de la fausse conscience. La troisième partie se concentre sur la pratique de l'encadrement des enfants, où le recours aux images rencontre divers succès.

**Mots clés :** Tchécoslovaquie ; classe ouvrière ; parti communiste ; conflit social ; idéologie.

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Interwar Czechoslovak society was characterized by internal division. The most visible was division by nationality, where a state that understood itself as national had a very slim Czech majority (around 51%), and only thanks to the legal fiction of the existence of the “Czechoslovak” nation constituted almost two thirds of the population together with the Slovaks (65.5%). The rest were Germans (23.4%), Hungarians (5.5%), Ruthenians/Ukrainians (3.4%), and a small percentage of Poles, Jews, and others.<sup>1</sup> Political parties were formed along national lines, as well as city/countryside, employers/employees, center/periphery, and religion/secularism. The political division that had begun under the Habsburg Monarchy continued to a great extent in democratic Czechoslovakia. Robert Luft has written about the existence of five political camps: national-liberal, agrarian, Catholic, socially democratic, and national-social.<sup>2</sup>

The fragmentation of the party system was also due to the fact that individual nationalities in the republic created their own relatively closed party systems, and so there were many political parties that were identical ideologically, and differed only by nationality. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) was founded in May 1921,<sup>3</sup> and, in October of the same year, it united with its German counterpart, which had existed since March 1921. Unification was inevitable because the Comintern demanded the existence of a sole Communist party within the state. Therefore the creation of the CPC had two consequences for the party system: firstly, the workers’ (social democratic) camp fell apart and a sixth, Communist camp was added to the original five; secondly, the CPC was the only significant party that focused on all of the nations living in the republic, i.e. it was an international party unlike the others.<sup>4</sup>

The significant segmentation of the society in interwar Czechoslovakia made social pillars out of the individual political camps. This is why some historians (Peter Heumos, Zdeněk Kárník) use the term “pillarization” of civil society in their analytical texts.<sup>5</sup> Segmentation and pillarization arise in situations when the social stratification of the society along socioeconomic status, class, and functional differentiation is crossed with grouping according to confessional, national, or political persuasion,

<sup>1</sup> René Petráš, Helena Petrův, Harald Christian Scheu (eds.), *Menšiny a právo v České republice*, Prague, Auditorium, 2009, p. 63. [Minorities and Law in the Czech Republic]

<sup>2</sup> Robert Luft, *Parlamentarische Führungsgruppen und politische Strukturen in der tschechischen Gesellschaft. Tschechische Abgeordnete und Parteien des österreichischen Reichsrates 1907–1914*, München, Oldenbourg, 2012. For political cleavage in Slovakia, see, Linda Osyková, *Volebné kampaně politických stran na Slovensku počas 1. ČSR*, Bratislava, Veda, 2012. [Voting Campaigns of Political Parties in Slovakia During Czechoslovakia]

<sup>3</sup> CPC embraced Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, and Ruthenian communists into the one organizational unit.

<sup>4</sup> General appraisal on history of the communist movement in Czechoslovakia between two wars, see e.g. Zdeněk Suda, *Zealots and Rebels: A History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*, Stanford, Hoover Institution Press, 1980; P. E. Zinner, *Communist Strategy and Tactics in Czechoslovakia 1918–1948*, New York-London, Praeger, 1963; Jacques Rupnik, *Histoire du Parti communiste tchécoslovaque*, Paris, Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1981; Karl Bosl (ed.), *Die Erste Tschechoslowakische Republik als multinationaler Parteienstaat*, München–Wien, Oldenbourg, 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Heumos, “Die Arbeiterschaft in der ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik”, in: *Bohemia 29*, 1988, S. 50–72; Peter Heumos, “Strukturální prvky první Československé republiky”, *Soudobé dějiny*, 1995, pp. 157–168 [The Structural Elements of the First Czechoslovak Republic]; Zdeněk Kárník, *České země v éře I. republiky*, díl I, Prague 2001, s. 172 [The Czech Lands in the Era of the I. Republic]; Jakub Rákosník, “Štěpení občanské společnosti v meziválečném Československu”, in: Jindřich Dejmek (a kol.), *Zrod nové Evropy: Versailles, St.-Germain, Trianon a dotváření poválečného mírového systému*, Prague, Historický ústav, 2011, s. 425–434 [The Birth of New Europe: Versailles, St. Germain, Trianon and the Shaping of the Post-War Peace System].

which are rigid groups of pillars that inhibit social integration.<sup>6</sup> The existence of these pillars was reflected in the organizationally wide-ranging complexes or concerns around the main political parties – cooperatives, printing enterprises, or various cultural associations. Pillarization resulted from the political parties' effort to win over the relevant social segment that it was oriented towards, and integrate individuals into the various organizational structures. This network, connected to the party organizations, would ideally create conditions in which it would be possible for individuals to identify with the movement literally “from cradle to grave”.

Therefore the political parties at the time also devoted their energies to entice young people and children into their organizations, and the CPC was no exception. The ideologization of education, i.e. school and family upbringing, at the time of the creation of the CPC organizational complex already had a strong tradition founded along national lines, when in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century the so-called “struggle for school” was ignited between Czechs and Germans. It lasted until the interwar period, escalating significantly at the end of the 1930s.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the employee/employer division, it took over the activity of social democracy, which absorbed the Union of Workers' Sports Clubs (Svaz dělnických tělovýchovných jednot) into its structures in 1903. After the workers' camp fell apart, it was followed by the strictly Communist educational organizational structure.

In the spirit of pillarization, all parties and movements across the political spectrum tried to win over young people with various degrees of success. Communists tried to obtain the most detailed information about their political rivals. For its internal purposes, the CPC estimated that the numbers of their competitors' powers in 1925 were: “German socialist youth 8,000 members; Czechoslovakia soc. dem. youth 3,000 members; Czechoslovakia social[ist] youth 8,000 members; Vrbenský Youth (Mládež Vrbenského) (a group that split from the Czechoslovak socialists – *authors' note*) 800 members, Hungarian socialist youth 800 members = a total of 21,000 organized persons.” The author of the calculations concluded thus: “We must not overestimate urban youth groups; we find that they have 300,000 members.”<sup>8</sup> Although the potential of the program of CPC class-based education to appeal to children and young people primarily from poor families cannot be denied, its project was met with strong competition.

<sup>6</sup> See Peter Heumos, “Strukturální prvky první Československé republiky”, *Soudobé dějiny*, 1995, pp. 159–160 [Structural Elements of the First Czechoslovak Republic – Politico-Social System, Intermediary Organizations and the Problem of Stability]. In the literature, there are signs that mean that it the substance of this phenomenon is quasi-religious. Jiří Koubek notes: „A classic manifestation of kind of ideological-existential synthesis in large parties were the interwar political camps (Lager) in Central Europe, and the pillars in the Benelux countries – i.e. party related and ideologically closed media networks, associations, cooperatives, sports, youth, women's organizations, hospitals, etc. The fact that I am speaking about an existential element should deliberately refer to the quasi-religious position of this phenomenon. We know that people are literally born into a relevant political subculture and our lifelong membership is more or less assumed.“ Jiří Koubek, *Konsociální demokracie v současné perspektivě – Švýcarsko jako případová studie*, *Člověk – časopis pro humanitní a společenské vědy*, ISSN 1801-8785. <http://clovek.ff.cuni.cz>. [Consocial Democracy in a Contemporary Perspective – Switzerland as a Case Study]. From the recent literature see, Philip Howe, Thomas Lorman, Daniel Miller, “The Creation of the Conditions for Consociational Democracy and its Development in Interwar Czechoslovakia”, *Bohemia* 56, 2016, pp. 362–380.

<sup>7</sup> On the struggle for the child between the Czech and German national camps in the interwar era, see Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> *Vůdce*, leden 1924. [The Leader Journal]

In the 1920s, the CPC was, in the Comintern's relative numbers (ratio of members to the population), the strongest political party and only Russian Bolsheviks (VKSb) and Germans (KPD) had more in absolute numbers (overall number of members).<sup>9</sup> There was a similar trend in the organizational success of the children's movement. Although we are forced to work with significantly fragmentary and often contradictory statistics, we rely on the global comparison that V. Zorin developed for the purpose of the Communist International Youth [KIM], who found that in 1926 the CPC and KPD, each with 40 thousand child members (likely the sum of the members of all children's satellite organizations that sympathized with the KIM – *authors' note*), was by far the most successful in Europe. Other national Communist movements were never able to attract 10 thousand children.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, in comparison to the rival youth organizations in Czechoslovakia organized by liberal nationalists (Sokol), Catholics (Orel), or social democrats (DTJ), the communist ones were relatively weaker.

The scattering of the CPC membership base to a certain extent prevented the creation of a closed Communist milieu in most of the regions in the republic. Stanislav Holubec aptly described this situation in his pioneering study on the everyday nature of the members of the Communist movement in Prague between the wars in the following words: "While the members of the CPC in other regions were scattered and few and must have been in contact with non-Communists most of the time, in Prague this was not necessary. Its CPC members can have friends who are only party members, and some may have even found employment within the party or in the organizations and enterprises connected to it."<sup>11</sup> This was similar for the children involved in the Communist organizations.

In this study, we will focus primarily on three topics and so we have divided the text into three parts. First, we consider it important to describe the tools that the Communist party had at its disposal to attract children from elementary schools into their organizations. Second, we will analyze the discourse of the printed material intended for children. We understand discourse as the collective semantic system that is used to interpret and understand reality. This system exists for a purpose: in this case, in order to structure young readers of children's journals' images of the world in accordance with the political intentions of the CPC. The key structural element of the discourse are the "collective symbols" that depict reality in a certain way, which gradually becomes well known to all participants in a specific discursive grasp of reality.<sup>12</sup> In order to organize the images, we relied upon traditional Marxist class analysis. It is organized around three themes: firstly, images of an antagonistic class society (class struggle); secondly, categories that form class consciousness; thirdly, the depiction of competing images of reality as forms of false consciousness. Third, we will look at the practice and the children's activities that the party decided to organize, form, or at least influence.

<sup>9</sup> *Dějiny KSČ*, Prague 1961, s. 171. [History of CPC]

<sup>10</sup> Quoted by, František Budský, *K historii dětského pokrokového hnutí*, Prague, Mladá fronta, 1973, p. 136; see also Vilém Mucha, *K dějinám dělnického tělovýchovného hnutí*, Prague, Orbis, 1953, p. 75 [Towards a History of the Children's Progressive Movement] [Towards the History of the Workers' Sports Movement]

<sup>11</sup> Stanislav Holubec, *Lidé periferie: Sociální postavení a každodennost pražského dělnictva v meziválečné době*, Plzeň, Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, 2009, s. 208. [People on the Periphery: Social Status and the Everyday Life of the Prague Working Class Between the Wars]

<sup>12</sup> Comp. Deborah Tannen *et alii.*, *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2001, pp. 380–381; Siegfried Jäger, *Kritische Diskursanalyse. Eine Einführung*, Duisburg, DISS-Studien, 2001.



**Figure 1: Leaflet « For the international week of children », around 1930, courtesy of Českomoravská konfederace odborových svazů.**

Our knowledge is based on archival sources collected in the National Archive – Prague (archival funds of the dissolved Archive of Marxism-Leninism), concerned with the history of CPC. A wide array of internal documents, such as instructions, party circulars, and directives were helpful in obtaining a better understanding of the movement's organizational structure. The discourse analysis is based on the texts from newspapers, special journals dealing with youth, and party leaflets distributed to the members or supporters. Pushing the analysis to the individual level of the reader's particular experience is uneasy because of the lack of relevant sources. The only spaces where the individual feedback could be grasped are the special newspaper sections devoted to the reader's letters sent to editorial boards. These published letters adopted and promoted official propaganda of the CPC. We can also uncover exceptionally rare information (very unsystematically) in the memories published later by the members, who were active in the communist youth movement (e.g. Fritz Beer, Anna Horníková, or Marie Švermová – quoted below). Our arguments were also inspired by the existing historical literature concerned with national as well as international history of the youth communist movement between the wars.<sup>13</sup> From

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Susan Whitney, *Mobilizing Youth: Communists and Catholics in Interwar France*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2009; Reuven Kahane, *The Origins of Postmodern Youth: Informal Youth Movements in Comparative Perspective*, Berlin and New York, Walter De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 63–70

the insights gained by this study, we would like to fill in the gaps of our current historical knowledge of the following issue: on how the party governed, affected, and influenced children's everyday lives.

## Attracting Children into Communist Organizations

Although we will be focusing on the youngest children (up to age 15) in this study, their organization was part of the general organizational structures of the Communist oriented youth and sports movement. The most important leisure time activity organization for the youngest children was the Spartak Labor Scouts (Spartakovi skauti práce). The organization was founded in 1924 when two groups that were active in the previous years merged together: Labor scouts (Skauti práce), founded in 1920, and Spartak scouts (Spartakovi skauti), started under the Federation of Workers' Sports Clubs. The largely Communist Federation of Workers' Sports Clubs (FDTJ) was founded in December 1921 as the result of the rift in the social democratic leaning Union of Workers' Sports Clubs (Svaz dělnických tělovýchovných jednot). The Communists left and created their own youth sports center, which gradually became part of the international Communist organization Red Sport International. Despite this fact, its leadership, which consisted of young, active Communists, promulgated the Federation as apolitical so that it could more easily function as a recruitment center for young people.<sup>14</sup> According to the recollections of participants, cases when Communists had a minority stake, a one fifth share for instance, in a certain club were not rare.<sup>15</sup> Its successor organization, entitled the Federation of Proletarian Sports (Federace proletářské tělovýchovy), was founded in December 1926. It unified this Federation, the Spartak Labor Scouts, the Workers' Tourist Club (Klub dělnických turistů), the Red Stars (Rudé hvězdy, local sports clubs – authors' note), and the Union of Workers' Cyclists (Svaz dělnických cyklistů). Together with other Communist oriented organizations, it was shut down in the fall of 1938, when the conservative and increasingly authoritarian government of the Second Republic banned the CPC and many of its associated organizations.

When the organization was founded, the Spartak Labor Scouts were rather small, but with their four thousand members, one could not say that they were marginal. Membership doubled by the year 1928. In the 1930s, the scouts' activities were eclipsed by the Young Pioneers (Mladí Průkopníci) organization, but the scouts as an independent organizational platform within the Federation of Proletarian Sports survived until 1938. The Organization of Young Pioneers (sometimes called Red Pioneers) was founded in Czechoslovakia in 1922 on the orders of the II. Congress of the Communist International Youth (KIM) from 1921. The first organizational

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(concerned with Komsomol); James Riordan, *Soviet Youth Culture*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2009; Gabor Rittersporn, "Between Revolution and Daily Routine: Youth and Violence in the Soviet Union in the Interwar Period", In: Corinna Kuhr-Korolev *et alii*, *Sowjetjugend 1917–1941: Generation zwischen Revolution und Resignation*, Essen, Klartext Verlag, 2001, pp. 63–82; Robert Wheeler, "Organized Sport and Organized Labor: The Workers' Sports Movement", *Journal of Contemporary History* 13, 1978, pp. 191–210.

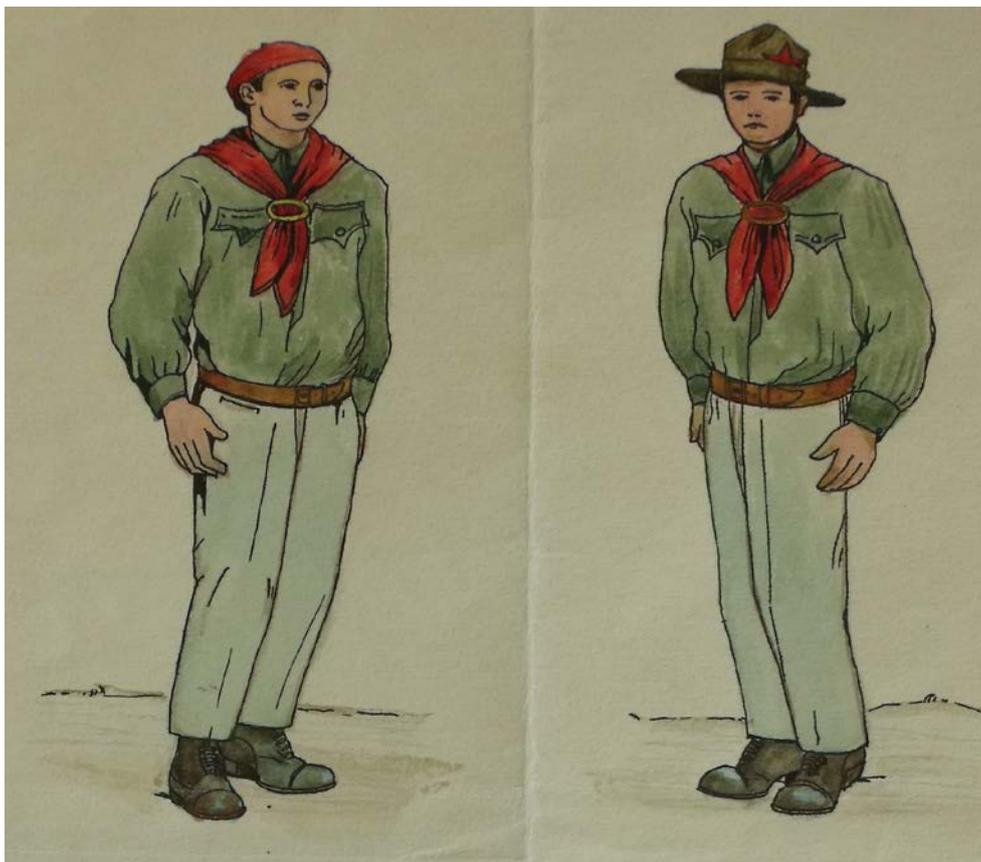
<sup>14</sup> Jaroslav Marek (ed.), *Sjezdy proletářské tělovýchovy: Sborník dokumentů ze sjezdů FDTJ-Federace dělnických tělocvičných jednot a FPT-Federace proletářské výchovy*, Prague, Olympia, 1977. [Proletarian Sports Congresses: Collection of Documents from the Congresses of the FDTJ-Federation of Proletarian Education]

<sup>15</sup> *Zápisy KSČ očima pamětníků*, Prague, Svoboda, 1971, s. 110. [CPC Fights Through the Eyes of Eyewitnesses]

attempts of this platform were quite chaotic. As Anna Horníková, one of the later head representatives of the Prague organization of Young Pioneers, remembered:

“I went on foot to Karlín to Královská street number 13, where the secretariat of our party was located [...] I was looking for the Komsomol. They sent me somewhere to the back building [...] I told them that I would also like to lead a children’s unit, like the one I saw at the party. I would take them on walks all over the periphery of Prague, where we would rouse all of the poor children with our songs [...] but the comrades said that they hadn’t received their orders on how to found such units yet [she then met Antonín Zápotocký, one of the most important party leaders of that time – *authors’ note*]. He told me to go home and look up and down our street because there were tons of children there...”<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the organization mitigated the fallout from the effort to be financially accessible for poor families from working class peripheries and the desperate lack of resources. For a membership fee of 20 halers, a child could participate in various activities from sports to art classes. Everything was taught according to working class values. These activities, however, due to the constant lack of finances, took place in club houses created, for example, in the nook of a pub on the periphery of town, shared space in various open FDTJ playgrounds, in the ruins of old houses, etc.



**Fig. 2 :** Drawing « Red Scout in a uniform », late 1920s, courtesy of Českomoravská konfederace odborových svazů.

<sup>16</sup> Anna Horníková, *Rudí průkopníci*, Prague, Mladá Fronta, 1972, pp. 10–11 [Red Pioneers].

According to the sources available, these organizational structures proliferated successfully. While the statistics on the number of Young Pioneer members from 1929 reveal 1,943 registered members, in 1934 their party estimated it to be 16 thousand.<sup>17</sup> Due to the overall arrangement of political plans for the party to influence young people, the organization of Young Pioneers was given this significant task. It was closely tied to the CPC because it functioned as a Komsomol section.

The unification of the children's and young people's movement was so strong that it basically created a single structure divided into two levels. The leaders of the individual children's Red Pioneers groups organized in towns and neighborhoods were recruited from the ranks of the Komsomol, which similarly served not only as a bureaucratic guardian, but also as a reservoir for personnel, worked together with politically active parents, and had a similar role. The interconnection of children's and young people's platforms with the CPC's party organization was to be ensured through increased membership, which copied the logic of "cradle to grave". A child encountered the coveted class education very early on through his or her mother, which the women's movement within the party with its own party section (women's division) and periodical Communist Woman (Komunistka) (later called Sower Woman – Rozséváčka). A child could become a first level member at age 10, when he or she could acquire a red pioneer scarf. He or she was to spend his or her early adolescence in the children's organization and at age 14 could graduate to Komsomol membership. If the child was organizationally indispensable, he or she could leave the children's movement only at age 16.<sup>18</sup>

Youth organizations united young people from age 14 to 21. Then, according to the rules of this milieu, it was the right time to enter the party structures.<sup>19</sup> The age limit to transfer from one organizational platform to the next in practice was not as strict as it seemed with regard to the official regulations. For example, in 1925, the Communist Youth Union (Komunistický svaz mládeže - Komsomol) worked with statistics revealing that around 25–30% of its members were people older than 21.<sup>20</sup> An individual could enter into the party educational process whenever, either as a completely new person or as an experienced member of one of the satellite organizations. In fact, it was desired that participation in this linear process of growth was complemented with membership in the FDTJ, Labor Scouts, etc.

Komsomol – an organization uniting often very radical individuals – never hid its fundamentalist approach to revolution, and so it was temporarily banned in the fall of 1922. Thereafter, it was on the border between legality and illegality. This limited its possibilities, and so its membership base remained rather low. In the 1920s, it had around 10 thousand members. It only started to increase significantly during the period of the people's front tactics in 1935. In the second half of the 1930s, it had around 24 thousand members.

In 1931, the Young Pioneers merged with a certain charity organization for pragmatic reasons. In order to lessen the threat of persecution by the state authorities, it was officially called the innocuously sounding Union for the Care of Proletarian Children

<sup>17</sup> Zpráva ústředního dětského Byra z 21.9.1929. In: National Archive Prague, collection: *Sbírka organizací mládeže*, box 45; Zpráva o práci mezi proletářskými dětmi z 2.7.1934. In: National Archive Prague, collection: *Sbírka organizací mládeže*, box 46. [Collection of Communist Youth Organizations].

<sup>18</sup> Organizační řád Rudých průkopníků. In: National Archive Prague, collection: *Sbírka organizací mládeže*, box 45. [Collection of Communist Youth Organizations].

<sup>19</sup> *Vůdce*, říjen 1923. [The Leader Journal].

<sup>20</sup> Age cohorts of Komsomol: 14–17 years of age 30%, 18–20 years 40–45%, older than 21 years 25–30%. See *Mladý bolševik*, červen 1925. [Young Bolshevik Journal]

(Svaz pro péči o proletářské dítě). Next to these larger organizations, there were other Communist leaning ones, such as Children of Nature (Děti přírody), the League of Forest Wisdom (Liga lesní moudrosti), the Association of Woodsmen (Sdružení zálesáků), or Slovak Scout Laborers, but we have not managed to find more information about them.<sup>21</sup>

Besides acquiring young sympathizers through the sports they organized, Communists used the opposite tactic as well. They tried to infiltrate into other sports organization and gain control over them. Their typical targets were social democratic sports groups, from the German ATUS (Arbeiter Turn- und Sportverein) or the DTJ of Czechoslovak Social Democrats. Today, it is difficult to assess its real numbers and how much this infiltration was successful. The report from the IV congress of the CPC from 1927 stated that Communists represented up to a third of the members in ATUS, but that the leadership was safely in the hands of reformers. On the contrary, in the CPC organizational report from the Olomouc region from 1932, we can find the assertion that in the German parts of the region ATUS was, in fact, under the influence of the Communists.<sup>22</sup>

Classic organizational structures were complemented by the diverse production of printed matter. Within the Communist movement, the press was held in high esteem as a useful tool for the unification of the movement's assorted activities as well as its ideological direction. In the 1920s, the journals published were aimed solely at the youth movement as well as at ordinary members. Periodicals such as *Mladý Bolševik* (Young Bolshevik) or *Vůdce* (Leader) pondered the theoretical and practical questions of the youth movement and were intended for its officials. It provided ideas for specific organizational practices, wrote about the ideological shifts within the movement's global structure and also (next to internal memos) served as a channel for the everyday organizational exchanges of information from the center to the periphery. Its readers could find ideas for ideologically slanted games, rules, how to organize the local division/cell, or reports from executive KIM meetings together with an interpretation of the basic works of Marxism-Leninism. The Czech language journal *Kohoutek* (Rooster) with the subheading "journal of the proletarian child" was intended for ordinary members and sympathizers. Its editor-in-chief in the 1920s was Antonín Zápotocký. In 1926, it had a print run of 15 thousand copies.<sup>23</sup> It contained stories, tales, short poems, revolutionary songs, but also rules for how to make toys at home and ways to improve one's housework skills (how to tie knots, wrap things in paper, etc.). The *Kohoutek* (Rooster) for the German minority was the comparable journal *Rotter Trommler* (The Red Drummer), but this group already had something that came from the KPD: *Das Proletarische Kind* (The Proletarian Child) published in Berlin. The satellite youth organizations mentioned above published their own journals for their members. To a certain extent these latter combined the format of a journal for everyday members and functionaries into one –

<sup>21</sup> František Budský, *K historii dětského pokrokového hnutí*, Prague, Mladá fronta, 1973, p. 136; Vilém Mucha, *K dějinám dělnického tělovýchovného hnutí*, op. cit., p. 162. [Towards a History of the Children's Progressive Movement] [Towards the History of the Workers' Sports Movement]

<sup>22</sup> *Protokol IV. řádného sjezdu KSČ*, Prague, 1984, p. 277. [Protocol of the Fourth Congress of CPC] Zpráva ke krajské konferenci 11. krajské organizace KSČ (Olomouc), 22. A 23. 10. 1932. In: National Archive Prague, Collection: *Krajské a okresní výbory KSČ, základní organizace KSČ 1921–1938*, box 20. Tactics of infiltration was at its peak especially at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, when the doctrine „class against class“ was pursued by the international communist movement.

<sup>23</sup> František Budský, *K historii dětského pokrokového hnutí*, op. cit., p. 136; Vilém Mucha, *K dějinám dělnického tělovýchovného hnutí*, op. cit., p. 75. [Towards a History of the Children's Progressive Movement] [Towards the History of the Workers' Sports Movement]

the FDTJ published the journal *Výboj* (Spark), the Spartak Labor Scouts had the journal *Oheň* (Fire). The CPC's production for children included the editorial series of the „*Komunistické nakladatelství*” (Communist Press) entitled „*Dětská knihovna*” (Children's Library), which generally published translations of Soviet novels, stories, and tales.

This production often clashed with official censorship. Due to official limitations and the constant lack of funds, the journals often changed their formal name, print format, publication place, or editor.<sup>24</sup> After the publication of the journals *Kohoutek* and *Rotter Trommler* was officially banned in 1929, the movement's center tried to publish illegally. After the ban on *Kohoutek* and its successor *Rudý trubač* (Red Trumpeter), the central bureau decided on a strategy that planned on publishing school journals (biweekly) including instructions for children on how to write for it.<sup>25</sup> Due to the lack of sources, it is very difficult to assess how the similar activism from below worked. However, it is indisputable that the CPC as a whole considered the press and its dissemination as one of its priorities. It was the party's basic bearer of discursive practice, which maintained its ideological homogeneity and had the ambition to create worlds of ideas in the minds of its readers – i.e. the movement's members and sympathizers.

## The Discourse of the Communist Publications for Children

The logic of the discursive practices of the political movements directed against any form of oppression consists in a new evaluation of the causes of the suffering that exists in society, making the conclusions available to the public, and subsequently designating the *status quo* of suffering as morally intolerable.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, the Communists were extraordinarily proactive and they assembled diverse testimonies and statistics. These facts played an important part in shaping the ideological discourse directed toward children and their parents. Substantiated reports on low wages, high prices, small apartments, or the high sickness rate of working class children thus made the Communist activists' speeches all the more relevant. It gave them the opportunity to force the topic on an ever wider group of people and incorporate it into everyday conversations – directly into the heads of workers and their families, including children. The more aptly the data reflected the listeners' and readers' actual experience, the more the CPC speakers and journalists had the power to assert their interpretation of the causes and thus the right to interpret reality – to seize the discourse as a weapon in the struggle for the power to create reality.

In this study, our goal cannot be to capture the discourse created for young Communists in its totality, and we have therefore focused only on some examples that we have found to be fundamental due to the frequency of the given collective symbol's appearance based on a critical analysis of children's and young people's journals. In order to organize the images, we relied upon traditional Marxist class analysis. The first part of this section of our study will be about the concept of “class-in-itself” [Klasse an sich]: images depicting society as an antagonistic system divided

<sup>24</sup> Michael Wögerbauer *et al.*, *V obecném zájmu: Cenzura a sociální regulace literatury v moderní české kultuře 1749–2014*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Band, Prague, 2015, pp. 741–745. [In the Public's Interest: Censorship and the Social Regulation of Literature in Modern Czech Culture 1749–2014]

<sup>25</sup> Oběžník ústředního byra z 3.5.1929. In: National Archive Prague, collection: *Sbírka organizací mládeže*, box 45.

<sup>26</sup> Barrington Moore, *The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt*, London, MacMillan, 1978, p. 88.

into opposing classes – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The second part will turn to the concept of “class-for-itself” [Klasse für sich], i.e. descriptions of the world with the intention to make readers become class conscious. The third part is then devoted to the category of “false consciousness” [falsches Bewußtsein]. The various ways in which religion and patriotism were delegitimized are discussed in this last section.

In order to display a society mired in a tenacious (in terms of the current socio-economic order) class antagonism, the discourse of the CPC creates a sentimental picture of suffering children and a stolen youth: “Children without parents, without health, without love, the most wretched city dwellers. The most necessary things like sunshine, clean air, and milk are the hardest to come by here. When they grow up and are let out of school, they will be swallowed up by the factory or workshop. The only thing left is the hospital and a sad end.”<sup>27</sup> The shortage of the most basic things in this picture is complemented with dismal moral degradation: “The life of children from proletarian families is pure destitution. The economic destitution that their parents bear, and considerable moral destitution. Children grow up uncared for by their families, their father and mother only greet them when they come home from work, exhausted and often unable to guide their children consistently...”<sup>28</sup> These melancholy scenes were likely a pathetic exaggeration, but to achieve the desired effect, it was enough that they were seen as the perhaps less depressive, yet still existentially complex concerns of real people.

Descriptions of situations from the everyday life of people unsatisfied with various aspects of the capitalist order, although exaggerated, added a plasticity to statistics on the social problems of the lower social classes and thus created a mix of ideas that had the potential to become the shared experience of the working class. The discourse of oppression had to be rendered in black and white. Hungry children and dead newborns were frequently depicted as naturalistic literary figures. Similar declarations were supposed to morally shock readers: through unexpected shocking information and stories proving the amorality of the current order they elicited emotional dissatisfaction, spontaneous anger and thus spurred them to take action (participating in a demonstration, registering their children in a children’s organization, adults becoming party members, etc.).<sup>29</sup>

The Communist discourse worked with a distinctive moral economy.<sup>30</sup> A central concept of this moral economy was exploitation. The pictures of worn out parents reflected the everyday reality of the young readers and the stories always emphasized the senselessness of a social order that permits it.<sup>31</sup> Emphasizing the irrationality of the existing order was then underscored by pictures of stupid, undignified, and often shallowly vicious rich people, whom the parents had to humbly bow down to so that they would not lose their jobs. The accumulation of wealth was seen as senseless: “The rich don’t work yet they have everything they need [...] They collect money not out of necessity, but only for pleasure.”<sup>32</sup> The description of the unjust existence of different classes of train seating sections for passengers was an effective image that also aided in the delegitimization of the existing social order that must have been

<sup>27</sup> *Reflektor*, 1928, no. 7. [The Reflector Journal]

<sup>28</sup> *Komunistická mládež*, July 1922. [Communist Youth Journal]

<sup>29</sup> Jeff Godwinn, James M. Jaspers, Emotions and Social Movements, In: Jan E. Stets, Jonathan H. Turner (ed.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Emotions*, New York, 2007, p. 621.

<sup>30</sup> See Edward Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century”, *Past and Present*, 1971, No. 50, pp. 76–136; Stefan Svallfors, *The Moral Economy of Class: Class and Attitudes in Comparative Perspective*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2006, pp. 1–8.

<sup>31</sup> Srv. *Kohoutek*, 1924, pp. 1–3. [Rooster Journal]

<sup>32</sup> *Kohoutek*, 1922, pp. 9–10; 1923, p. 51. [Rooster Journal]

extremely familiar to young readers: “*V té první třídě jsou továrníci, / ve druhé třídě jsou páni důstojníci. / Ve třetí tísni se s chmurou vtváří / po práci umdlení proletáři*” (“Factory owners are in first class, / commissioned officers are in second class. And in third class ride the gloomy faces/of exhausted proletarians on their way home”), read the banal rhyme in *Kohoutek* in November 1923.<sup>33</sup> Another common figure was also the depiction of the class divisions among children that young readers were confronted with at school and sometimes even afterwards.<sup>34</sup>

In the Communist moral economy, the contrasts in the quality of life were presented as senseless and baseless. An understandable rhetorical figure connected to the perception of such injustice was the simple demand “He who does not work, neither shall he eat,” the well-known Socialist slogan from the previous century, which the Communist editor Helena Malíčková told children was the “most beautiful saying that we know.”<sup>35</sup> Marx’s teaching on surplus value was presented, much simplified: “In reality, however, capitalists and rich people provide for the workers, who are paid for their work only a small portion of what they truly made, the larger portion goes into the pockets of the capitalists who not only live off of these surpluses of the workers’ labor in splendor and luxury, but they amass new capital in order to hire an even greater number of poor souls to work for them.” The CPC was held up as the only force that is capable of overturning this unjust order like the Russian Bolsheviks had done.<sup>36</sup>

Such social phenomena were presented to children in a way that was appropriate to their experience and cognitive development. The creators of these ideological texts wanted to work with the prefigured experience of their young readers. For example, the issue of child labor was explained thusly dumbed down: “Mommy seized the opportunity and says: You’re unhappy when I leave and I’m not with you all the time: but the children that are tethered to unpleasant labor while they are on their own suffer much more. They never have a day off. They go to school, and when they’re done they sit down once again to their work tables [housework, stringing beads], to make enough money to buy shoes so that they can go to school in the winter.” The sad image of a stolen childhood was used to build up the subsequent discursive strategies that condemned the way goods were redistributed at the time: “And why don’t the rich give them money so they wouldn’t have to work? Mommy defiantly and spitefully furrows her brow: Because they have hard hearts and respect orders that give the results of other people’s work to those who deserve it the least.”<sup>37</sup> This is how the evil and unjust bourgeois class was constructed.

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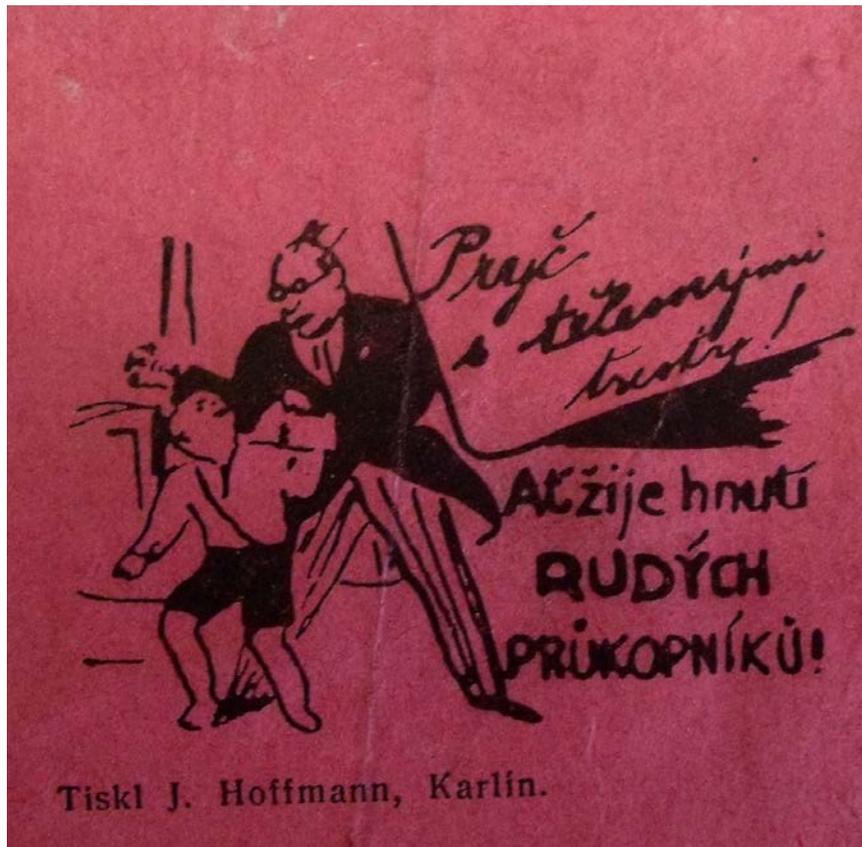
<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1923, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 1926/1927, p. 65; National Archive Prague, collection: *Sbírka organizací mládeže*, box 47.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1924/1925, p. 61.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1926/1927, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1924/1925, p. 31–32.



**Fig. 3 : Leaflet “Against Physical Punishment! Long Live for the Red Pioneer Movement”, late 1920’s courtesy of Českomoravská konfederace odborových svazů.**

The thorough depiction of a society steeped in class antagonism as irrational and unjust was to be a template for proletarian children to adopt proper class consciousness. The journal *Kohoutek* disseminated the discursive image of a child warrior for the rights of the poor with a catchy rhyme: “*Až já jednou budu velký do bojových ustoupím řad, / tam kde otec můj dnes stojí, půjdu rád! / Chudé dítě, proletář jsem, mám však touhu jedinou, moje malé srdce cítí s chudinou!*” (“When I grow up I’ll join the ranks of the fighters, / I’ll be happy to stand where my father stands today! / Just a poor child, a proletarian am I, I have but one wish, my small heart is with the poor!”)<sup>38</sup> In accordance with the above-mentioned images, children were raised with the conviction that none of the negotiations that the social democrats believed in are possible and that the only possibility to improve the situation is the social revolution offered by the CPC.<sup>39</sup> In this way, one of the delegates of the VII. congress of the CPC that took place in spring 1936, expressed the Communists’ intentions with no sugarcoating: “If proletarian children are kept from the knowledge that there is a great struggle taking place in the world between two classes and are taught to be as meek as lambs – then we must teach them to hate the masters.”<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1922/1923, p. 113.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1922/1923, pp. 51–52.

<sup>40</sup> *Protokol VII. sjezdu PCP*, Liberec, 1936, p. 224. [Protocol of the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of PCP]

Based on these discursive strategies, the basic program of the Communist movement was translated into a language that children can understand and distributed as a good example of how the small members of the Communist movement should explain who they are and thus initiate the indoctrination of their friends: “And Jarda willingly told his friend that Communists are people who want there to be another order in the world, for there to be justice, so that all people would be equal as brothers and sisters, so that everyone would work, so that nobody would be idle, so that everybody would have enough to eat and nobody would overeat, so that children and old people would be taken care of fairly and then for there to be no more wars [...] We Communists don’t do [like Jesus – *authors’ note*] – said Jarda proudly – we don’t do what we are not allowed to do, for we would help our tyrants [...] We have to defend ourselves and we have to fight!”<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, the Communist program was translated for children into demands that they could understand (free school supplies, free medical treatments, community supported playrooms and swimming pools for children, fruit as food and not for the production of spirits, etc.).<sup>42</sup>



Fig. 4 : Frontpage of the journal *Kohoutek* (1926)

The declared struggle was to take place along several lines. Any form of what Marxist ideology terms false consciousness was unacceptable. The goal was to defeat the discourse of religion, the discourse of the stability of the existing social system, the nationalist discourse, and, last but not least, the discourse of a romanticized past. While the discourse of the stability of the society at the time was undermined by the

<sup>41</sup> *Kohoutek* 1922/1923, pp. 46–47. [Rooster Journal]

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 1923/1924, pp. 261–262.

constant highlighting of the minimal opportunities for upward social mobility and the differences in quality of life, religion was attacked as a project with a specific social aspect that the church used for its own enrichment and thus participated in “exploitative” practices. The church entered into children’s lives through the compulsory religious classes in schools, which were seen as completely useless, and through Christmas. Most of the December issues of *Kohoutek* contained articles explaining the material foundation of Christmas. St. Nicholas was transformed into the just “Nicholas Lenin,”<sup>43</sup> who gives children the true gift of social justice, and not worthless trinkets. Christmas – the time of children’s wishes – was used to fulfill the discursive strategies described above: “Baby Jesus gives to the rich, for today he is not called Jesus, but – money. Jesus has left us a beautiful legacy – love. But that love commands us to fight for the rights of the poor and to win!”<sup>44</sup> While Communists did not have a single kind word to say about the institutional church, Jesus was not depicted only in negative colors, as is apparent from the quotation. The working class milieu at the time was not purely secular and atheist, and in Slovakia identifying as Catholic was an important component of the Slovak national consciousness. Julius Verčík, one of the leading members of the Slovak Communist movement in the 1920s, later wittily related a common practice at the time in his unpublished memories: “When the church bells would ring, I stopped speaking [...] I saw how many people, our own comrades, would take their hats off while the bells rang and the women were obviously praying. This mass of proletarians that furiously demanded that the party be renamed the Communist party, that fervently believed in the salvation that would come from Russia, believed in the revolution, was religious. [...] We had to make concessions to the attire of the proletarian masses, and we were not allowed to touch their religious beliefs.”<sup>45</sup>

Historian Juraj Benko therefore emphasized that, especially in the first years of the republic, the ideology that was most popular among the inhabitants of Slovakia took on religious overtones and the Socialists’ and Communists’ campaigns had chiliastic elements in the images of salvation that they emphasized.<sup>46</sup> Therefore Jesus was depicted in a positive light and presented as a utopian socialist whose ideals of love for one’s neighbor may be realized only through the scientific socialism of the Marxist-Leninists in the CPC.<sup>47</sup>

A very effective strategy to vilify nationalism was to devalue it through an extremely critical interpretation of World War I that contained, for example, the disparagement of the cult of the fallen hero: “The teacher explained to the students: Imagine me coming to class and saying to you: The second grade teacher insulted me. Go get knives and axes, let’s get our revenge [...] The one who would throw away his axe and say that he won’t commit murder, we’d laugh at him because he’s a coward [...] During World War I some also didn’t take up arms. Austria imprisoned and tortured them as

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1922/1923, pp. 46–47. Mikuláš (Nicolas) was one of Lenin’s previous pseudonyms. It was used also as a pen name – some Czech translations of Lenin’s books published in the early 1920s were signed with a name Mikuláš Lenin.

<sup>44</sup> *Kohoutek* 1922/1923, p. 39. [Rooster Journal]

<sup>45</sup> Quoted by, Juraj Benko, “Socialistická ideológia v konfrontácii s religióznym slovenským prostredím v prvej štvrtine 20. Storočia”, In: Xénia Šúchová (ed.), *Ludáci a komunisti: Súperi? Spojenci? Protivníci?*, Prešov, Universum, 2006, pp.15–16. [Ludaks and Communists: Opponents? Allies? Adversaries?]

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>47</sup> *Kohoutek*, 1922/1923, pp. 20–24 [Rooster Journal]; Alena Wagnerová, *A zapomenuti vejdeme do dějin*, Prague, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2010, p. 201. [And Forgotten Will Go Down in History: Germans Against Hitler – The Life Stories of German Opponents of Hitler]

if they were horrible criminals. Many went insane or died as a result of their treatment. But we hold them in the highest respect today. They are our heroes.”<sup>48</sup>

While children had to celebrate October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1918 together with the whole Communist cultural milieu as a milestone, when a wave of demonstrations took place all over Bohemia (and in several locations independence was declared), the founding of the Republic on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1918, was interpreted as an act of a “revolution betrayed.” This discourse reached the public in another popular way – through theater plays that the Young Pioneers were supposed to rehearse: “*Vašek*: Our teacher just told us that we’ve had a Republic for 14 years. And what’s it done for us? My father is unemployed and we only eat once a day now. We have a Republic that gives us 20 crowns a week, that’s supposed to be enough, there’s supposedly too many unemployed people...;

*Pepík*: Look, I’m telling you, we have a Republic, but it’s not our Republic. It’s only for those who own factories and banks.”<sup>49</sup>

Children not only acquainted themselves with this idealized version of the past during history class, the teaching of which was strongly criticized by the Communists, but also in seemingly innocent fairy tales. This old genre was apparently so intertwined with childhood that it could not be ignored or prohibited and not recommended to parents and children who were party members. Stories about beautiful princesses, brave knights, and fair kings that idealized feudalism, however, were deemed ideologically harmful and needed to go through a fundamental reformulation. In the pages of *Kohoutek*, the “bourgeois” princess Goldilocks was mercilessly beaten to death by a revolutionary mob, Cinderella was only spared this same cruel fate due to her proletarian origins, and Sleeping Beauty’s savior from the antimilitarist working class refused to wake her up because sleeping feudalism would wake up along with her.<sup>50</sup>

These propaganda products were supposed to ensure that Communist children would not adopt the false consciousness of traditional fairy tales. In 1923, “*Kohoutek*” editor Helena Malířová edified them with the following words: “The world must change, not through the crack of a magic whip as in a fairy tale, but by working together and fighting all for one and one for all – even for our poor children.”<sup>51</sup> To achieve this, however, the rhetorical images of the world in material practice needed to be transformed, and this will be the topic of the next part of this study.

## **The Practice of Political Activism: The Child between the Party and the Family**

A Communist child’s time was divided into three segments depending on who or what was helping raise it: the family, school and an organization.

Despite the lack of academic studies on the families of Communist activists, there is a relative agreement of opinion based on fragmentary evidence that the interconnection between the personal sphere and public political party activity was

<sup>48</sup> *Kohoutek*, 1923/1924, pp. 60–61. [Rooster Journal]

<sup>49</sup> National Archive Prague, collection: *Sbírka organizací mládeže*, box 47.

<sup>50</sup> *Kohoutek* 1925/1926, pp. 292–298. [Rooster Journal]

<sup>51</sup> *Kohoutek*, 1922/1923, p. 101. [Rooster Journal]

very strong in the Communist movement – likely even stronger than in the other competing political camps.<sup>52</sup> As Archie Brown stated with characteristic pertinence:

“The life of the Communist Party member within a Western democracy also had something in common with that of members of a sectarian Church. Membership was extremely arduous and demanding. Such time as was left for social life was spent in the company of party comrades. People met their spouse in the party, and when this was not possible because of the under-representation of women, the male spouse was expected to recruit his wife to party membership, and usually did.”<sup>53</sup>

According to the logic of creating a relatively closed Communist social pillar, children of Communist activists were also expected to join the party's organizational structures at a very early age.

Children of activists could not escape the party because it was an everyday part of their lives: parents often left for demonstrations or party meetings (these meetings sometimes took place in their homes), they experienced the consequences of the social stigmatization of their parents due to their political persuasions (for example the loss of employment, being forced to move out of their homes), they gazed every day at pictures of Karl Marx and other cult figures in the movement on the wall of their apartments. This was not specific to the CPC, but it was the inheritance of the mobilization of the working class, which was initiated by social democracy long before the First World War. Josef Krosnář, who was a member of the highest party bureaucracy in the 1930s, summarized his start in politics: “I was nine or ten years old when I first got a job as a paperboy for the workers' journals Red Clouds (Červánky) and Blaze (Zář). I enjoyed it mostly because of my father.”<sup>54</sup> Maria Lippertová, who grew up in a Communist family between the wars, remembers that class affiliation had been a clear concept for her since her childhood and her grandmother (although she was a social democracy sympathizer) had been taking her from a very young age to various gatherings of politically active women.<sup>55</sup> Important postwar CPC functionary Marie Švermová, who was imprisoned during the purges of the late 1940s and early 1950s, remembered the pride she felt in her childhood soul when she went to buy social democratic newspapers for her father, and she remembered, after she had learned to read them, that they wrote about freedom and justice.<sup>56</sup> The class awareness of children from functionary families surprised their middle class classmates. Fritz Beer, the brother of the later significant Communist intellectual Kurt Konrad, who was also part of the Communist movement between the wars, retained this perception until his old age when he wrote his memoir. He remembered his admiration of children from a German social democratic family,

<sup>52</sup> Philippe Ariès, Georges Duby, Antoine Prost, Gérard Vincent, *History of Private Life: Riddles of Identity in Modern Times*, vol. V, Cambridge, The Belknap Press, 1991, pp. 315-345; Stanislav Holubec, *Lidé periferie: Sociální postavení a každodennost pražského dělnictva v meziválečné době*, Plzeň, Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, 2009 [People on the Periphery: Social Status and the Daily Life of the Prague Working Class Between the Wars]; Jakub Rákosník, “Strana profesionálních revolucionářů? Politická kultura meziválečné KSČ”, *Historie-Otázky-Problémy*, 2014, pp.135–146. [Party of Professional Revolutionaries?, History-Questions-Problems Journal]

<sup>53</sup> Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism*, London, Ecco, 2009, p. 125.

<sup>54</sup> Josef Krosnář: *Zlaté pražské časy*, Prague, Svoboda, 1966, p. 146. [Golden Prague Times]

<sup>55</sup> Alena Wagnerová, *A zapomenutí vejdemo do dějin: Němci proti Hitlerovi – životní příběhy německých odpůrců nacismu v Československu*, Prague, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2010, pp. 47ff. [And Forgotten Will Go Down in History: Germans Against Hitler – The Life Stories of German Opponents of Hitler]

<sup>56</sup> Marie Švermová, *Vzpomínky*, Prague, Futura, 2008, s. 11. [Memoirs]

who, unlike other poor children who were ashamed of their families, radiated dignity and confidence, bore their poverty, and said with pride: “The future is ours.”<sup>57</sup>

The Communists’ relationship with the institution of the family was not a simple one. On the one hand, from the standpoint of socialist ideology, it was contemptuous. Socialists from all over the spectrum were apparently in agreement that, in a bourgeois society, women are oppressed in two ways: in their exploitative relationship with their employers and by her husband inside the home in terms of the bourgeois civil law code. On the other hand, even the largest Communist proponent of free love, the post-revolution People’s Commissar for Social Welfare Alexandra Kollontai, did not deny the significance of the family. As opposed to economic shackles, however, in Communist society marriage “is transformed into an exalted unity of two souls in love.”<sup>58</sup> Communists did not deny the ideal of monogamous cohabitation, which was more contingent on the actual bond than on formal marriage, which is reflected in the quoted memoirs of Švermová or the reminiscences of the writer and journalist Vilém Nový.<sup>59</sup> As Gérard Vincent noted in 1991, their picture of a functional family took on distinctly conservative overtones: a member of the Communist movement had to be a competent professional, good husband, father, and a “normal”, conformist member of society.<sup>60</sup> Disorganized family relationships could even be a reason to be expelled from the party, something that happened to functionary Vilém Daněk from Vítkovice in 1924.<sup>61</sup>

The CPC nevertheless expressed scepticism about the family’s ability to raise a child and cement its class awareness. The resolution on the children’s question at the III. CPC congress (1925) had this to say about the matter: “Neither the family, nor the school is able to ensure that proletarian children are raised properly. During the development of capitalism, the proletarian family ceased to be a true instrument of nurture [...] The proletarian family is forced to hand over their child to the streets. Then the school, supported by the church, movie theater, literary rubbish [...] is a tool of the bourgeois class education.”<sup>62</sup> The party was therefore to devote more attention to its children’s organization in the future in order for it to replace the apparent dysfunctional proletarian family and reactionary school.

Despite the fact that many school teachers were Communist party members who were organized in the legal Socialist Teacher’s Union (Socialistické sdružení učitelské, later in the 1930s Teacher’s Union), promoting the values of the Communist movement hit a brick wall. In the child’s world, the state was present through the school, the curriculum of which was not only about providing a basic education, but was also about systematically strengthening the students’ national awareness.<sup>63</sup> This aspect of

<sup>57</sup> Fritz Beer, *A Tys na Němce střílel, dědo?*, Prague-Litomyšl, Paseka, 2008, pp. 35–36. [Did You Shoot German, Grandpa?]

<sup>58</sup> Alexandra Kollontajová, *Rodina v komunistickém státě*, Chicago, without publisher, 1920, s. 22. [Family in the Communist State]

<sup>59</sup> Marie Švermová, *Vzpomínky*, *op. cit.*, s. 49–50 [Memoirs]; Vilém Nový, *Život a revoluce*, Prague, Orbis, 1974, s. 50. [Life and Revolution]

<sup>60</sup> Gérard Vincent, “Communism as a Way of Life”, In: Philippe Ariès, Georges Duby (eds.), *A History of Private Life*, vol. 5, *op. cit.*, p. 333.

<sup>61</sup> *Protokol II. řádného sjezdu KSČ*, Prague, 1983, p. 210. [Protocol of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of CPC]

<sup>62</sup> *Protokol III. řádného sjezdu KSČ*, Prague, 1967, p. 429. [Protocol of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of CPC]

<sup>63</sup> A similar activity that school schools organized was the celebration of national festivities. A collection of celebratory poems, etc. that were recited on this occasion in honor of President Masaryk and other significant people involved in the founding of Czechoslovakia was published. See, for example, Bohumil Tožička (ed.), *Státní svátek 28. Říjen: Sbírka proslavů, recitací, scén, her, vzpomínek, hesel a nápisů*, Prague, Ústřední nakladatelství a knihkupectví učitelstva československého, 1932 [The State Holiday (October 28<sup>th</sup>). Collection of Speeches, Recitations, Scenes, Plays, Watchwords, and Signs].

their education placed the school on the same level as the CPC's greatest ideological enemies. The fact that the school system of interwar Czechoslovakia was still a socially impermeable hierarchical structure, together with the problems of proletarian children who were handicapped by poverty, may have encouraged parents' mistrust in the school system as a whole.<sup>64</sup> Accepting the conclusions of the CPC that "each official school works in the interest of the old world and tries its utmost to falsify and disguise the truth, materialistic and religious life, the class struggle, out of which will emerge the real democracy, Communist society,"<sup>65</sup> was far easier. Children were encouraged by the Communists to boycott their homework, go on strike, and disrupt their class. They were told to found so-called school cells and publish a school journal. The children activists were supposed to describe the everyday shortcomings of school life through a specific Marxist language and flood the flyers with the whole symbolic space of the school. The height of the defiance could be to boycott school altogether. Flyers with the following message were confiscated from the students of an elementary school in Nusle: "Boys, girls, we're on strike. We're not going to school on Friday. We will punish any scab that will betray us! Instead of school on Friday, let's all go at 9 in the morning to Rieger square in Nusle! Red Pioneers."<sup>66</sup>

The mere wearing of Communist symbols on one's clothes or school supplies caused a lot of problems. Antonín Trousil, one of the pioneers of the Communist youth movement, later recalled how the FDTJ published a large number of copies of a schedule for students, on which there was a picture of Marx and Lenin and a five-pointed star. This was followed by expulsion from the school council, which prohibited not only the use of the schedule, but even young school children from exercising in the FDTJ.<sup>67</sup> Trousil did not add a date to this recollection, but it may have occurred between the years 1926–1927. In March 1927, the school council published instructions for teachers to report how many students were Young Pioneer members. In Prague, they even had to find out how many students and teachers participated in a certain school party that was organized by the Communist Proletkult in the Municipal House on February 20th, 1927.<sup>68</sup> These formal instructions were an effective tool for schools to combat Communist infiltration, either by giving students lower grades in behavior and/or prohibiting students from exercising in Communist sports clubs.<sup>69</sup> We have discovered similar interventions two years earlier in 1925, when the school administration banned the children's journal *Kohoutek* from school libraries and the students could not exercise in clubs, while competing sports organizations, the nationally liberal *Sokol* or the Catholic *Orel*, and their promotional materials, never suffered the same penalty.<sup>70</sup>

The above-mentioned text makes clear that belonging to an organized children's Communist movement was a risky undertaking for many of its members. This was also one of the important limitations to the recruitment of more members. However, risks and fears of punishment were not the only limitation. The function of a children's movement was ideological indoctrination and Communist campaigners

<sup>64</sup> Stanislav Holubec, *Lidé periferie: Sociální postavení a každodennost pražského dělnictva v meziválečné době*, Plzeň, Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, 2009 [People on the Periphery: Social Status and the Daily Life of the Prague Working Class Between the Wars]

<sup>65</sup> *Reflektor*, 1925, no. 17. [The Reflector Journal]

<sup>66</sup> National Archive Prague, collection: Sbirka organizací mládeže, box 47.

<sup>67</sup> Antonín Trousil, *Hrst vzpomínek*, Prague, NPL, 1962, s. 107. [A Handful of Memories]

<sup>68</sup> *Učitel'ské noviny*, 1927, p. 164. [Teachers' Newspaper]

<sup>69</sup> *Kohoutek*, 1926/1927, pp. 108, 114. [Rooster Journal]

<sup>70</sup> *Kohoutek*, 1924/1925, s. 305. [Rooster Journal]

may have seen indifference or even opposition to the depictions of reality they were offering. Ida Wöhlová, who came from a German family who were CPC members and who was herself a member of the children's movement, remembers "that for the young generation in the family membership in the Communist Party was not as much a question of ideology, but more of a society of generational types, a circle of friends they would go on outings with, take part in sports celebrations..."<sup>71</sup> The extreme politicization and the emphasis on indoctrination may have been counterproductive, something that even the CPC admitted, as one of the internal documents evaluating the children's movement attests: "Today, it looks like the Left Front in the Red Pioneers troops, the leader speaks for hours, children sleep through it..."<sup>72</sup> The success of recruitment strategies apparently depended to a great extent on a competent leader. It was not easy to balance their indoctrinational function with children's wishes to have fun, and this is likely why one of the instructional materials for leaders in 1931 emphasized: "Exchange the current speeches to the ranks for conversations with children!"<sup>73</sup>

For this reason, the members of the children's movement who were able to use understandable language categories with their listeners were often tasked with disseminating Communist ideology among children. Their activity was almost like a type of street social work. Anna Horníková recalled one of her visits to emergency housing on the periphery of Prague, where the families of the long-term unemployed lived: "We're not asking for anything from you! But Sláva didn't give up. He sat down in front of the hovel and started to tell the children: Children, one day it'll get better, don't be afraid of me, I like you, and everybody likes you [...] comrades Communists [...] where is your father and mother? [...] Daddy moved us here and in the fall he went to look for work somewhere else [...] And mom? She's with Mařenka and Franta on Wenceslas Square. She has a spot in front of Koruna [a well-known buffet in the center of Prague – *author's note*] [...] She started to drink. She comes home drunk and the noise she makes [...] The second day we adopted some measures in the Union for the Care of Proletarian Children. That very same day in the afternoon, the family moved from the hovel to a small place in Jinonice. The Union paid their rent for a whole year and furnished their apartment with poor, but clean furniture. Frantík and Božena were in Sláva's class and they traveled with us every year to camp in Soběšín."<sup>74</sup>

Influence of this kind did not always mean such a radical intervention into the life of the family. Organizers often only handed out school supplies to children for free at various demonstrations or other gatherings, organized various games with recruitment goals for them, etc.<sup>75</sup>

The camps were considered one of the most effective tools for the cultivation of children's class awareness. Detailed information on the daily schedule of the summer camp that took place in Soběslav in 1927, organized by International Red Aid, has been preserved. Apparently, gentle indoctrination organically pervaded the children's games. After morning ablutions, exercise, bathing, and a short walk, they paid homage to the camp flag, during which the children sang the International. Then they played games, especially collective ball games. After a snack, they either debated or practiced songs, recitations, and choir performances. Children spent a long time

<sup>71</sup> Alena Wagnerová, *A zapomenuti vejdemo do dějin: Němci proti Hitlerovi – životní příběhy německých odpůrců nacismu v Československu*, Prague, Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2010, pp. 19–20 [And Forgotten Will Go Down in History: Germans Against Hitler – The Life Stories].

<sup>72</sup> "Vůdce třetí generace". In: National Archive Prague, collection: *Sbírka organizací mládeže*, box 46.

<sup>73</sup> *Výboj*, 1931, p. 30. [Spark]

<sup>74</sup> Anna Horníková: *Rudí průkopníci*, *op. cit.*, pp. 56–59. [Red Pioneers]

<sup>75</sup> *Komunistická mládež*, September 1922. [Communist Youth Journal]

bathing and fighting for a small riverboat that they named „Potěmkin“ in honor of the legendary revolt on the battleship of the same name during the Russian Revolution in 1905. After lunch, they had quiet time during which the young campers had to read children’s proletarian literature from the camp library. Then they exercised or had a lecture and debate. In the late afternoon, they most often went mushroom or berry picking in the forest. The day was concluded around the campfire where they sang workers’ songs and talked about the injustice of the existing order.<sup>76</sup> The issue of boys and girls spending time together arose during the camp. In the interwar period, this was not the usual practice and parents did not accept it unequivocally. It is interesting how in the instructional documents there is also an emphasis on demolishing gender prejudice in terms of the division of labor into men’s and women’s work. The youth journal *Výboj* (Spark) in 1929 called on scout leaders to purposefully break down these gender stereotypes so that campers would be raised to work together regardless of gender.<sup>77</sup>

When not on vacation, children were supposed to be involved in party operations and other activities. In reality, children engaged in various types of risky activities: from the organization of patrols that would notify older comrades when the police patrols arrived during illegal meetings, to disorderly conduct during demonstrations.<sup>78</sup> An example of this type of activism may be the recommendation that they participate in the activities of the striking committee. Here, children would be useful “especially in the struggle against scabs (drawing on doors, children running behind scabs and calling: You’re stealing our bread). Handing out journals among the strikers. Intelligence reports...”<sup>79</sup> This could potentially develop into symbolic or even open violence. In 1935, the Young Pioneers made rude gestures and were openly aggressive during a demonstration in front of one of the factories on the outskirts of Prague. As Anna Horníková remembers: “They bring them in [scabs] at night, and when they lead them out in the afternoon, the siren doesn’t even sound when the working day is done. The gates fly open and cars exit [...] The gates flew open and right then children, boys, even girls rushed at them from all sides. They rain rocks down on the cars, people are screaming [...] all of a sudden, Karel starts running out of his booth through the open space and behind him Baryk [the butcher’s dog whom the children used as a banner – *authors’ note*]. A white sign hangs from his neck, and on it in red letters: “I’m a dog, but I don’t do scabs.” Karel is lost somewhere and the dog is looking for him, he’s wandering through throngs of people who are screaming, laughing...”<sup>80</sup>

The reality in the troop of young pioneers was much calmer, except for certain exceptions such as these risky activities. They also had to attend the regular membership meetings, gain class awareness through singing revolutionary songs, go on outings to places around the city, rehearse plays and organize small productions. Periodic collective events, such as Red Pentecost or Red Christmas, had a special status.<sup>81</sup>

We did not find any evidence about enforcement in our sources. We can presume that politically engaged activities of children from families of organized communists were

<sup>76</sup> *Kohoutek*, 1926/1927, p. 3; *ibid.*, 1924/1925, p. 58. [Rooster Journal]

<sup>77</sup> *Výboj*, 1929, p. 118. [Spark]

<sup>78</sup> *Kohoutek* 1925/1926, p. 58. [Rooster Journal]

<sup>79</sup> Policejní opis oběžníku dětského byra, 1933; National Archive Prague, collection: *Sbírka organizací mládeže*, box 46.

<sup>80</sup> Anna Horníková, *Rudí průkopníci*, *op. cit.*, pp. 101–102. [Red Pioneers] Story of Baryk was also mentioned at the 7<sup>th</sup> CPC Congress in 1936. See *Protokol VII. sjezdu KSČ*, Liberec 1936, p. 224–225. [Protocol of the 7<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPC]

<sup>81</sup> *Kohoutek*, 1926, p. 310. [Rooster Journal] See also Nečas, Ctibor: *Hnutí ostravské revoluční mládeže*, Ostrava, Profil, 1967, p. 127. [Revolutionary Youth Movement in Ostrava]

not enforced formally by the party bureaucracy. On the other hand, some kind of moral pressure made by other active members and functionaries could be expected. The sources are remarkably silent in this case.

## Conclusion

The children's Communist movement, however exotic and unethical its pedagogical practices may seem, represents a perfect window into the discourse and practice of the Communist movement. From the sources available, one can conclude that its organizations were supposed to function as an integral part of a complex that created the social pillar of the CPC within the competitive environment of the organizational concerns attached to the main political parties. In the social reality at the time, in which large political parties tried to create the most closed and impregnable social environments out of the segments under their control (satellite organization), the CPC saw its influence on the young generation as the key to fulfilling its vision of an ideal society.<sup>82</sup> Joining the Red Pioneers was a formative childhood experience, like an initiation, in which they received a membership card and a symbolic red scarf. This was a step along the ladder that led all the way to a higher form of membership. The ambivalent, but surprisingly utilitarian approach to the institution of the family, which went from pressure on functioning families to the promise to raise their child in party organizations, placed children in the front seat in the family as well as in party activities. Not only did it help parents solve their material problems with raising their children or combine their own political activism with caring for their children, but it offered children access to instructions on how to understand the world around them. The internalization of the image of the world as a black and white reality between the evil bourgeoisie and the good proletariat helped children construct ethical principles that would guide them to their future political activism. As yet, no scholarly study has been written on the issue of the dynamics of the children's Communist movement in interwar Czechoslovakia, so we must make do for now with provisional findings based on the sources available. Whether the goal of "giving the working class conscious revolutionaries" was successful in the long-term<sup>83</sup> will be a challenge for continuing historical research.

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<sup>82</sup> Peter Heumos, "Strukturální prvky první Československé republiky, *Soudobé dějiny*", 1995, pp. 159–160. [The Structural Elements of the First Czechoslovak Republic]

<sup>83</sup> *Komunistická mládež*, 4.9.1925. [Communist Youth Journal]