



Czech national awareness in Moravia in the revolutionary years 1848/1849

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This study focuses on the process of the gradual shaping of Czech national awareness in Moravia from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards when the necessary conditions for the development of improved mutual relations between the Czech (Slavic) population in the two Lands of the Czech Crown – Bohemia and Moravia – were slowly being formed. Moravia faced a number of handicaps to the development of a national revival in comparison with Bohemia, the most significant of which was the relatively high degree of Germanisation of the land. A change to the image of Moravia came in the revolutionary years 1848/1849, when Czech national awareness spread to broader sections of society in Moravia. The view of Bohemia held by the Moravians underwent significant change and a period of increasingly intensive political and cultural contact between the two lands arose.

Key words: *national awareness; nationalism; shaping of modern Czech nation; provincial patriotism; Slavism; constitutional connection; the “spring of nations”; the work of civic associations*

Let us first remember the words of the distinguished Moravian poet Jan Skácel, who worked for many years in Brno, who said the following on the issue of Moravia a number of decades ago: *“Moravia is a remarkable country if only for the fact that it exists and does not exist.”* These few words hold the key to the fundamental question: *Are the people of Moravia Moravians or Czechs?* This topic has been the subject of much discussion (of varying levels of intensity) for almost two centuries. Many views have been expressed on the issue of the identity of the people of Moravia (Moravians – a group in which the local Germans also included themselves) and much debate held on their relationship with the Czechs and on the history of the constitutional position of the Margraviate of Moravia within the Lands of the Czech Crown. The principal subject of interest to the historians up to the end of the

eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century was investigation of the essence and transformation of the provincial awareness of the Moravian aristocracy and their relationship to the Czech aristocracy.

With the emergence of a modern national awareness associated with the industrial revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was necessary for this movement to be placed in the framework of the great political, social and cultural changes that had set society into motion. It ceased to be an issue merely within the aristocratic environment, but became a process in which other sections of the population, particularly the middle class, educated people and the emerging political classes, were gradually involved. The term nationalism became widely used for this turmoil in society which brought with it the idea of the nation. Today, we generally associate this term with a dangerous force threatening order and political stability accompanied by excesses occurring in the name of the nation. Nationalism, as we know, has not, however, given rise only to negative phenomena such as jingoism, racism, aggressiveness and destructive militant notions of the exclusiveness of one's nation associated with militarism, but in its beginnings played its part in the formation of modern democratic society. In the first half of the nineteenth century, it was associated with the democratic and cultural aspirations of a middle class that was becoming emancipated which can be called a national movement (also popularly referred to as a national revival), representing a purely intellectual affair that was instrumental to the development of culture and education among the broad masses of the population.

An understanding of the development of national awareness in Moravia must be based on analysis of the history of the Czech national revival in Moravia, whose modest beginnings can be found at the end of the eighteenth century. This emerging national movement played a decisive part in the development of Czech society in Moravia, where the dominant political, economic and social position had been held, until this time, by the German minority. The population of Moravia in these years was about 1,700,000, of which seventy percent spoke the Czech language.¹

The idea that the province formed an independent entity that was not part of a Czech-Moravian identity was widespread in Moravia; any talk of

¹ A detailed investigation of the socio-political situation in Moravia up to the year 1848: Řepa, M. (2001): *Moravané nebo Češi? Vývoj českého národního vědomí na Moravě v 19. století* (Moravians or Czechs? Development of Czech National Awareness in Moravia in the 19th Century). Brno, pp. 7–76.

a wider entity generally had Slavism in mind. What bound Bohemia and Moravia together was, first and foremost, the Czech language (though the Moravians usually referred to it as “Slavic”), though the importance of this factor was in decline as Moravian dialect forms had permeated into the language, followed by the Czech saints – Wenceslas, Ludmila, Vojtech, Procopius and John Nepomuk. Language and history were, then, considered the foundation of Czech-Moravian kinship.

Moravia faced a number of handicaps to the development of the shaping of modern Czech nation in comparison with Bohemia. Most important was the absence of a centre for the national movement in the way that Prague was for Bohemia (the largest Moravian cities Brno and Olomouc tended rather to compete against each other), followed by the influence and attraction of the capital city Vienna and the associated strong degree of Germanisation in the largest Moravian towns (Znojmo, Jihlava, Uničov, Šumperk and Šternberk, in addition to Brno and Olomouc). These towns tended to copy life in the nearby metropolis Vienna; Brno was even sometimes referred to as a suburb of Vienna, while Olomouc stood at the forefront of Pan-German nationalism in Moravia. The Moravian countryside, which had not experienced a great national awakening, could not act as a centre of a national revival with its predominance of a Czech-speaking population with strong dialect influences. The rural population was not affected by a historical awareness and remained apart from the course of cultural events. The situation among the aristocracy and the middle class was just as problematic. This left merely the intelligentsia, though this was generally German or Germanised; Moravia lacked a leading figure of the national revival of the like of Josef Dobrovský or Josef Jungmann in Bohemia. The penetration of the Czech language into the theatre, journalism and literature also lagged behind. All of this caused Moravia to undergo a rather different development in terms of the question of a deepening of national awareness and to lag behind Bohemia by a number of decades. Perhaps the only advantage held by Moravia in this area was the larger proportion of Catholic clergymen among the propounders of the national revival. It must be emphasised that historical awareness was the basis for the development of national awareness throughout the entire nineteenth century in Moravia, as national awareness is, first and foremost, awareness of a common past, and this was extremely weak here. The concepts of homeland and nation were entirely alien to the unpropertied and uneducated population of Moravia.

The first revivalist generation in Moravia was dominated by a “provincial patriotism”, often with a deeply ingrained distrust of

“Hussite” Bohemia by “Catholic” Moravia. The national movement in Moravia took on the form of “Moravianism” based on the patriotism to the provincial estates of the Moravian aristocracy which jealously guarded the political and administrative “independence” of Moravia and asserted a vision of “no constitutional connection with Bohemia”. In contrast to the Czechs, the Moravian aristocracy retained a far greater influence in the land in 1848 than the aristocracy in Bohemia. There was said to be just one nation in Moravia – the Moravian nation – divided by language into German and Slavic (Czech) “tribes”.

Slavism was a strong intellectual movement in Moravia in the first half of the nineteenth century. The idea of a great Slavic nation (community) covering an extensive part of Central, Eastern and South-eastern Europe took hold among patriotic intellectuals and reinforced their resistance to the strengthening German nationalism.

The relationship between the Czechs and the Moravians was made difficult by a number of disputes and often by a sense of jealousy caused by a feeling that the Czechs ignored and underestimated the Moravians. This was also reflected in the linguistic area, in which efforts were made to incorporate Moravian dialects into standard Czech. Views were expressed on the Moravian side, in contrast, that Moravia was the heart of the Czechoslovak Lands and was charged with the task of acting as an intermediary and a link between the Czechs and the Slovaks. Generally only Czechs (i.e. from Bohemia) living in Moravia were responsible for cultural relations between the Czechs and Moravia before 1848. Bohemian Prague only gradually became a cultural model for the majority of Moravian patriots. National life in the two Lands of the Czech Crown developed in relative isolation from one another, however.

The shaping of modern Czech nation did not grow into a national movement in Moravia as it had in Bohemia even in the eighteen forties, but remained restricted to individuals or small centres such as the Augustinian monastery in Old Brno, for example (we might mention the two distinguished names of F. M. Klácel and the founder of genetics J. G. Mendel).²

For the people of the Habsburg Monarchy, the end of the eighteen forties saw a long-awaited release from the existing restrictive political situation. The spring of 1848 brought partial liberalisation (the adoption of a constitution, a weakening of censorship) which politicians and

² Čapka, F. (2003): *Morava. Stručná historie států (Moravia. A Brief History of States)*. Prague, pp. 102–106. Also: Čapka, F. (2001): *Dějiny Moravy v datech (The History of Moravia in Dates)*. Brno, pp. 125–139.

journalists, in particular, took advantage of. Rallies were held and civic associations constituted. Even Moravia was affected by the revolutionary spirit of the “spring of nations”, though considerably less than and rather differently from Bohemia. No dramatic events took place in Moravia (and its important centres Brno and Olomouc) of the kind that took place in Bohemia, and in Prague in particular (the constitution of the “Saint Wenceslas Committee”, the petitioning of the emperor, the constitution of a National Guard, the Slavic Congress and the subsequent June Uprising in Prague). During this revolutionary period, the Moravian politicians concentrated largely on the demarcation of Czech-Moravian relations. The unrest among the workers at a number of places in Moravia had a generally socio-economic subtext.

The first impulse towards stirring up discussion in Moravia on the scope of its independence was the demand for the constitutional connection of Bohemia, Moravia and (Czech) Silesia expressed in Prague by representatives of the “Saint Wenceslas Committee” on 11 March 1848 in a petition addressed to Emperor Ferdinand I in Vienna. On the position of Moravia, the petition spoke of the Moravians as the “native brothers of the Czechs” and demanded the same rights for them as the Czechs had.³ Its authors sought support for the text of this petition in Moravia. Because it had been written without consultation with the Moravian Provincial Diet, however, it met with a lukewarm, even negative, response here as the Moravian functionaries took the chosen procedure as a deliberate oversight of attitudes in Moravia and an attempt by the Czechs to decide the fate of Moravia behind their backs. The representatives of the Moravians at the last Moravian Provincial Diet of the Estates emphasised the necessity of maintaining Moravian autonomy in particular in reference to the “higher principle”, i.e. the principle of freedom. Only in the following months did the idea of freedom come to be overshadowed by the interests of the growing Czech and German movements.⁴ Their longing for freedom was closely accompanied by

³ Note the following fundamental part of the petition relating to Moravia: “*Moravians, brothers of the Czechs, with whom they have lived in alliance since ages past, and who therefore recognise the same needs as they, ask the following: 1. For them to be accorded the same rights as those won by the Czechs..., in respect of both the system of provincial government and the system of local government. 2. For Moravia to remain independent regardless of this level of rights... 4. For the members of the Czech and Moravian assemblies to come together for joint debate. 5. For the Czech and Moravian nation to guarantee each other civic freedom and national equality.*” For more detail see: Čapka, F.: *Dějiny Moravy v datech (The History of Moravia in Dates)*, op. cit., p. 140.

⁴ Colours on ribbons or flags became the outward sign of national radicalisation; at the beginning of the spring of 1848 the white colour (the colour of freedom) was still used

demands for autonomy.⁵ They took a decisive stand against the connection of Bohemia and Moravia, as in their opinion Moravia was an independent land belonging exclusively to the union of the Habsburg monarchy.

A special address to the emperor in Vienna was formulated at the *Moravian Provincial Diet* in the middle of April 1848 (as a response to the separate talks of the “Czechs with Vienna”) containing a protest against the Prague petition that had demanded the “merging of the estates of the two lands”, and expressing a contrasting demand for Moravian autonomy within the Austrian Empire.⁶ The Czech constitutional viewpoint (the Prague petition) was defended by merely a section of the Moravian journalists and intellectuals and by around two hundred local representatives, mainly from central Moravia. The Moravian Germans, on the other hand, were firmly against it and adopted an address to the emperor in Olomouc on 19 March in which they demanded the connection of Moravia to the German lands of Austria, saying that otherwise “the Moravians would become slaves after being joined with Bohemia”.

The elections to the Pan-German “Frankfurt” assembly that took place in the border lands and the ethnically mixed Czech-German areas of

by everyone. Gradually those holding the German ideals began to wear black, red and yellow, Austrian patriots began to wear black and yellow, while Czech and “Slavic” patriots wore red and white.

⁵ The last Moravian Provincial Diet of the Estates was held in Brno on 30 March 1848; it was comprised of lords, knights, church dignitaries and representatives of the royal towns. The majority of the 69 deputies present were members of the aristocracy and representatives of the Catholic Church (mostly Germans). The towns (also largely represented by German deputies) held seven votes. From 14 April, the diet was expanded to include a further thirty deputies from seven royal towns in Moravia (Brno 10, Olomouc 7, Jihlava, Znojmo and Uničov 3 each, Uherské Hradiště and Kyjov 2 each). For more detail see: *Ibid*, p. 141. The new constitutional Moravian Provincial Diet met in Brno on 31 May 1848. It was made up of 261 deputies, of whom 124 were Slavs-Czechs; it is known as the “peasant diet” in view of the large number of deputies from rural towns and villages. For more detail see: Janák, J.: *Návrh moravského zemského zřízení z roku 1848 o složení zemského sněmu* (Proposal of the Moravian Provincial System of Government of 1848 for the Composition of the Provincial Diet). In Janák, J. (2007): *Morava v národním a politickém ruchu 19. století* (*Moravia in the National and Political Turmoil of the 19th Century*). Brno, pp. 11–21.

⁶ The given address also stated that “*the Margraviate of Moravia has always been a land separate from and independent of Bohemia, in spite of the fact that there has always been a close bond here in view of their shared nationality. Connection with Bohemia would be a violation of the Moravian constitution and the independence of the land... The Margraviate of Moravia would, however, support the related Czech Kingdom in view of the preservation of a strong and friendly union and the similarity of their nationalities and languages, so long as this is not to the detriment of the independence of the land.*” *Ibid*.

Moravia in May 1848, which were characterised by an atmosphere of increasing German nationalism and contributed to a growth in Czech-German antagonism, can be seen as a certain turning point in the strengthening of Czech national awareness in Moravia. The Moravians began to feel the danger of Slavic denationalisation from the Germans among their fellow citizens more intensely. The Moravian Germans, who were strong both politically and economically, represented the greatest obstacle to the joining of Moravia and Bohemia; the Moravian Jews, who were heavily Germanised, were in agreement with the Germans on this matter. From the middle of 1848 onwards, it became increasingly clear that cracks were appearing in the coexistence of the Czechs and the Germans as represented by a provincial awareness of belonging to the same land, i.e. Moravia, and these cracks gradually widened into a situation of conflict. The factors that had unified them thus far now ceased to be priorities in the newly forming civic society in Moravia. The two nationalities split into sides with widely differing opinions. The ideas of nationality and national awareness took hold to the detriment of provincial interests.

Awareness of the fact that the Czech-speaking Moravians formed a different community to their German fellow citizens aroused greater interest in Bohemia among the Moravians. The years 1848 and 1849 provided the Czechs and the Moravians with a number of opportunities to come together. The first such official contact between the patriotic elites of the two lands came at the beginning of June 1848 at the *Slavic Congress*. Even though this Slavic summit did not prove a success, it was a significant aid to the development of national awareness. Representatives of the Moravian patriotic community (around a hundred delegates out of the total number of around 340 participants) were able to meet up here with the elite of Czech social, cultural and (the emerging) political life. A "spirit of national unity between the Moravians and the Czechs" was asserted at joint talks. Wishes for unification still came from Prague more than from Moravia, and evoked considerable indignation among the Moravian Germans.

The *Imperial Diet* proved far more favourable soil for shaping Czech national awareness. The Czech Moravians had ceased to seek allies in the German deputies from Moravia, looking now to the Czech deputies from Bohemia. Moravian politicians abandoned their provincial viewpoint and began to focus more on a broader national (Czech) politics. The newly established association of Moravian compatriots contributed to this in Vienna. Co-operation between Czech and Moravian politicians continued at the Imperial Diet in Kroměříž, to where its proceedings had

moved from Vienna in November 1848. They met up in a joint Slavic grouping that included the Moravian section. Kroměříž and the entire Haná region were alive with these extraordinary events and became the centre of Czech life in Moravia. Various festivities, rallies and marches (although initially organised primarily in honour of the presence of Emperor Ferdinand) provided significant momentum for Czech-Moravian rapprochement and a deepening of national awareness. This was fully reflected in the draft text of a new constitution put forward by the principal representative of the Czech national movement in these years, the historian František Palacký, at a meeting of the constitutional committee on 23 January 1849. This paper proposed the division of the Austrian Empire into eight groups of countries according to national criteria; one part was to be comprised of the Czech Lands (i.e. Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, though without the German borderlands) and Hungarian Slovakia. This proposal documented the view that the division of the Czech Lands according to nationality was practically impossible. The events of the following days in March 1849, however, put an end to this proposal; the Kroměříž Diet was dissolved and a centralist constitution forced upon the Austrian Monarchy.

The foundation of patriotic institutions in Prague provided a model for the Moravians to strengthen patriotic feeling. The fact that the Moravian press began to depict the Czechs as people close to the Moravians made a great contribution to the development of national awareness – the Czechs were most commonly referred to as *brothers* (or *blood brothers*), Moravia as their *sister*. Sometimes the word *twins* was used. In spite of this, however, it must be said that Moravians still did not usually refer to themselves as Czech in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The first patriotic organisations in Moravia were the “*Slavic Lindens*” which performed mostly civic and cultural educational work; the first such Slavic Linden was established in Olomouc at the end of May 1848. This association is often called the first political association in Moravia, whose primary stated aim was close co-operation with Bohemia and the constitutional connection of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, including the cultivation of Slavic mutuality.⁷

Czech Moravia was, however, still lacking a centre of the kind represented by Prague and its National Committee in Bohemia. The Slavic Lindens scattered around Moravia were not able to form a central

⁷ For a clarification of this issue see also: Malíč, J. (1990): *Morava na předělu* (K formování národního vědomí na Moravě v letech 1848–1871) (Moravia at the Turning Point – The Shaping of National Awareness in Moravia in the Years 1848–1871). In *Časopis Matice moravské* (The Journal of the Moravian Foundation), pp. 345–363.

body of any kind. The newly constituted Moravian Provincial (“peasant”) Diet was unable to fulfil the role played by the National Committee in Prague. Czech Moravia also lacked the kind of personalities that Prague could boast (F. Palacký, K. Havlíček). Moravia’s strengths were splintered between Brno and Olomouc. The association constituted in Brno at the beginning of June 1848 under the title *Jednota moravská (The Moravian Union)*, which aimed to contribute to book publication for Czech-speaking Moravians, tried to act as a certain kind of substitute for a central Moravian institution. The *Národní jednota sv. Cyrila a Metoděje (The National Union of Saints Cyril and Methodius)*, which aimed to “awaken and reinforce national awareness”, set itself a similar goal in the middle of April 1849. The union saw the means for fulfilling this goal in the publication of books and magazines, the foundation of libraries, and the development of Czech education.⁸

The revolutionary years 1848–1849 began to change the face of Moravia. Social conditions relaxed for the Czech national movement in Moravia, and people were freely able to become acquainted with ideas such as nation, homeland and national awareness. Journalism helped the national awareness to penetrate into broader sections of society, though represented primarily by the population of the towns and the rural intelligentsia. Its penetration into wider civic society would still have to wait. Nevertheless, the years 1848 and 1849 changed the view of the Czechs held by the Moravians fundamentally and strengthened Czech national awareness and a sense of fellowship with the Czechs. Two facts assisted these developments: 1. heightening Czech-German antagonism led to Czech-Moravian rapprochement, and 2. increasingly intensive political and cultural contact between the Czechs and the Moravians.⁹ Czech national emancipation, which culminated in October 1918 in the declaration of Czechoslovak independence and, shortly afterwards, the Czechoslovak Republic, was subsequently founded in the emerging ideals of cultural independence and political state sovereignty in the two Lands of the Czech Crown.

⁸ An image of Moravia in eighteen forty-eight is provided by: Macůrek, J. (1948): *Rok 1848 a Morava (1848 and Moravia)*. Brno.

⁹ For more detail see: Řepa, M.: op. cit., pp. 77–105.