

SOCIAL CARE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTHS IN THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

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Abstract: *Public health care and social services for children and youths were absolutely insufficient in the interwar Czechoslovakia. Some tasks, such as care for disabled or mentally handicapped children, were transferred to the provincial governments of Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, municipal authorities were forced to take care of children dependent on public welfare due to being poor or deserted. Municipalities lacked funds, necessary facilities and often sympathy.*

Key words: *children and youth; social services; first Czechoslovak Republic*

Public health and social care for youths were absolutely insufficient in the interwar Czechoslovakia. Some tasks, such as care for disabled children, were transferred to the provincial government. Municipal government was forced to take care of those children dependent on public welfare due to being poor or deserted. Municipalities lacked funds, necessary facilities and often sympathy. There was also a big difference between Czech Lands, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The tasks in Slovakia, provided by municipalities in our country, were provided by the state, which was taking care of all orphans up to 15 years. Also, the care of disabled children was provided by the Slovak State. Therefore, the Ministry of Social Welfare in 1927 prepared a bill that would care for young people across the united Czechoslovakia. According to the unification ministry, if the Hungarian state was able to take care of orphans, then the Czechoslovak democratic state must be able to do it too.

Social care for young people was based on the principle that the basic sociological unit is the family which is the foundation of the community, nation and state. Social care for adolescents of 14 to 18 years tried to develop a harmonious person who wanted advice on choosing a profession, convey to him employment and to enable the socially poor people to gain this goal. After leaving school in some regions more than half of the children were forced to seek employment outside the home – both as workers and as apprentices. Therefore, the Czech Provincial Youth Care wanted to register the needs of young people in different districts in adolescent departments at District Youth Cares. Teenagers should be concentrated in junior groups because of their education. Counselling centers for adolescents used to be set up - especially for their career choice. Mediation of apprenticeships and youth employment was suppo-

sed to be more effectively organized with a help of job centres. Attention should be paid to feeding the poor young people by establishing cafeterias, housing in orphanages and providing clothing needs.

According to State Statistical Office (SÚS), especially in Bohemia the birth rate dropped so low it was not enough to maintain the population status. Therefore, the Ministry of Health established the Advisory Council on population issues, which should propose appropriate economic and financial-political measures. State Statistical Office (SÚS) pointed to the unusually high mortality of children under one year and an excessive number of stillbirths. Of the total of 202 thousand cases of death in 1936, 6 thousand were stillborn children and 33 thousand were deaths of children under one year.

The number of live births per 1 thousand citizens of Czechoslovakia was 3,9 people, including 0,3 in Bohemia, 4,0 in Moravia and Silesia, 8,6 in Slovakia and 16,4 in the Carpathian Ruthenia. However, in Slovakia out of the total number of 82 thousand births there were 2 thousand stillbirths, 2 200 children died in the first week of life, 10 thousand children died under one year of age. The main cause of infant mortality was congenital weakness (4 500 cases). Another problem was the issue of abortions – mostly illegal and only half were conducted by physicians. The killing of the fetus was a crime, which carried a 15 year jail term. Abortion should be prevented by improving prospects for unmarried pregnant women, illegitimate children, ensuring a sufficient income for the young couple and by education leading to responsibility.

The Ministry of Health convened a panel of scientific and socio-political workers to establish the Advisory Board for the issue of population. They emphasized that it was not only a medical, but also a biological, moral and economic problem. The Advisory Board was to provide an economic and financial basis for a systematic fight against depopulation.

The Ministry of Health carried out the central administrative guidance To Our Children designed for mothers and infants. Each clinic led, inter alia, an overview of fertility and infant mortality in its district. The clinics cooperated with all local institutions of social and health care. Counselling for mothers and children should also include children in someone else's care and children out of wedlock which was carried out until the child was six, including regular medical surveillance records.

The Czech Provincial Commission for the Care of Youth in Bohemia asked the Regional office for support and cooperation in identifying causes of stillbirth and infant mortality (children under one year). A part of the Provincial Commission was also the Department for Mothers and Infants, which previously operated independently as the Czechoslovak Protection of Mothers and Children. The Provincial Commission developed an extensive questionnaire recording details of all deaths and stillborn children. A purely medical part was supposed to be filled in by a doctor in order to ensure professional standards of action. The social part was filled in by the social worker.

The Association for the Protection of Mothers and Infants in the Czech Kingdom was already founded in 1915. During the First World War it took over the distribution of milk to poor mothers in Prague and it also extended its organization in the Czech countryside. It supported 10 thousand mothers in Prague and 50 thousand mothers in the countryside. It was based on the fact that the child's health care is the foundation of social hygiene. In Czechoslovakia the bearer and executor of public care for mothers were the public corporations – the state, country, counties and municipalities, as well

as the health insurance companies headed by the Central Social Insurance Company. Organizations worked only as subsidiary bodies and additional authorities, particularly the Provincial Headquarters of Youth Care, the Czechoslovak Protection for Mothers and Children (150 organizations in Bohemia) and Czechoslovak Red Cross (ČSČK). Community care e.g. supported 58 counseling rooms called For our Children.

The Slovak division ČSČK established health stations for children according to the English pattern. The first one was established in Žilina - founded by an English mission which after the First World War handed out food, clothing and financial support. It also provided medical and health advice. In the years 1920-1921 it founded 20 children's stations, including 10 permanent and 10 travelling. In 1921 their activity was taken over by ČSČK. The aim of the stations was to eliminate social poverty by material support and build children's stations in every political district. ČSČK emphasized more prevention, limited medical care to the poorest and unemployed. All efforts should be aimed at education at work and charity, and also support activities restricted to cases of abandoned mothers with many children, the elderly and the ill. The children's stations were the institutions where people could find support and advice on health and on medical, moral, legal and material issues. ČSČK warned that people underestimated the importance of health advice, they forgot to change dark and crowded dwellings and that the change of ventilation, use of the sun and nature, improving nutrition, awareness of the importance of breastfeeding was often the same and sometimes more important than treatment and financial support and that the moral support was more important than the material one. In total there were 62 children's stations in Slovakia, mostly in the northern mountainous regions of Slovakia. Most stations were in the district of Čadca. In the records there were 37 000 people. At each station there was a nurse. Social work was also performed by ČSČK adolescents – they worked at 2 000 Slovak schools.

In the winter period of 1928-1929 the government authorized five million CZK on the diet for poor children. The Czech Provincial Commission for the Care of Youth set up and kept 1 000 local stations. The average number of children boarded daily in the period of critical frost exceeded 68 thousand. During the whole winter they issued 3 750 000 doses of a food supplement for the nourishment of the family. In the solid freeze up to -30 °C, in freezing winds and snowdrifts the school children waded knee-deep and waist-deep through snow, struggling on the slippery icy roads to school in many cases up to 2 hours away. They came to school exhausted from fatigue, chilled and frozen and they often cried in pain. Therefore it was necessary to cheer them up with a hot tea and at noon to give them hot food so that their health would not permanently suffer.

The Czech Provincial Commission for the Care of Youth in Bohemia in 1929 stated that the financial situation of voluntary organizations for the care of youth was critical because of the drop in public finances after the beginning of the Great Depression, so it was not enough for the large tasks if they had not received support from state authorities part of whose agenda was engaged in the care of young people. They suggested that the association of child care would be focused in one organization, thereby the collections held by individual organizations would be unified.

Religious associations were also engaged in the care of youth – it was e.g. the Child Asylum of the Gracious Infant Jesus of Prague under the Protection of Saint Joseph in Prague that was catholic and a purely non-political charity. The purpose of the

asylum was to take care of Catholic children who were abandoned and orphaned, particularly those who were illegitimate, 1 year old, so that they would later become proper Catholic Christians, Czechs and - first since 1908 - Austrians, later Czechoslovaks. The asylum warned that if a third of the amount withdrawn from cinemas were given to charitable institutions, there would not have been any starving children who had no place to sleep. The Asylum in 1929 accommodated and fed 93 children, the meal cost per child a year was 3 398 CZK (in 1928 it was 2 828 CZK).

The Home for Abandoned and Orphaned children in Prague nurtured, clothed and raised in their two homes in Záběhlice and Strašnice an average of 48 children aged 5 to 15 years, of which only a few parents contributed a little. The Home was established for illegitimate children – the foundlings, but there were also more and more children from broken marriages, children of unemployed parents and abused children.

The Czech Provincial Commission for the Care of Youth in Bohemia warned the Interior Ministry of the bad influence of scouting and camping that undermined the moral upbringing of youth. It claimed that boys and girls have the field trips together, they behave indecently on the way and on a train, they spend the night outdoors or in tents, which compromises their morality. In addition, boys ruthlessly ravaged the countryside.

Similar views were held by the District Care for Youth in Beroun. The scouts were allegedly stealing firewood, they startled the deer in the district and at night they slept in tents with young girls. It was suggested that the juvenile scouts were excluded from the night train services. The district youth welfare in Jílové depicted the wild scouts and ramblers as the terror of the countryside which caused the owners of forests, gardens, fields and meadows major damage, they committed garden and field theft. Immature young people often camped in tents together, they drank alcohol, smoked, went poorly dressed and committed bloody fights. And also the District Care for Youth in Zbraslav thought the tramping was unacceptable in the whole area of Vltava and Sázava. It drew attention to the shouting, singing and playing of record players at night. In the evenings - when it was still light and with the sounds of accordions - they demonstrated coitus on the square. Youth under the age of 16 slept in tents. They went to the square in swimsuits, speaking roughly, singing and playing on the decks and roofs of railway wagons. They were ignoring the separate boys and girls rides in school wagons. District Care for Youth of South Bohemia demanded that the District Attorneys there established social and health boards to make the district authorities send their representatives to administrative committees of the District Cares for Youth, so that the district annual budgets would include a reasonable amount to support District Cares for Youth, then they asked the district offices to have stable social-health officers, and the municipalities to take into consideration reasonable allowances for District Youth Welfare in their budgets and to make the illegitimate fathers pay alimony.

In 1931 the Czechoslovak Union of Care for the Young was appointed. It grouped Land Youth Welfares of all countries of Czechoslovakia. Headquarters of the Union was in Prague, but the offices were in Brno. It was a response to the increased need for social care for young people in times of economic crisis and therefore the need to increase financial assistance from public funds. During a period of 3-6 months there were on average 76 000 children nurtured daily, they were distributed about 4 million doses of dishes. Orphans were placed in colonies of the Czech Provincial Commission for Youth

Welfare in Bohemia, which built the Masaryk Children's Home in Mariánské Lázně. The Home cared for needy children from 6 to 14 years.

Presidium of the Czech Provincial Commission for the Care of Youth in Bohemia, chaired by Senator Vojta Beneš, did not even have an approximate idea of how many disabled children there were in the country. Individual facilities for handicapped children were not organized as parts of a single overall plan according to reliable statistical findings. Therefore the commission announced the four directives: plan, usefulness, economy, efficiency. The first step should be a register of disabled children as well as all social institutions and facilities. There were only 20 thousand physically and mentally disabled children in Bohemia.

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SOCIÁLNÍ PÉČE O DĚTI A MLÁDEŽ ZA PRVNÍ ČSR

Abstrakt: Veřejná zdravotní a sociální péče o mládež byla v meziválečném Československu naprosto nedostatečná. Některé úkoly, jako péče o postižené děti, byly přeneseny na zemskou samosprávu v Čechách, na Moravě, ve Slezsku, na Slovensku a na Podkarpatské Rusi, obecní samospráva zase byla nucena se starat o ty děti, které pro chudobu nebo opuštěnost byly odkázány na veřejnou péči. Obce k tomu neměly dostatek financí, potřebná zařízení a často ani porozumění.

Klíčová slova: děti a mládež, sociální péče, 1. ČSR