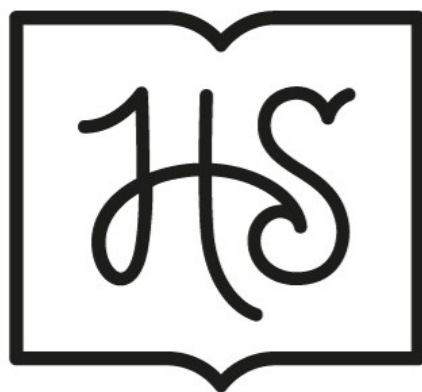


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Liberec, 1-2 June 2015

Růžena VÁŇOVÁ^a

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Seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II became the impetus to convene an international scientific conference entitled *Education and Schooling in the hand-cuffs of totalitarian beliefs and systems. A general pedagogical and historical analysis of chosen education and schooling philosophies and school systems which fell under and functioned within totalitarian systems in the twentieth century.* The initiators and organizers were the National Pedagogical Museum and Library of J.A. Comenius, Prague and the Technical University of Liberec, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Humanities and Pedagogy, Department of Pedagogy and Psychology. The conference was held in June 1 and 2 t the Faculty of Natural Sciences, Humanities and Pedagogy, Department of Pedagogy and Psychology of the Technical University of Liberec. The conference took place under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic. In addition to organizing institutions the conference was supported also by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the German-Czech Fund for the Future. At the conference, 53 participants from 13 European countries made their speeches.

The aim of the conference was to present and analyze selected educational concepts of the 20th century, which fell for totalitarianism and educational systems that functioned within the totalitarian socio-political systems. A kind of motto of the conference became a presentation

by professor Zdeněk Helus, which focused on the crisis of humanity as a challenge to education. Almost all contributions related one way or another to this topic. Two-thirds of the total meeting time was dedicated to speeches in the plenary, which defined totalitarian and anti-totalitarian education and pedagogy, looking for their sources. In this context, a contribution presented by Professor Ehrenhard Skiera was extremely remarkable. It dealt with selected issues of pedagogy of Marie Montessori and Paul Petrovich Blonskij. The contributor characterized these important representatives of the reform pedagogy as proponents of the authoritarian conception of education that must, according to Skiera, inevitably result in a system of an implicit totalitarian educational state. According to the contributor, both of the concepts in the theoretical and educational level show clear signs of epistemological and structural totalitarianism. In this context, it seems that reform pedagogy should be subjected to a thorough re-examination (as it was the case in the Western European historical and educational research discussion) that would confirm or disprove this statement, because this evaluation casts "a dark shadow" over the reform pedagogy hitherto known as a new paradigm of education, which gave new direction to the former Herbart's pedagogy. As regards the theoretical foundations of the totalitarian pedagogy, a contribution by Andreas Hoffman-Ocon on eugenics attracted the attention, in particular as regards its reflection in teacher journals

Particularly Czech and Slovak participants of the conference expected with interest the speech of Professor Simonetta Polenghi, which dealt with Giovanni Gentile. This representative of Italian idealistic pedagogy was introduced to Czechoslovak pedagogical public for the first time and up to now also for the last time by Josef Hendrich in 1926 (the text *Philosophical movements in pedagogy*) as a remarkable philosopher, who believed in ethical state and therefore viewed the fascist state as the parent entity as a means for reaching higher goals. Hendrich, though he knew about Gentile's admiration for Mussolini, could hardly have guessed what career Gentile would make within the fascist movement. That fact was clarified by S. Polenghi in her speech. She presented Gentile in the role of Minister of Education and author of educational reform in the spirit of normalization and centralization, standardization of textbooks and others. The author expressed well the process of thinking development of Gentile already in the title of her contribution: *Giovanni Gentiles' School Reform between Liberalism and Totalitarianism*.

A similar topic "between totalitarianism and democracy" in the conditions of Slovenia presented Professor Edvard Protner from the University of Maribor. Several other posts dealt with school and out-of-school practice of totalitarian education (Theresienstadt education, the concept of national political education among German youth in Czechoslovakia, educational models developed in women's organizations in Spain, the war and post-war developments in education in the Slovak Republic, Hungary, Poland, GDR). A contribution of Professor Charles Rýdl was of the methodological nature – To the issue of evaluation of education and training in totalitarian regimes.

The first conference day was concluded with the reception of participants in the Liberec Regional Gallery, where two prominent personalities of the world of pedagogy were awarded

J. A. Comenius medals - Professor E. Skiera from the University of Flensburg and Professor S. Polenghi from the Catholic University of Sacro Cuore in Milan. The awarded contributed significantly to a common pedagogical discussion between the former "Eastern and Western" pedagogy after 1989.

Plenary Sessions continued throughout the morning hours of the second day of the conference. In the afternoon it was replaced by panel discussions. There were presented contributions mostly by domestic participants of the conference. Meetings in sections were, as usual, in comparison to the plenary contributions less formal and created an imminent lively discussion.

The conference in Liberec was a remarkable event both in terms of the topic chosen, as well as the number of participants and the number of participating countries. The conference brought not only new knowledge, but it enriched significantly the historical-educational and educational-comparative research. The conference also contributed to the deepening of international scientific cooperation, was an opportunity to establish new contacts in the field of educational science. The greatest success of the conference, however, was undoubtedly the fact that it became a meeting point of experts, mostly university teachers, anyway workers in the field of history of education and pedagogy, who until recently were on "opposite sides" of the Iron Curtain, where they reflected together on problems that led to the loss of human dignity, to the crisis of humanity and they strongly and loudly warned against reckless conduct that would result in a repetition of the disaster whose anniversary we have commemorated this year.

The conference was extraordinary successful. Both organizing institution – the National Pedagogical Museum and Library of J.A. Comenius, Prague and the Technical University of Liberec, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Humanities and Pedagogy, Department of Pedagogy and Psychology – deserve our great gratitude.