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Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and His Philosophical Genesis of Economic Thinking

Abstract

The end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was a period of numerous changes in Europe. The end of the First World War created an opportunity for the countries of Eastern and Central Europe to gain the desired independence. One of the countries which was created after the end of the Great War was Czechoslovakia. The aim of the article is to present the profile of the Czech politician, sociologist and philosopher, the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (7 March 1850 – 14 September 1937), who was elected three times to this office. His observations in the area of economics were formed under the influence of many philosophers, including Auguste Comte, Johann Gottfried Herder, Immanuel Kant, František Palacký, Ján Kollár. The article includes the review of the main opinions and thoughts of Masaryk concerning such topics as: poverty, getting rich, having money, entrepreneurship of individual nations, collectivisation of certain areas of the economy. His attitude to Karl Marx's socio-economic views was also subject to discussion. The work was written on the basis of an on-line archive query, which contains studies related to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and his works.

Keywords: Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Czechoslovakia, president of Czechoslovakia, philosophy of economics, Marxist economics

“Do not fear, and do not steal”

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

Introduction

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (7 March 1850–14 September 1937) was a Czech politician, sociologist and philosopher. During the First World War he became an advocate and supporter, as well as populariser of the idea of Czech independence. He was the founder and the first president of Czechoslovakia. Initially, although he was inclined to the repairment of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy as part of a common democratic



federal state, during the First World War he began to declaim more explicitly for the abolition of the monarchy¹.

Masaryk was born in a poor working class family in Hodonín, Moravia. He grew up in the village of Čejkovice, Moravia, and later moved to Brno, where he attended a German-speaking secondary school. At that time his first interest in political and national issues appeared. At Brno school he found out about the Czech-German conflict². His father was Józef Masaryk, his mother Teresa Masaryková (née Kropáčková). From 1872 to 1876 Masaryk studied at the University of Vienna. In 1876, he made his doctorate at the same university, and in 1879 he wrote his habilitation thesis. From 1876 to 1879 he studied in Leipzig. In 1882 he was appointed a professor of philosophy at Charles University in Prague³. In 1883, he founded “Athenaeum”, a magazine dedicated to the Czech culture and science⁴.

In December 1914, Masaryk emigrated first to Rome, then to Geneva. In Geneva, he began to organise Czechs and Slovaks living outside Austria-Hungary, mostly in Switzerland, France, England, Russia and the United States, and began to establish international contacts, which – as it turned out later – became crucial for the issue of independence of the Czechs and Slovaks. During this time he gave lectures and wrote numerous articles and official memoranda supporting the so-called Czech issue⁵.

In 1918, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk arrived in the United States, where he convinced President Thomas Woodrow Wilson of the validity of his case. While delivering his speech on 26 October 1918, Masaryk made an appeal for the independence addressed to Czechoslovakia citizens and other oppressed nations of Central Europe. As Austria-Hungary collapsed in 1918, the Allies recognised him as the head of the Provisional Czechoslovak Government (14 October), and on 14 November 1918, he was elected the President of the Czechoslovak Republic by the National Assembly in Prague (Masaryk stayed in New York at that time). He returned to the Prague Castle on 21 December 1918. He was elected a president three times, in 1920, 1927 and 1934. The provision, which was included in the 1920 constitution, exempted him from the two-term limit. On 14 December 1935, he resigned from the president office due to his old age and poor health. Masaryk enjoyed great authority among the Czechoslovak people. Under his leadership, Czechoslovakia became the strongest democracy in Central Europe⁶.

Tomáš Masaryk was a philosopher, rationalist and humanist, who emphasised ethics, thus reflecting the influences of Anglo-Saxon philosophers, French philosophy, and especially the works of the 18th century German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder, who is commonly regarded as the founder of nationalism. Nevertheless, he was extremely critical of German idealism (he often criticised, for example, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel) and Marxism⁷.

¹ Cf. F. Veselý, *Masaryk, jeho život a dílo*, Nákl. G. Dubského, Praha 1918.

² P. Eberhardt, *Poglądy geopolityczne Tomasza Masaryka*, “Przegląd Geograficzny” 2017, no. 2, p. 319.

³ E. Denis, *První prezident republiky Československé Masaryk*, Nákl. olce a imáka, Praha 1919, p. 10; R. Flieder, *T.G. Masaryk*, Melantrich, Praha 1920, p. 3–21; J. Herben, *T.G. Masaryk, prezident republiky Československé*, Nákl. Šolc a Šřimaček, Nakladatelská společnost, 1920, pp. 43–46.

⁴ E. Denis, *První prezident...*, p. 14.

⁵ F. Veselý, *Masaryk, jeho život...*, pp. 12–23; J. Gruchała, *Tomáš G. Masaryk*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1996, p. 320.

⁶ R. Flieder, *T.G. Masaryk*, p. 14; M. Bankowicz, *Koncepcja demokracji i niepolitycznej polityki Tomasza Garrigue’a Masaryka*, “Prace Komisji Środkowoeuropejskiej PAU” 2015, vol. XXIII, pp. 29–60.

⁷ Cf. T.G. Masaryk, *The ideals of humanity*, G. Allen & Unwin, London 1938; T.G. Masaryk, *Světová revoluce. Za války a ve válce 1914–1918. Vzpomínka a uvažuje T.G. Masaryk*, Čin a Orbis, Praha 1936; T.G. Masaryk,

As the chief founding father of Czechoslovakia, Masaryk was perceived as a statesman, a distinguished and charismatic politician and diplomat. As Marek Bankowicz states, “Statesmen are rare because the greatness of their historical merits allows them to enter history permanently. T.G. Masaryk was not an ordinary politician. That is obvious. He was certainly one of the greatest statesmen since the scale of his epochal achievements was enormous. He was one of the few who, in the good sense of the word, changed the political map of the world”⁸. The Czechs and Slovaks continue to regard the first president of Czechoslovakia as a symbol of freedom and democracy. His legacy can be noticed, among others, in the establishment of the Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, which since 1990 has been a state award granted to people who have made outstanding contributions to the development of humanity, democracy and human rights. Also Masaryk University in Brno, founded in 1919, bears his name.

It ought to be underlined that Masaryk raised the whole school of followers. He influenced citizens and listeners with his numerous university lectures or lectures addressed to a wide audience. “Every man of good will came out of his lectures with a sense of well-being”⁹. Not only abroad but also in the country Masaryk became a person who won the hearts and minds of all the citizens. The Czechs emphasise that never before has anyone been so unanimously recognised as the leader of the nation and head of state, and never before has the official election for the highest state rank been held with more enthusiasm of the whole nation than in the case of the election of Masaryk as the first president of Czechoslovakia¹⁰. We can certainly say that “he was not elected by the deputies of the National Assembly, but marked by the will of the whole nation”¹¹.

The aim of this study is to present the profile of the first Czechoslovak President, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, and to present his reflections and comments on economic issues. The article reviews Masaryk’s main opinions concerning subjects related to poverty, getting rich, having money, entrepreneurship of individual nations, collectivisation of specific areas of the economy. His ascertainment regarding Karl Marx’s views was also discussed.

The topic was taken up due to the identification of a research gap on the basis of a study of literature, which became a key justification for discussing Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk’s views on, above all, economic, but also political issues, tackled in his works.

The Pragmatism of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and the So-Called Czech Issue

In his works, Masaryk calls himself a realist and a pragmatist. Realism, as he underlines, is a name referring to several methods/ways of thinking which are related to each other,

Kult rozumu a nejvyšší bytosti. 1793–1794, Adolf Synek, Praha 1934; T.G. Masaryk, *Výbor ze spisů T.G. Masaryka*, Jan Laichter, Praha 1930; T.G. Masaryk, *Myšlenky Masarykovy z jeho spisů a řeči: výbor z prací*, Nákladem Nového lidu, Praha 1920c.

⁸ M. Bankowicz, *Demokracja według T.G. Masaryka*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2015, pp. 9–10.

⁹ R. Flieder, *T.G. Masaryk*, p. 14.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 14–15.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

although it is more “depicted in literature and painting than in philosophy”¹². As the first president of Czechoslovakia states, the French writer is guided mainly by reason and pragmatism, and the Russian – by feeling; the French constructs, the Russian paints; the French believes in science, the Russian believes in natural instinct¹³. Which of these methods is better? Masaryk would like to combine these two things with his realism and pragmatism. He refers to the Czech philosopher and pedagogue, Jan Amos Comenius, about whom he says: “For us, Comenius [...] must be something more than he was. We can recognise in him not only the philosophy of the Czech brotherhood, but also the philosophy of the Czech nation and of the Czech history. We see a Czech who is sincere, who cannot be better, but at the same time a man who works for all humanity; he writes in Czech and writes in Latin”¹⁴. His spiritual leaders, such as Auguste Comte, Johann Gottfried Herder, David Hume and Immanuel Kant, have a great faith in reason, and Masaryk, as his works demonstrate, became increasingly rationalist¹⁵. “Rationalism and pragmatism are in a sense a Czech national feature”¹⁶ – he claims. Masaryk very often opposes the Czech pragmatism with the Polish Romanticism. In his works, he emphasises that he does not understand this Polish romantic approach, considering it to be inappropriate and disastrous¹⁷.

František Palacký wrote that “what connects our Czech humanism with Polish messianism is the fact that the messianism followers also build the Polish idea on religious foundations, i.e. Catholicism and Polish history, similar in many aspects to ours. But Russian Slavophilism is closer to our humanism than Polish messianism”¹⁸. Masaryk supports this viewpoint. In his opinion, relying on one’s happiness, on the genius of the people, on the sound instinct of the nation or on God, who at the decisive moment will deliver us from a crisis situation, is not justified. According to him, the German approach of common sense, slow and systematic pursuit of the goal, is more appropriate. As the first president of Czechoslovakia states, “the Russians made this mistake; in their novels we can notice contempt for German accuracy, too ridiculous and petty”¹⁹. Masaryk emphasises and reminds that Tolstoy despises German generals in *War and Peace*, and writes with disgust about doctors in *Anna Karenina*; on the other hand, he puts Kutuzov’s hopelessness and his reliance on his own instincts and the instincts of the people as a model²⁰.

It may be concluded that Masaryk is completely non-Russian in this respect, as he wrote in his book *The spirit of Russia: studies in history, literature and philosophy*. In fact, he devoted his whole life to the fight against distrust towards the western reason and perception of the world²¹. But he also notices the benefits of Russian realism. Dostoyevsky, for instance, is of great importance to Masaryk, although this is what he says, “Dostoyevsky

¹² K. Velemínský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel; sborník*, Vydalo Ministerstvo školství a Národní osvěty, Praha 1920, p. 106.

¹³ Ibidem; T.G. Masaryk, *Nová Evropa: stanovisko slovanské*, Nákl. G. Dubského, Praha 1920b.

¹⁴ T.G. Masaryk, *A. Komenský*, Státní nakladatelství, Praha 1920a, p. 14.

¹⁵ Cf. T.G. Masaryk, *Velcí mužové*, Státní nakladatelství, Praha 1926b.

¹⁶ K. Velemínský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, p. 106.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ T.G. Masaryk, *Palackého idea národa Českého*, Praha Grosman a Svoboda, Praha 1912, p. 17.

¹⁹ K. Velemínský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, p. 107.

²⁰ Ibidem, pp. 106–107.

²¹ Cf. T.G. Masaryk, *The spirit of Russia: studies in history, literature and philosophy*, G. Allen, London 1919b.

lacks a sense of western rationalism and pragmatism”²². “Dostoevsky and the Russian writers in general want to give us the most direct reality yet unprocessed by the man who thinks about it”²³. However, as Masaryk underlines, this reality has no limits, it is infinitely wide and profound. Good and evil, beauty and ugliness are inextricably linked in it, and that is why the Russian novel is so limitless and its characters so profound. Hence, the writer convinces the reader of good, beauty, and truth only by demonstrating that at the bottom of all the things there is a tendency towards good, beauty, and truth²⁴.

While referring to Russia, Poland and Western Europe, Masaryk tackles the dilemmas of smaller nations. He claims that “in the centre of Europe, between Germany and Russia, there is a special zone, i.e. the zone of little nations. The nations are bigger in the west and in the east. Only those located in the centre are small. Some of them are independent, like Romania or at least autonomous, for instance, Hungarians. But next to them, there are three strangled nations that demand political independence, i.e. Poles, Czechs and Southern Slavs”²⁵. In Masaryk’s opinion, the objective of the First World War “is to liberate these three nations, together with the liberation of the French in Alsace-Lorraine, the Danes in Schleswig-Holstein from the German yoke. Therefore, it is rightly said that the First World War is fought in the name of small nations”²⁶. In his works, Masaryk often referred, among others, to Ján Kollár, a Slovak cleric and poet, who formulated the “Czech issue as a problem of a small nation”; František Palacký also raised issues related to a small state²⁷. Obviously, Kollár approached this “national smallness” very emotionally²⁸. Czech pragmatism is characteristic for small nations. Masaryk expresses his opinion and admits quite openly that he is oppressed by the smallness of his nation, but he is not convinced, unlike Kollár, that its source is a small number of citizens. Kollár regretted that “the education of small nations – ‘nations and peoples’ – is itself petty and ailing [...] it is not alive, but only vanishes [...] small nations think and feel only half-way [...] in small nations, humanity manifests itself in a limited, crippled way [...]”²⁹. There is a lot of truth in this, but at the same time Masaryk emphasizes that “this tormenting smallness [...] of national life is only temporary and that it will cease. It will cease with the recognition and acknowledgement of our drawbacks – those who have recognised and felt them will withdraw them”³⁰.

According to Masaryk, a smaller nation can emerge through a realistic and pragmatic approach, focusing its endeavours on economic issues³¹. He states that “our nation, which was once the first in education, should not be the last among nations in the economic sense”³². Masaryk points out that the Czech Reformation is the apogee not only of the his-

²² K. Velemínský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, p. 107.

²³ E. Denis, *První prezident...*, p. 7.

²⁴ K. Velemínský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, p. 107; E. Denis, *První prezident...*, pp. 7–8.

²⁵ T.G. Masaryk, *Svět a Slované*, Nové Čechy 1918, p. 14.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ R. Flieder, *T.G. Masaryk*, p. 32, 55–56; T.G. Masaryk, *Česká otázka: snahy a tuby národního obrození*, Nákl. Asu, Praha 1895, pp. 10–11, 100–135.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 63–64; *Ibidem*, p. 57.

²⁹ K. Velemínský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, p. 345.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 345.

³¹ T.G. Masaryk, *Nová Evropa...*, pp. 57–62, 81–89.

³² F. Veselý, *Masaryk, jeho život...*, p. 15.

tory of the Czech nation, but of the history of the world in general³³. “We must again be, if not the first, at least among the first, we must make a truly cultural, internal policy, aimed at the liberation of spirit and body, a policy of freedom, progress, democracy and the economy”³⁴. Professor Masaryk, as Jan Herben noted, “made us think, taught us to think, turned us away from empty talk”³⁵.

Masaryk often repeated that he was never a zealous patriot. Nevertheless, as his biographers claim, “this should not be understood literally, and only malicious gossipers could interpret his words so that he denied his love for the nation and country. In fact, Masaryk was not a patriot in his childhood, for instance, he did not have a home and a place to spend the time, which we all remember as our family home”³⁶. In his works he repeatedly underlined that at the beginning of the First World War hardly anyone tackled the Czech problem, “today entire Europe knows why the Czechs and Slovaks must regain their independence. In the Allies’ programme submitted to President Wilson, the liberation of the Czechs and Slovaks was announced, and thus the Czechoslovak issue became an international issue”³⁷. He underlines that

the Allies [...] have promised us this programme, and we now have the right to demand that they keep their promise. You, who fight for this programme, who lay down your life, have a greater right, and in the name of these Czech victims we will demand the liberation of our nation. There cannot be a conscious civilised nation in Europe that is not free. We demand the freedom and independence of our nation, just as we demand the freedom and independence of Poles and Southern Slavs and all the nations in general. We demand a free Europe, a free organised humanity – this is our Czech programme, our democratic programme³⁸.

However, according to the first president of Czechoslovakia, this can be achieved through a pragmatic approach. As a proof of solidarity with other oppressed nations, Masaryk sent a telegram to his Polish friends, in which he wrote that “the foreign Czechoslovak National Council warmly thanks the Polish Council for its greetings. We fully agree with the programme of the fight for independence. Without a free Poland there will be no free Czechoslovak state. Let us work together and fight together for the freedom of our nations”³⁹.

In his dissertations, Masaryk also refers to political and economic friendship with Poles. As he states

I have had many conversations with leading people from Poland on this subject; we have even considered a federation, but we have said that in the near future each nation has a lot of its own special constructive work to do, and therefore it is better not to complicate the tasks; but we are trying to reach an economic and military agreement. This will obviously have a purely

³³ Cf. T.G. Masaryk, *Karel Havlíek; snahy a tuby politického probuzení*, Nákl. Jan Laichter, Praha 1904; T.G. Masaryk, *Jan Hus: Naše obrození a naše reformace*, Čas, Praha 1896.

³⁴ F. Veselý, *Masaryk, jeho život...*, p. 15.

³⁵ J. Herben, T.G. Masaryk, *president...*, p. 16; J. Patočka, *Masaryk a naše dnešní otázky*, “Křesťanská revue” 1946, vol. 13, č. 2; J. Patočka, *Masaryk včera a dnes*, “Naše doba” 1946, vol. 52, č. 7.

³⁶ P. Maxa, J. Papoušek, *Masarykovy projevy a ei za války*, S. Minařík, Praha 1919, p. 41.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 90.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

defensive character. We also discussed the Polish case in Silesia; consent is easy – it is rather a small problem in view of the great tasks that await us. It is in our common interest that each of us is as strong as possible. Yet, I must say that the way some Poles try to seize our territory is unacceptable⁴⁰.

According to him, first and foremost, it is necessary to “consolidate the territory of our country, and then we can voluntarily proceed to repair the borders”⁴¹.

Masaryk says that “from time to time we hear voices from Poland that the Polish nation will be the leader of the Slavic nations, that it is the largest after the Russians and that it has the appropriate western cultural foundations”⁴². He acknowledges that it is necessary to watch Poland with attention and see whether it can conduct such a policy. “But I must say,” he adds, “that I do not see sufficient conditions for this”⁴³.

Getting Rich and Enjoying Life. The Paradox of “Progress” according to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

Masaryk often raised the question of having money and getting rich. As he points out “recently, there has been a growing interest in economic issues, and since 1848 the following slogan has been promoted: get rich. The practical man will not deny this, but getting rich cannot be the most important goal of our lives, it depends on how one can use wealth. There are people who want to get rich and become rich, but they are slaves to money”⁴⁴. Masaryk thinks that a nation and every individual must be the master of that wealth. This means that one should not yield to materialism, even if “it is adorned with the more beautiful phrases of morality, religion, anything, but be the master of money, be able to earn it honestly and be able to use it fairly”⁴⁵. Masaryk notices that in one of Dostoyevsky’s novels, several young men discuss some economic secrets. Some people have an irresistible desire to become financiers, bankers, or second Rothschilds. As Masaryk says, fortunately not everyone. In his opinion, one must think in terms of the joy of the little things that surround us, and not just how to become rich. But he also points out that he is aware that many citizens are simply forced to work hard because of poverty. Then he emphasises that a man who “labours from the morning to night in a factory, in a writing room, or working on a book, is not dangerous. The danger begins when there is no work. It is also the social and moral pain of the unemployed, in which perhaps the problem of economic materialism accumulates and in which the whole dilemma of our nation lies”⁴⁶.

When discussing the issue of entrepreneurship, Masaryk divided trade into different types. For instance, as he states, “there is our Czech and Austrian trade. The Czech entrepreneurship is petty, worthless, coercive and idle. The Czech entrepreneurs would like to

⁴⁰ R. Flieder, *T.G. Masaryk...*, p. 72.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² T.G. Masaryk, *Světová revoluce...*, p. 529.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ K. Veleminský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, p. 309.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 310.

get rich immediately without any effort, without any work⁷⁴⁷. Masaryk sees the reasons for this in following the Tsarist Russia, where the most important, as he calls it, is “cheap cunning”, and “gold fetishism”, which is connected with various superstitions and purely mundane, ceremonial piety, not ashamed to sell another man “for any penny”⁷⁴⁸. On the opposite side Masaryk puts the German merchant, who, according to him, is characterised by a more solid, more entrepreneurial, educated and more advanced approach. Finally, as he indicates, there is a type of the English and American merchant. He sees him as a man characterised by energy, diligence and entrepreneurship, “a man of exact calculation”⁷⁴⁹. As the first president of Czechoslovakia states, “in our country we pretend to be idealists, as if we are ashamed of money and live on air and water, but we think only of money”⁷⁵⁰. He further points out that in his romantic fantasy, a Czech dreams of prosperity, of a palace, but in reality he is content with the sops. An Englishman or an American does not fantasise, but he works and is not ashamed of his work. “Here, more than in England and America, everyone wants to get rich; when he gets rich, he sits on his money. An Englishman, an American, also wants to get rich; if he gets rich, he uses his money more generously, as proven by the numerous university foundations”⁷⁵¹.

As Masaryk diagnoses, poverty, and wealth have a very significant impact on self-assessment and suicide statistics. In order to live, you must be able to satisfy your needs. If this cannot be done, life loses value to man. A man becomes dissatisfied and unhappy, and eventually voluntarily seeks death. In this case, however, what counts is the measure applied to consumption, because the need itself cannot be the right measure⁷⁵². According to Masaryk, it is about the value that our reason and our moral sense attribute to objects and material and economic values. Money is necessary to maintain a decent life, but for the most part, the things used by an educated person are not originally necessary, but have become necessary only through the habit and “whims of the consumers”⁷⁵³. Some of these things correspond to real and moral needs, others are invented because needs are unknown, either because they are assumed to be false, or because false qualities are attributed to things, or because ignorance concerns both things and needs. The unsatisfied needs of consumers make a person unhappy and tired. If the basic needs of man are not satisfied, “the life force withers away, and we know all too well what a sad picture pauperism represents.” As Masaryk notes, “the life expectancy of the poor classes is shorter than that of the better classes, morbidity and mortality are greater, and the lack of morality is equally appalling”⁷⁵⁴. Poverty often leads to suicide. But even unsatisfying our needs that are not necessary leads to life fatigue and suicide, so in this respect the rich, well-off and less wealthy people are completely equal to the poor. The understanding of the standard of living is very relative, so “imaginary misery has a different effect on suicide than real misery”⁷⁵⁵.

⁴⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² T.G. Masaryk, *Sebevražda hromadným jevem společenským moderní osvěty*, Čin, Praha 1926a, p. 41.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

As Masaryk reminds, “the French, for example, at the end of Louis XIV’s reign, were very poor, while now they are generally envied because of their wealth, nevertheless, suicide was rare at the time, and now it is a very common phenomenon”⁵⁶. What matters is the value system, but it changes over time. The same economic goods can cause satisfaction and dissatisfaction with life, depending on how the consumer value pyramid has changed. Statistics attribute nearly 200 to 300 suicides to dissatisfaction with financial conditions and adverse economic conditions, so they appear to be a significant cause of high suicide rates⁵⁷.

Poverty and impoverishment of society have a strongly unfavourable and determinative effect, it introduces the one who has fallen into it into a pathological, mentally ill state, and suicide appears to be the last element of solving indescribable difficulties. The malignant effects of pauperism/impoverishment are most evident in large cities, but not only among the “labourers” but also among the “better classes of the population, among the officials, and among the society”. As Masaryk notes,

poverty can be endured with dignity if one is reasonable and does not imitate the rich, but all too often today the poor do not want to change, and then they fall into circumstances from which only death can save them. The rich also commit suicide very often, so it can be said that apart from poverty, no economic state in itself is either favourable or unfavourable. The centre, as everywhere, is probably the best of all. Unexpected changes in an economic status are particularly unfavourable, even though favourable ones do not make everyone happy⁵⁸.

As Masaryk observes, any adverse change in wealth does not have the same effect. For instance, poor harvests do not generally cause any particularly large disorganisation. A peasant who has experienced the above is accustomed to the fact that he can expect a worse harvest. Similarly, traders and merchants who have been affected by crop failure are calmer when the misery came in anticipation, and it struck not one or several, but all the traders. Masaryk believes that common unhappiness is only partial, or it not a misery at all⁵⁹. Any sudden, unexpected, and extraordinary turn of fate is definitely unfavourable since in most cases reason and morality cannot bear such a misfortune; it is especially disadvantageous to lose property when only few persons have been affected⁶⁰.

In his work *Sebevražda hromadným jevem společenským moderní osvěty* [*Suicide-mass social phenomenon of modern civilization*], Masaryk describes how, for instance, the Great Depression of 1875 or the events in Vienna between 1869 and 1873 that violated property rights caused 13.8% of all suicides between 1874 and 1879⁶¹. Crises have long-term adverse effects, which can lead to speculative phenomena. Like all crises, all market speculations have a negative impact. For stock market traders, loss or profit often means life or death. Here, as Masaryk emphasises, we are dealing with a zero-one situation. Numerous data show that, for example, suicide rates often increase after announcing results in games of

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 42.

⁵⁸ Ch. Sarolea, V.A. Jung, *President Masaryk and the spirit of Abraham Lincoln*, Orbis, Prague 1921, p. 22.

⁵⁹ T.G. Masaryk, *Sebevražda hromadným...*, p. 43.

⁶⁰ Ch. Sarolea, V.A. Jung, *President Masaryk...*, p. 22.

⁶¹ T.G. Masaryk, *Sebevražda hromadným...*, p. 41.

chance⁶². “If we were to compare the suicide statistics of different nations with their economic conditions, we would not have reached any roughly universally binding law. For instance, combining suicide data with data on public debt does not produce any results: Spain has the largest public debt and very few suicides. Denmark has a low public debt and a significant number of suicides”⁶³. According to Masaryk, everything depends on how these debts were incurred. In addition to public debt, national assets as well as other economic indicators must be considered. The situation is different if we take into account the means of transport and communications. It should be pointed out that the suicide rate is to some extent higher in those countries where transport is more extensive, which means that the more railways, telegraphs, post offices, newspapers, etc. a country has, the higher the suicide rate. Nevertheless, as Masaryk adds, one should bear in mind that “the means of transport and communications serve not only the economy of a given country but, to a significantly greater extent, all the citizens, for example, through the exchange of thoughts or ideas, and that it is in this respect that they can have a significant impact on the number of suicides”⁶⁴.

Rural and agricultural populations show fewer suicides than industrial and urban populations⁶⁵. It depends not so much on the mode of work as on the conditions in which people live, namely, on the strength of reason and moral resilience which they use in various economic conditions. As Masaryk points out, trade and industry are not as such inferior to agriculture. It is more about the way of life in the city and in the countryside, the social and economic conditions that have developed in these areas⁶⁶. For instance, England’s industry and craft demonstrate a lower degree of suicides than France and Austria, where agriculture is cultivated to a much greater extent⁶⁷.

“Theorists generally say that society acts economically and rationally, that nations get richer, but according to statistics more suicides occur every year in the same nations”⁶⁸. The question is whether it is not true that “we are in a better economic situation than our predecessors, or whether our greater inclination for suicide come from our wealth?”⁶⁹ To answer this, Masaryk acknowledges that one must bear in mind that wealth, like poverty and misery, enables suicide, and that statistical data concerning suicide rates cannot be considered an absolute measure of an economic status⁷⁰.

Certainly, the educated nations are now richer than ever, and the wealth of people is steadily increasing, but I do not believe that the distribution of wealth is fair, considering that, with the present means of exchange of ideas and social agitation, the just and unjust claims of individuals are rapidly increasing, and that it is very easy for those who think they are being harmed to communicate and organise. We can understand why, despite the greater involvement of the society, dissatisfaction with the economic and social situation is large, greater than before,

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 43.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 44.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 62–63.

although previously the overall situation was not better. Contemporary nations tend to shape their social and economic conditions, which have hitherto developed nearly spontaneously, logically – in their view, and thus, alongside the many other phenomena which have arisen from this effort, socialism in all its various forms appears in the economic field⁷¹.

On the other hand, “we see a great material effort everywhere, and this effort, which owing to great progress in the economic field is constantly reinvigorated, is not flattened, for all the economic work of mankind is the external result of inner mental development”⁷².

The 20th century, as Masaryk emphasises, “has become indisputably materialistic and undemanding; idealism, gratuitousness and moderate restraint have become rare”⁷³. Masaryk believes that in times when material goods and economics play such a significant role, one cannot feel happy. This pursuit of wealth must sooner or later “wreak havoc on the minds of men”⁷⁴. It can be concluded that despite the increasingly better economic conditions, general anxiety and chaos inevitably develop, which in many cases increases idleness and discouragement with life. Nonetheless, it is not hardship or wealth that makes the presence unhappy, but the immoral valuation of the objects of satisfaction. The whole “social case” is the question of whether we really want to be moral and rational. According to Masaryk, “neither the rich nor the poor, neither the employer nor the worker are the only ones guilty of the present situation. We are all guilty and we must all pay and suffer for our common guilt”⁷⁵.

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and His View of Marxist Economics

Masaryk repeatedly stated in his works that as regards the main principles of social democracy in the context of economics and all the inclinations that result from it, he does not accept the philosophical foundations of the social democratic programme. Socialist philosophy, as he claims, developed from classical philosophy. From this philosophy the Social Democrats of the 19th and 20th centuries drew a materialistic view, which assumes the so-called historical materialism as the theoretical basis of socialist politics and philosophy in general. As the first president of Czechoslovakia underlines, “it is not my habit to talk much about these matters and to throw my faith at the mercy of our liberalism and clericalism, so I simply repeat that I am a strong opponent of the materialistic world view”⁷⁶. Yet, he adds,

I have learnt to be tolerant and not to declare every materialist a bad man, and every anti-materialist a good and valuable man. I have discovered too often that the philosophical and theological opponents of materialism are not better people, and very often they were worse when they look at facts and life, not just words. Therefore, I distinguish between the postulates and the

⁷¹ T.G. Masaryk, *The ideals of humanity*, p. 20.

⁷² T.G. Masaryk, *Sebevražda hromadným...*, p. 63.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

⁷⁶ K. Velemínský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, p. 396.

respective programme points of Social-Democracy and its philosophical interventions: I distinguish between the legitimate postulates of our history and its foreign philosophy, which is imposed on it by social injustice and our indifference⁷⁷.

As far as individual economic and social postulates are concerned, Masaryk considered them to be mostly right, and therefore he always felt a moral duty to support them in every way possible. At the same time, he notes, “I realise that I am not the most outstanding expert in economic matters [...] but I can judge that the criticism of Marx and the theorists of socialism is justified and altogether correct, and that their theories have no greater value than the honest and thoughtful theories of others”⁷⁸. If Social Democracy makes Marx an untouchable authority, Masaryk says: “I can understand it, but I cannot enjoy it”⁷⁹. And he convinces further, “although I feel and know it very well, I have no reason or right to oppose the demands of justice and equal justice, whoever makes these demands, and in the name of whatever principles”⁸⁰.

Masaryk, in his works describing his attitude to Marx, often asks the following question: why does Marx base his economic views mainly on the cult of labour? As Plato believed that the state begins with justice, so according to Marx the state begins with the cult of labour. Work was recognised as a philosophical and social principle at the beginning of modern thought. As Masaryk emphasises, economists like John Locke were already interested in work. The next thinkers who were engaged in work were Adam Smith and David Ricardo, followed by Marx, but it was he who, through his discretion and in a sense, “non-objectivity, defined the meaning of work for the entire modern life”⁸¹. Masaryk further underlines that “the great merit of Marx, however, is that he demonstrated us the world of workers’ labour”⁸². As he indicates: “I admit that others before him referred to this subject, but none so effectively”⁸³. He also claims: “I see in Marx an attempt to value small labour, both physical and mental. So far, people have detested work, and they detest this small work, a disordered, unspectacular, non-distracting work”⁸⁴.

In Masaryk’s opinion, the current romanticism of work must give way to realism. Work is not only the so-called great deeds, work is also toilsome work; work is not only the work of the poor, but also the small and humble, about which history has not yet told enough. “A new age of democratic work, of work, I am saying, not only physical but also mental, new work in all the areas”⁸⁵. In mental work one usually thinks of employing the so-called intelligent classes. According to Marx, for example, the work of a lawyer or a professor is compared to that of a physical worker or a peasant. A large part of the so-called intellectual work is not, as Masaryk points out, more important or more valuable than the tasks of a physical worker. A large part of the work of “white collars” is also mechanical, “cut and dried”, and does not really require thinking, at least no more than an ordinary employee

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 396–397.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 397.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 396–397.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 325.

⁸² *Ibidem*.

⁸³ *Ibidem*, p. 326.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 327.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 325.

must think. Through education and training the intelligentsia learnt their trade, just as the craftsman learnt his profession, and therefore there is no appreciable difference between the labour of a physical worker and of the average educated person. “A simple female worker or craftswoman – or even the wife of a professor or an official – who runs a household thanks to her modest funds and brings up her five children decently, thinks much more than a man who spent twenty years in school and bought a pile of various certificates”⁸⁶. The only difference between an educated person and a physical worker is that their education is not equally expensive, and therefore their wages are no longer the same.

From this ordinary mental work we must, obviously, distinguish creative, innovative, imaginative work – as Masaryk says. This applies to all the areas and fields, including science, economics, philosophy, art, politics, engineering⁸⁷. All over the world, a true thinker and an artist is different from a peon. These categories are not yet precisely defined, but they are of great importance. This is especially noticeable in the economy. In addition to Isaac Newton or Napoleon Bonaparte, society needs workers, as Masaryk puts it, “of second, third order.” He claims that Marx and Engels are not able to properly grasp the true nature of mental work⁸⁸. Human usefulness for society is not limited to intellectual work; according to Masaryk, emotions and will also work. Marx and Engels evaluate work too unilaterally. They consider “real” work to be only physical work; in their opinion, it must be “direct productivity” and it must be useful to society. Mental work, admittedly – as Masaryk points out – very often is not useful at once – but should theorising be prohibited?⁸⁹ In this case, not a single machine would have been invented and there would be no progress at all. Masaryk poses the following question: “do not the later times benefit from the theoretical facilities of earlier and often very distant times?”⁹⁰

To put it briefly, it is impossible for Marx to distinguish all labour by the category of quantity alone. The work is not only simple or complicated, but there are also different levels of quality. This is also the case with many physical jobs. Very often material work is combined with spiritual work. It cannot be measured only by the time needed for its specific performance⁹¹. Both physical strength, muscle strength and mental strength are unstable. Quantitative measurement alone is not enough, not to mention, as Masaryk points out, that it is an approximate estimate, not a measurement in a scientific sense⁹².

According to Masaryk, those who perceive the state in materialist terms will easily fall into the trap of a materialist concept of the entire society and all its life. The first president of Czechoslovakia represents the view that, despite everything, the state and even the entire society is not merely an economic organisation and is not based solely on pure economy⁹³. He believes that man by nature is not only an egoist and has not only economic interests, but also others. As he declares, “he wants to live physically, but also spiritually”⁹⁴. He goes

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ Cf. T.G. Masaryk, *Česká otázka...*

⁸⁸ R. Flieder, *T.G. Masaryk...*, pp. 26–30.

⁸⁹ T.G. Masaryk, *Výbor ze spisů...*, p. 112.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 112–113.

⁹² K. Veleminský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, pp. 325–327.

⁹³ E. Denis, *První president...*, p. 8.

⁹⁴ K. Veleminský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, p. 370.

on to state that “in every epoch we not only have a specific quantity and quality of economic goods, but we also have a specific quantity and quality of spiritual goods”⁹⁵. He claims that “a man not only works in body but also in spirit, works and prays, works and thinks, learns and teaches others, creates artistically, lives in a family and a society – in short, in the consensus of economics, social activity is one activity alongside other activities, and this activity is related to all other activities”⁹⁶. For instance, railway, as Masaryk states, not only carries goods, but also ideas created from thought. Adam Smith described his economic system and his ethical system, and he used both these systems to specify the organisation of society. Man, as Masaryk points out, is not only a machine, but he also feels and thinks⁹⁷.

Marx’s positivist materialism is, according to Masaryk, thoroughly racist. In theory, Marx leaves no room for emotions. Having separated emotions from man, he cannot notice ethics, moral principles, and with them – art and all human activity beyond the purely economic sphere. Hegelianism, believing in objective opposites, falls into the paroxysm of practice for the sake of the theory as such. From Hegel’s pantheism Marx takes materialism, which then causes it to be transformed into socio-economic pantheism and finally into communism. As Masaryk claims, his efforts aimed at communism are not a sufficient foundation. Nevertheless, Marx was so afraid of the love and ethics of Ludwig Feuerbach, a German philosopher, that he found in materialism a purely objective and justifying reason for communism. Positivist and Hegelian historicism leads him to the same objective. From the constant and permanent changes of the social and economic order, Marx deduces the purely objective cause of communism given by history. Philosophy, according to Marx, is a naturalistic photograph of nature and history – communism is simply given by history. This is why, as Masaryk believes, Marx misunderstands human needs and understands economics in a very random and subjective way. Marx’s materialism is historical, not economic materialism. As far as economics is concerned, Masaryk thinks that Marx makes cardinal mistakes and falls into the traps set by himself. Matter, according to Marx, is a very complex system. Marx quite obviously tries to synthesise the idea of his maturing time, but Masaryk notes that “an objective judge cannot say that his synthesis has succeeded”⁹⁸.

Marx’s philosophy, and Engels’s philosophy even more, are eclectic in their nature. With all its criticism, they both lacked consequence and sufficient power to join the various elements of modern philosophy into a harmonious whole. Above all, societies (consumers and entrepreneurs) lose a lot because of this way of thinking and such an approach⁹⁹.

Tasks for the Future within Economy according to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk

Genuine democracy cannot take place only in the political field since – as the first president of Czechoslovakia claims – democracy is a social matter and, above all, a significant economic problem, which today is really important because war and revolution

⁹⁵ E. Denis, *První president...*, p. 9.

⁹⁶ K. Velemínský (ed.), *Masaryk osvoboditel...*, p. 370.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸ R. Flieder, *T.G. Masaryk...*, p. 72.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

destroyed the wealth and reserves of nations and created market deficiencies nearly everywhere¹⁰⁰. “Crisis observed in Europe affects, basically, all the people. It forces our states to a thorough economic reconstruction. Nonetheless, it is not correct to perceive this situation, which appeared due to war, as a new reason for economic (historical) materialism”¹⁰¹.

Masaryk thinks that we have various tasks to fulfil, not only the economic ones. Care for economic and social justice ought not to be deteriorated by war but it should be intensified. This can be seen by the emergence of new republics and democracies. Masaryk underlines once again that he does not see any desired economic equality which would be arranged perfectly by communism. At this stage of development, democracy is intended to eliminate poverty and great wealthy anti-theses. Even in the area of economy, democracy cannot be a utopia equalisation of all the people but a certain possibility of egalitarianism. Capitalism is defective not only due to the fact that it produces but people who do not produce or even do not work may unfairly seize the incomes of the part of society which works fairly¹⁰².

From Adam Smith onwards, national economic theorists derive economics and thriftiness from selfishness; selfishness is certainly a powerful force here. An entrepreneur or an inventor is not, as Masaryk points out, focused only on profit. Some of them, and the better ones, are immersed in entrepreneurship, in invention, in the development and improvement of work and production, etc.¹⁰³ Social and economic anarchism, which Marx rightly complains about, also comes from the fact that men are not in their proper place according to their talents. This, of course, applies not only to the economic field in general, but to all the fields; selfishness is a characteristic of every man and is binding everywhere, but alongside selfishness there is also a talent for special fields.

Masaryk underlines that he is not opposed to collectivisation or state supervision in certain areas of the economy. For example, he supports the collectivisation of railways and means of transport, and of transportation in general, of hydro-power and coal energy, but he imagines this socialisation as gradual, developmental, prepared by the proper education of workers and people who direct production and exchange. For this purpose, very precise financial management of the state and closer and more substantive control of the entire financial system, especially banks, are necessary. Nevertheless, the social security system needs to be completed first, in particular social security, including unemployment insurance, should be improved and harmonised¹⁰⁴.

A special task is to carry out land reform, which, as Masaryk reminds, was already a postulate of all the parties before the war. In this respect, he shows the similarities between Czechoslovakia and East Prussia. The foundation and original source of the “latifundia in our country was [...] confiscation, carried out by the selfish Habsburgs and foreign nobility”¹⁰⁵ – he claims. The more rich our country is, the greater the tasks that are placed on our democracy in the social and economic sphere¹⁰⁶.

¹⁰⁰ T.G. Masaryk, *Světová revoluce...*, p. 545.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 546.

¹⁰² T.G. Masaryk, *Výbor ze spisů...*, pp. 541–548.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, pp. 545–546.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 546.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 546.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*.

The second great task is caring for the physical and mental health of the nation by state bodies, municipalities and all so-called humanitarian institutions. As he writes, “the fact that not only the Ministry of Social Welfare, but also the Ministry of Health, was established in the republic immediately proves that the representatives of the nation recognised this need well. The vitality of the entire population has been weakened by war, not only by general impoverishment, but by psychophysical exhaustion, and this, according to Masaryk, translates into the economy”¹⁰⁷. Masaryk analyses that “this is not only the case in this country, but everywhere. But a small nation must feel this weakness more intensely”¹⁰⁸.

The Czech spirit is the spirit of disciplined freedom. And this spirit should be served by a strong body¹⁰⁹. Masaryk notes that if history teaches us about the unparalleled quality of Czech temperament, geography has given the Czech nation a position unlike any other in Europe. But the generous nature provided it with all the resources of material wealth. There are few countries with greater economic opportunities. During the Habsburg period, the Czech Republic was the financial backbone of the empire. The Czech Republic is not only an industrial country, but it can rely on its agriculture, which makes it almost self-sufficient. The Czech nation is thus equipped with everything needed for a stable and developing modern state¹¹⁰.

As Masaryk wrote in his work *Budoucí echy* [*Echoes of the Future*]: “It is well known that the Czech Republic is the ‘pearl of Austria’ in economic and financial matters, and that in the future it will be much more so than before: in fact, it will be even more so because it will not have to support the economically weaker Austrian provinces”¹¹¹.

Conclusions

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was undeniably an important figure on the political scene not only of the Czech Republic or later Czechoslovakia, but also of other Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland. Respected in the world, he played a leading role in regaining independence by the Czechs and Slovaks and creating a common state. In his work he tackled the subject of “the Czech issue as a problem of a small nation.”

Masaryk’s economic thinking undoubtedly evolved under the influence of many eminent personalities, mainly philosophers such as Auguste Comte, Johann Gottfried Herder, Immanuel Kant, František Palacký and Ján Kollár. This is evident in his observations and assessments of economic issues in which he was realistic and pragmatic. He looked at economic issues through the prism of western models that he wanted to put into practice. At the same time, he remained sceptical of the Polish or Russian “romantic” temperament. He focused his reflections on topics such as poverty, wealth, possession of money, which, he argued, have a significant impact on the assessment of one’s own life and the suicide of people. He analysed issues related to the entrepreneurship of individual nations, looking for specific regularities in this area. He was a supporter of collectivisation and state super-

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁹ Ch. Sarolea, V.A. Jung, *President Masaryk...*, p. 20.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹¹ T.G. Masaryk, *Budoucí echy*, Nákl. OTTO GIRGAL, Smichov, Praha 1919a, p. 9.

vision in certain areas of the economy. He criticised Marx and his approach to economic and social matters. He saw the dilemmas of economics through the prism of ethics and morality.

To sum up, it can be stated that Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk's query on economic issues demonstrated that his assessments and comments in this regard are still valid and thus can be a legitimate pretext for conducting further research on his views and accomplishments.

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