

PHILOSOPHY OF PRAGMATISM AS A SOLUTION AFTER AN (UN)SUCCESSFUL TRANSFORMATION¹

Ľubomír Dunaj

University of Vienna

lubomir.dunaj@univie.ac.at

ABSTRACT: This study aims to recall certain ideas of the pragmatist tradition that could inspire dialogue about progressive future developments and caution regarding too radical a social transformation and that, perhaps even more importantly, could save the democratic and liberal character of Slovakia and other East-Central European societies. The point of departure here lies in the interpretations of two philosophers: Emil Višňovský and František Novosád. Not only are they the most renowned experts on social and political philosophy in Slovakia, but their analyses are in certain crucial aspects significantly close to Axel Honneth's *Zeitdiagnose* and to his attempt to revive John Dewey's democratic theory, which plays a key role in the theoretical parts of the paper. For further elaboration on those ideas, the author proposes a discussion, with the still highly relevant normative ideals of the Czech and Slovak revolution(s) of 1989, as reconstructed by James Krapfl. The paper suggests a potential path for a social-democratic "revival", one which might contribute to finding a balance among politics, market, society and, not least, ecology.

Keywords: East-Central Europe, Slovakia, pragmatism, democracy, negative freedom, political philosophy, liberalism, dialogical cosmopolitanism

Introduction

The fall of 2019 had already marked the 30th anniversary of the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, which fundamentally changed the shape of the region.² During that time, and especially in recent years, numerous authors expressed their doubts about whether the social transformations that took place after 1989 managed to fulfil the expectations of those who demanded a shift from state socialism towards democracy. The question is still open and difficult to answer. Nevertheless, one important historical lesson to learn is that political transition can be a painful and even regressive process,

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² The East-Central European countries usually include the so-called *Višeград (V4) group* – Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. We can loosely add there also Slovenia, Croatia, the eastern part of Germany, the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) and even (the western part of) Ukraine.

especially in the absence of necessary groundwork and preparations. Unfortunately, the neoliberal waves of the last 30 years, which accompanied the process of transition, rather than bringing the promised prosperity and political stability in East-Central European societies, have triggered the growth of far-left, but especially far-right movements. While we cannot attribute all aberrations to neoliberalism, its unfavorable consequences in these countries are just too obvious. Yet, their diverse conditions would require more nuanced reflections, so they will have to stay out of the focus of this paper, which will be confined mainly to the Slovak experience.

Like most other countries of East-Central Europe, Slovakia is currently experiencing a struggle over the future character of the state. Apparently, the political situation in many Western societies is tense as well. Nonetheless, the basic assumption about Western democracies is that even the most severe crises will not undermine the firm foundations of liberal democracy. Indeed, none of the horrible experiences such as 9/11, the financial and economic crises of 2008/2009, the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo or the Bataclan Theater massacre, has shaken the established political systems.³ In East-Central Europe, however, an ongoing political, economic, and moral crisis may launch a political change of regimes, which happened several times in the 20th century.

To put it bluntly, there is no single solution for preserving the democratic and liberal character of East-Central European societies, and rose-tinted expectations can only result in disappointment and disillusion. This paper aims to recall certain ideas of the pragmatist tradition, which may suggest "softer ways" of solving social and political problems, presumably with "less harm and pain" than in the last decades. In this endeavor, proper understanding of democracy as such is *the condition sine qua non*. In order to develop the ideas of 1989 further and to 'reactivate' them in the contempo-

³ While the final words of this paper were written a few days after the 2021 storming of the United States Capitol, even the 4 years of Donald Trump do not seem to push us to change this statement – although, naturally, the consequences of his way of doing politics are hardly predictable at the moment.

rary debate, one should also take account of the idea of *dialogical cosmopolitanism*, indicated in the closing part as a suitable direction of further research.

A Slovak Perspective on Transformation: Uncertainty and Ambivalence

It may no longer be an unknown fact that one of the main characteristic features of the present situation in East-Central European countries is that a large part of the population is unable to identify itself with the existing political system, even though its standards embody many ideals of the Enlightenment and (Western) modernity. A significant part of the public is losing respect for the pluralistic political system and, as a result, cannot positively contribute to democratic processes and institutions. The paradox of this situation is that instead of vehemently demanding the fulfillment of our rights guaranteed by the constitution – civil, political, social, cultural, ecological etc. – a large part of the population tends to follow authoritarian and populist leaders, or secludes itself in “private spaces”, as was the case during the *era of normalization*.⁴ Instead of striving for the exercise of these rights in order to lead their lives in a transparent manner, many prefer their own opaque ways, which often results in various forms of corruption to satisfy their real needs and, naturally, also many artificially induced “needs”, stimulated by ubiquitous advertising. The situation is not particularly different in Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Czechia or even Slovenia (although the latter two are economically, politically and culturally the most successful examples of transition). Moreover, the gov-

ernments of countries like Belarus or Russia obviously gave up on building a liberal democracy many years ago.

Emil Višňovský introduced his reflections regarding the pragmatist understanding of sociocultural transformation with the question of “How much transformation can people bear?” Višňovský states that “social transformation is sometimes a rather painful, even destructive process. All social transformations entail certain ‘costs and yields’, apparently also victims, and it is impossible to count and calculate them all. Too much transformation can harm, if we are not ready for it.” (Višňovský 2014, 102)⁵ František Novosád summarizes on a similar note: “we should not forget that the processes that sociologists and political scientists denote as ‘transition’, ‘transformation’, ‘the change of a system’, ‘the change of structures’, result from the action of particular individuals and behind these ‘systems’ and ‘structures’ there are always humans with their hopes and frustrations, personal ambitions, gains and losses, joys and pains. With every historical shift some gain, and some lose.” (Novosád 2007, 231)⁶ The question that begs to be answered is, “how can we prepare at all for such revolutionary changes?”

Any endeavor to answer this question should be undertaken with modesty because the nonlinear and chaotic character of historical processes cannot be overlooked. Hence, the problem will be narrowed down to the following one: “How can we realize social improvement, without ending up in unreflective radicalization?” The prime examples of such radicalism are Communism and Neoliberalism. There are numerous analyses dealing with the negative consequences of both – these ideologies are now among the most debated paradigms of social change and social order. However, the debate should not be undertaken unless the notion of democra-

⁴ In the history of Czechoslovakia, “normalization” is a name commonly given to the policy enforced in 1969–87, which was gradually established after the military intervention of the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968 and which resulted in general political apathy and opportunism. Regarding the revival of the term ‘new normalization’ cf. for instance (Krapfl 2013, 222). One typical example of such ignorance and indifference is low voter turnout, especially in regional elections and elections to the European Parliament as a sign of resignation on the hope that one’s vote can change something (the participation is often less than 20%). Even during the most important decision-making process, elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic (the Slovak parliament), the voter participation has only once exceeded 60 % since 2006.

⁵ All Višňovský’s and Novosád’s quotations in the text were originally written in Slovak – translated by L.D.

⁶ Yet, Novosád himself optimistically adds that, in the longer term, perhaps everyone gains. This in a way correlates with Axel Honneth’s general attitude. Their mutual similarities as well as differences, however, would require a more detailed explanation. Nevertheless, in our personal conversation a few months ago, Novosád was rather pessimistic about the current developments in Slovakia and his earlier optimism now seems to be fading.

cy, whose adequate grasp is indispensable for eliminating the risk of radicalization, has been addressed in the first place. The population of the former socialist countries might have longed for freedom and democracy even before 1989 – both were once promised by Communism and also by Neoliberalism. Yet, it is only with the lapse of time that we can see what was not so clear in 1989, namely, that there are multiple interpretations of freedom and democracy. The main mistake of the post-1989 regime was that population at large had had quite simplistic understanding of the concept, which was implemented in an overly formal fashion – e.g., for many, democracy was only about going to the polls once in four years – with narrow comprehension of freedom as a *negative* liberty, neglecting adequate proactive participation and contribution of citizens.

To point out other negative consequences of the post-1989 transition, let us quote some more of Emil Višňovský on the nature of post-1989 transformation in Slovakia. According to Višňovský,

what is happening in post-Communist countries following the collapse of the totalitarian regime, whose nature was truly anti-transformative, is clearly two things: (1) the disintegration of society and the disintegration of many forms of social life; (2) the application of power in all its forms, including corruption as ‘a method’ of transformation, combined with strong bureaucracy. Not only is the legacy of the previous regime, as far as political culture is concerned, so powerful that politics is understood largely, if not exclusively, as a struggle for power – miles away from Dewey’s understanding of politics as a method of intelligent problem-solving; what is worse, it is combined with capitalism, which was implemented too quickly in these countries. Neither the left nor the right side of the political spectrum can offer an alternative concept of politics as a tool for transformation (Višňovský 2014, 105).

To draw a broader picture, it is relevant to add the very first paragraph from James Krapfl’s book *Revolution with a Human Face. Politics, Culture, and Community in Czechoslovakia, 1989–1992*, where the Canadian historian refers to a widespread commonplace in contemporary Slovakia regarding the revolution 1989 and the subsequent misdevelopments:

‘So, you’re going to write about what fools we were?’ my friend Ivan asked after I explained to him the nature of the research that had brought me back to Slovakia in 2004. It was a better response than I had expected. Over the years, I had grown accustomed to Czechs and Slovaks responding to my interest in 1989 not with polite curiosity but with awkward discomfiture, hysterical laughter, or angry derision. Evidently it was not a topic one could discuss dispassionately. Ivan’s ironic question probably explains why: history has not unfolded the way most citizens of Czechoslovakia expected it would in 1989. Indeed, the contrast between their faith in humanity then and the many deceptions and disappointments that have followed – dare one say as a result? – tends to make 1989 either embarrassing or a cruel reminder of how easily people can be manipulated (Krapfl 2013, xi).

Although Krapfl does not absolutely subscribe to Ivan’s ironical comment, he still takes this interpretation seriously. There are indeed many sociological and historical studies that would support the interpretation of Krapfl’s friend Ivan.⁷ On the other hand, there are also many that would point to the positive aspects of transformation.⁸ I am not going to take a side on this matter here, as the length of the paper does not allow for a detailed analysis. What is more important for me is to share the sentiment shared by a huge part of the population: a “lack of freedom.”⁹ This is indeed a paradoxical phenomenon, since the most important critique of the old regime was this very lack of freedom.¹⁰

Granted, such experience is hard to measure, especially if looked upon as “feelings” or “impressions.” What

⁷ Compare this to the analyses undertaken at the various institutes of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, such as: (Pekník et al 2005, Plichtová 2010, Krivý 2013).

⁸ For the ambivalence of post-1989 development not only in East-Central Europe, see (Ther 2016).

⁹ It is worth noting that the sentiment pertains not only to the issues of political correctness and all displays of private and public “censorship”. For most people, the main problem lies in the undemocratic and often even unbearable work conditions, where the owner of a company or the boss has or used to have – there have been certain improvements in recent years – (almost) absolute power over the employees, especially in the poorest regions. Henry Ford’s assertion that “**democracy stops at the factory gates**” is something which most people are still not able to digest, and the relevant question is, why should they?

¹⁰ Both in Slovakia and in Czechia, November 17 is a national holiday, marking the victory in the struggle for freedom and democracy in 1989.

often happens though is that when someone speaks favorably of some aspects of the former regime, they are immediately countered by the accusation of “retro-optimism,” or Communist nostalgia (in German, the word “Ostalgie” is often used in this context, a portmanteau of the German words *Ost* [east] and *Nostalgie* [nostalgia]). Conversely, however, even such pre-eminent Slovak philosopher as František Novosád views the post-1989 development in a similar way:

Since 1989, almost everything has changed: institutions have changed, technological conditions of life have changed, and our life strategies have changed. The changes, however, have manifested themselves differently in the lives of the elites and in those of ‘ordinary’ people. The life of an ‘ordinary’ man has remained essentially the same, and even has become more difficult, because today, his or her fate hinges on several increasingly vague factors. The social environment, especially the working environment, is less defined, requiring more will to adapt than before. It is ambiguous even when it comes to the liberty to express oneself freely. Formally, there are no obstacles to freedom of speech. However, the line separating the acceptable from the ‘indecent’, while not publicly drawn, is ruthlessly adhered to. As a result, we are paradoxically almost as careful with words as we used to be. The life of the ‘elites’ has changed radically. A new world has opened up for them, with new possibilities - so many new possibilities that they cannot even absorb them. We can even talk about the increasing cleavage between “the elites” and “the commoners”, which is clearly reflected in political behavior patterns and attitudes. The ‘elite’ bemoans the fact that the ‘masses’ prefer populists, while ‘the commoners’ in their turn lament the unwillingness and inability of the elites to understand the elementary concerns of an individual who lives from paycheck to paycheck. The ‘elites’ respond to the commoners’ concerns according to the pattern: ‘If they do not have enough money to buy bread, let them eat cakes’¹¹ (Novosád 2010, 29).

Of course, majorities can be wrong in their assessment. This has happened many times in history. Yet what is important here is the fact that a few years ago (and often also now), in the liberally dominated public sphere, even to ask a question about – at least certain aspects of – the legitimacy of the former regime, that is, to express

¹¹ A variation on the most famous quote attributed to Marie-Antoinette, the queen of France during the French Revolution.

a more balanced view on the state-socialist regime, was something unthinkable, something that could cost, at best, one’s good reputation and, at worst – fortunately only in very few specific cases – even one’s career.¹² The reason behind such ostracization was that any Leftist alternatives to the dominant neoliberal discourse were brand-marked as ‘Communist’ and associated with the re-establishment of gulags and other extreme measures.¹³ Nevertheless, mistrust on the part of the Slovak population of the mainstream liberal ‘elitist’ interpretation of history is widespread – often for relevant reasons (see, for instance, ongoing mass-media manipulation towards neoliberal economic policies). According to F. Novosád, the writings on the present-day situation in Slovakia even among the intellectuals have been dominated by texts that, in fact, are nothing but policy-making tools in disguise.

[T]he intellectual consequences of this situation are devastating to everyone. Above all, the distinction between political, politological and ideological texts has been erased. In fact, erasing these differences meant that all texts began to be understood as political. Politicalness, however, implies bias, which results from partisanship. The value of a political text is not in its intellectual or argumentative strength but in its effectiveness. Yet, in this context, efforts at effectiveness entail the use of psychological suggestion in place of arguments as a persuasion tool, so logical argumentation has been supplanted by a whole array of rhetorical persuasion strategies. Analysis has merely been a blind; in reality, it has been a ‘struggle’, its point being moral humiliation of the opponents. Thus, the analyses have assumed the status of moral judgment, and the more this virus of ‘moralization’ spread, the more the political writings depreciated in value. Eventually, however, the bare truth that the political effectiveness of such texts was virtually nil, that it was only ‘surplus labor’ of the new guardians of the ‘only decent and possible views’ was bound to show through (Novosád 2007, 227–228).

¹² For more detail on the idiosyncrasies and distortions of the “post-Communist situation” and discourse in Slovakia, cf., for instance, (Larson 2013).

¹³ And although, for 12 consecutive years (with a short break between 2010 and 2012), Slovakia was practically ruled by a party that named itself “Social-Democratic” (*Smer-SD*), being the leading party in three governments, its overall policy was rather national-conservative with certain social programs than a truly leftist alternative.

Although Novosád wrote his book in 2007, his term “orchestrated, stage-managed mobilization”, i.e., permanent playing up of a situation or an issue, as if of something fateful that will, ‘here and now’, decide the future of Slovakia ‘in all its aspects and spheres’ for good, seems to have become not only a typical characteristic of the ‘transition period’, but, unfortunately, an underlying perennial strategy of almost all political actors as well as of most intellectual writings. Even though certain kinds of political activism should generally be considered instrumental in progressive change, too much of ideological and unreflected-upon intellectual involvement after 1989 was, according to Novosád, very destructive. And although we can say that now society seems to be a little more pluralistic, in the times of fake news and alternative mass media it is hard to tell whether we are really confronted with broader acceptance of other opinions and interpretations, or whether this is merely “information entropy” of the new social media, where everyone can express (almost) everything, but has only a handful of followers. Yet this aspect, however intriguing, is outside the scope of the current paper. What is more interesting here is the question of why the philosophy of pragmatism has not gained more attention among philosophers (and public intellectuals) in Slovakia. Meanwhile, the ideas of this philosophical tradition could help reduce the tension among proponents of various ideological positions and thus make the public sphere more functional.

In this sense, one of the possible answers to why the philosophy of pragmatism has, as yet, gained little attention from humanities in Slovakia is that it does not fit into any of the possible compartments¹⁴, which seems to “terrify” a significant part of Slovak philosophers and

intellectuals. For instance, with regard to the relationship of pragmatism to Marxism on the one hand, and liberalism on the other, Emil Višňovský states that

the ‘middle ground’ of pragmatism in political theory and praxis means that “pragmatism is in sharp ideological opposition neither to liberalism nor to Marxism. On the contrary, it finds in both a ‘rational core’ and such aspects that it can side with. Pragmatists are post-liberals and at the same time also post-Marxists, who have learned a lesson not only from the history of classical liberalism but also from Marxism. The philosophical framework and the basis of such ideological integration is pragmatist anti-dualism, transcending traditional oppositions between individual and community, individualism and holism, nature and culture, subjective and objective, facts and values, aims and means, morality and politics, politics and economy, right and left, capitalism and Communism, ideals and reality, motives and deeds, etc., that is, between those that liberalism and Marxism traditionally separate and juxtapose (Višňovský 2014, 119).

It has to be emphasized that such an attempt at locating oneself in-between different positions, or directly in “the middle”, does not serve as a camouflage to conceal any kind of conservatism or reactionary stance, nor is it a naïve belief that every problem can be solved by a “centrist” compromise. Rather, it is a genuine dialogical attitude towards social reality.

How can we reconcile diverse and often very rigid positions, and what role can pragmatism play here? Višňovský’s interpretation may help once again as a point of departure for further discussion. In his words, pragmatism rejects the existence of eternal, invariable, constant, ideal platonic “forms” or the universal essence of all variable individual things: “Forms are real rather than ideal, for they are inherent in things; they are fluid, they evolve, i.e., they transform themselves, along with things and within their context.” (Višňovský 2014, 105) As Višňovský further emphasizes, “we can even say that the entire “spirit” of American philosophy in general, and pragmatism in particular, is transformative, in the sense of a vision, revision and the potential for envisaging and creating a new picture of the world.”¹⁵ (Višňovský 2014,

¹⁴ Like in Western countries, the three major “compartments” are liberalism, socialism and conservatism. In Slovakia, however, throughout history, there have been (too) many adherents of their various extreme versions such as classical *laissez-faire* capitalism, which dominated in the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938), Clerical Fascism (1939–1945), Stalinism/Marxism-Leninism (after 1948), Neoliberalism (after 1992, in Slovakia, especially after 2002). Today, they all are variously present in the public sphere, struggling for the dominance; their “soft versions”, such as left-liberalism, social-democratic reformism or moderate conservatism, are rather scarce.

¹⁵ Unfortunately, it is not the philosophy of pragmatism that

107) Višňovský lists a number of other features of pragmatism such as anti-finitism, temporariness, provisionality, ephemerality, fluidity and temporality, dynamism, processuality and anti-absolutism. Ontology prioritizes time and change, potentiality and contingency over immutability and fixedness – nothing is given as fixed or absolute that we could not recreate or transform through our activity. This may lead us to claim that we could as well transform economy and thus evade the Marxist – as well as the current neoliberal – perception of economy and society as “eternal”, “unchanging” and “the only possible”. In this context, it is important to point out pragmatism’s orientation towards praxis and action. “Human activity per se means transformation – through an active contribution and intervention in reality, through experimentation and reconstitution of various situations.” (Višňovský 2014, 107) It does not, however, represent “a defense of a blind, anarchist or arbitrary transformation at all costs, but rather a directed, controlled, planned, “humanistic” transformation in the name of common human good.” (Višňovský 2014, 108)

For pragmatism, social and cultural critique is an instrument of transformation, thus representing one of the essential characteristics of pragmatist philosophy at large. However, the critique should be constructive rather than “pathological” (such as voices claiming that everything in present Slovakia is downright wrong, as can be heard especially from Marxist-Leninists or Fascists, but also from radically Western oriented “categorical” liberals), and rather gradual than categorical.¹⁶ It should indeed be moderate and based on dialogue, and able to reveal the underlying reasons why Slovakia (along with other East-Central European countries) has ended up in current morass. In order to find relevant answers, thorough historical research and hermeneutics seem to be necessary.

The previous reflections deserve one more comment. Although the idea of a dialogical way of solving problems

has not yet been applicable in all societies for various reasons, most of the EU countries (of which Slovakia is a member, too), possess enough resources for dialogical and pragmatic problem-solving. Thus, for all that has been said, the democratic transitions in Europe have been largely successful and there is enough room for addressing the current problems by other than radical means. To break it down further, “the old” EU members (before the extension in 2004) had either been democratic even before WWII, such as France, the Scandinavian countries or the former EU member Great Britain, or underwent democratic transition after the war, such as Germany or Italy, with Spain, Portugal or Greece joining in later. Ultimately, in the post-1989 period, when Czechoslovakia, and then independent Slovakia (since 1993), jumped on the huge wave of transformation, the liberal-democratic framework was established across Europe. What is now of utmost importance is to make sure that the existing distortions – such as the neoliberal understanding of the economy – would not destroy the still-fragile (especially in “the new” EU) democratic structures and institutions. Hence, the question that remains to be answered is whether the legal framework alone is sufficient for securing stability, democracy and justice.

The Slovak Experience in a Broader Perspective of Neoliberal Europe

Outside the East-Central European context, the last thirty to forty years have not given any reason for overt optimism, either.¹⁷ A quick glance at contemporary Western societies makes us realize that the existing situation requires considerable criticism. With regard to the state of societies in highly developed capitalist countries, Axel Honneth, along with many other social scientists,¹⁸ argues that there is a “trend toward growing impoverishment of large parts of the population; the emergence of a new ‘underclass’ lacking access to economic as well as sociocultural resources and the steady

dominates at American universities today, especially not Dewey’s. This may at least in part account for the global success of neoliberalism.

¹⁶ Cf. (Honneth 2014, 9)

¹⁷ Cf. for instance (Geiselberger 2017).

¹⁸ There is a large selection of relevant literature, cf. for instance (Sklair, 2001, Robinson 2004, Piketty 2014, Streeck 2014).

increase of the wealth of a small minority” (Honneth 2004a, 112). Already in 2004, Honneth lashed out at the “scandalous manifestations of an almost totally unrestrained capitalism today” (Ibid.) at a time that was the culmination point of neoliberal radicalization in Slovakia, and at a time which was still full of “(neo)liberal triumphalism” across the Western world, with the famous slogan “There is no alternative”. Naturally, Honneth was not the only one. Nevertheless, to offer a short explanation of the negative consequences of neoliberalism, I will follow his interpretation further. Honneth points out that what happened during that period was described by economists as the phase of eliminating Fordist production methods, which led to a new method of addressing job candidates not as dependent employees, but rather as “creative businessmen with themselves”. Honneth highlights the fact that corporations operating at an international level without any political control constantly seek new ways of signing contracts. This leads to the reoccurrence of the same forms of unprotected contractual work, part-time jobs and work from home, which had existed at the beginning of capitalist industrialization. Due to increasing flexibility of the labor market and adaptation of the whole society to market principles, poorly justified by referring to a new form of individualism, the “social question” is becoming a challenge once again, even though, by the latter half of the 20th century, it was regarded as part of the already-vanquished heritage of the 19th century (Honneth 2004b, 473, 475).

It is necessary to emphasize that all the phenomena are much more pronounced in post-socialist countries. In Slovakia, a huge part of the population has been very critical and very confused and disappointed about the post-1989 situation, not least due to high unemployment rates.¹⁹ Other pressing problems are emigration – including the brain drain of young and educated elites, pauperi-

zation of a large part of the population, and the emergence of slums, which exacerbates the marginalization of ethnic minorities, material inequality and further phenomena increasing the social gulf. And there are a number of other problems, like the collapse of industry and agriculture in many regions, the political dominance of oligarchs, and omnipresent corruption. The most painful and, in a way, also the darkest phase of the transformation from a Soviet economic system to market economy was the decade of 1990–2000.²⁰ And now, following the economic crisis of 2008, the situation in the European periphery is similar to that of post-socialist countries, in some cases even arguably worse – such as in Greece (not to speak of the conditions in many regions in Spain, Portugal or in southern Italy, or even in France and Great Britain).²¹ Nonetheless, as already mentioned, we should not conclude that there are no major differences between the West and the East-Central European societies. Although similar developments may be identified especially in the political area – such as the recent rise of the so called “anti-system or anti-establishment parties” – the system of “checks and balances” and the role of civil society are still stronger in most Western countries than in East-Central Europe. Take, for example, the institutional blockades of willfulness of Donald Trump or Boris Johnson, or the huge civil resistance against certain decisions of Emanuel Macron. At the other extreme, there are Poland and Hungary, and think also of the “berlusconisation”²² of Slovakia and Czechia.²³

Yet – and after all these critical remarks this may sound paradoxical – despite all misdevelopments, there

¹⁹ Fortunately, these figures have been on the decrease over the last few years, but they are still regionally very unbalanced, thus not really helping to solve “anti-systemic” political tendencies. Moreover, we must ask, regarding the structure of Slovak economy, whether the increase in unemployment is only “seasonal” or stable in the long term.

²⁰ Needless to say, in countries like Romania, Bulgaria or Russia, this transition has been experienced even more drastically. And in Ukraine, this process appears to be entering its final phase – with millions fleeing the country. Countries most affected by emigration include Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, the former East Germany and Bulgaria.

²¹ See (Ther 2016).

²² The term ‘berlusconization’ should be understood as a situation when a rich person gains major control over politics, economy and mass media. This enables them to create a semblance of democracy, while in fact, people’s chances to participate in the democratic procedures are either minimised or manipulated.

²³ With the Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, who now controls not only a big portion of Czech economy and mass media, but also politics.

are still many reasons to believe that East-Central European countries have sufficient prerequisites – legal, political, cultural, economic or social – for preventing potential collapse of the liberal-democratic regime.²⁴ Moreover, in the European Union, there is an array of the New Leftist movements (such as Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain) or personalities (such as former leader of the Liberal Party Jeremy Corbyn), with their (as yet unfulfilled) ambition to put forward viable alternatives to the flawed versions of capitalism. Hence, the future of many traditional social-democratic parties across Europe is obviously in question, too. Despite occasional victories in some countries, they are losing or have already lost their traditional position. In this sense, it becomes important to re-think economic and political alternatives to the present situation, where an idea of democratic socialism may once again play a cardinal role, and which Axel Honneth attempts to revive (Honneth 2017). His attempt could be brought on the same platform with the discussion in Czechoslovakia in 1989, when an idea of socialism was still one of the political demands of the Velvet/Gentle revolution.²⁵

Dewey, Honneth and the Czechoslovak '89

Although Honneth's analyses of the "scandalous manifestations of capitalism today" were written before the financial and economic crises of 2008, and one, especially with a radical leftist perspective, may expect even a more critical response with regard to the existing problems,²⁶ there are plausible reasons to claim that the core of Honneth's approach, in a sense rather moderate, is still relevant. This is accompanied by the assumption that despite certain similarities between our present situation and the 19th-century laissez-faire capitalism, there is no way to conceive of a socialist revival in nar-

row Marxist categories related to the 19th-century perspectives. Modern human societies are too complex to offer such a simplistic solution. Moreover, to emphasize it again, the degree of moderateness I attempt to develop keeps in mind Višnovký's emphasis on the "middle ground" of pragmatism, which, in my view, is shared by Dewey and Honneth alike.

Hence, before touching on Honneth's interpretation of John Dewey's democratic theory, let us quote Dewey's brief but comprehensive critique of Marxism, from his study entitled "Totalitarian economics and democracy" (Dewey 1988):

The inherent theoretical weakness of Marxism is that it supposed a generalization that was made at a particular date and place (and made even then only by bringing observed facts under a premise drawn from a metaphysical source) can obviate the need for continued resort to observation, and to continual revision of generalizations in their office of working hypotheses. In the name of science, a thoroughly anti-scientific procedure was formulated, in accord with which a generalization is made having the nature of ultimate "truth," and hence holding good at all times and places.

Laissez-faire individualism indulged in the same kind of sweeping generalization but in the opposite direction. Doubtless, in accordance with the law of the union of opposites, this background played its part in creating a cultural atmosphere favourable to Marxism. But two opposite errors do not constitute one truth, especially when both errors have the same root. With some disregard for historic facts, the Marxist doctrine might even be regarded as a generalized version of that aspect of classic economic theory which held that completely free competition in the open market would automatically produce universal harmony of persons and nations, Marx converting competition of individuals into war of classes (Dewey 1988, 125).

As shown, Dewey not only convincingly argues against the tenability of Marxist theory (which will be discussed below in more detail, using A. Honneth's interpretation), but also against the tenability of laissez-faire capitalism. This makes such ideas applicable also to the present situation, especially in East-Central Europe, which seemingly goes from one extreme to the other. For an educated social democrat, such a conclusion as offered by Dewey may sound banal at first. And of course, it is

²⁴ Regarding the Slovak issue, see for instance, (Šimečka 2017).

²⁵ Cf. (Vaněk 1994, 56). The terms "Velvet Revolution" and "Gentle revolution" are used interchangeably, with the former being more frequent in Czechia and internationally, while the latter is more confined to the Slovak setting.

²⁶ See for instance the discussion between Axel Honneth and Jaques Rancière (Honneth – Rancière 2017).

banal in a sense. However, if we consider today's intellectual discourse in Slovakia, the difficulty with reaching a consensus or at least a certain balance between the supporters of those two ideological poles becomes blatantly apparent. In a similar vein as Dewey, Honneth looks critically at the flaws of classical Marxism and the 19th century socialism, which he interprets as being fixated on the spirit and culture of industrialism, especially emphasizing three critical points.

First, Honneth points up that just like Saint-Simon and his followers, the subsequent generations of socialists were hardly interested in the political function of the newly acquired civil rights, and "the reorganization of society according to the principle of solidarity would have to take place entirely within the economic sphere." (Honneth 2017, 34) Secondly, Honneth sees the problem of their theory (once again mentioning the followers of Saint-Simon but also Robert Owen, Louis Blanc and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon) in the fact "that even before their theory takes effect in practice, the interests and desires they sought to justify and bring to fruition already existed objectively in social reality." (Honneth 2017, 38) From this, Honneth concludes that "socialist theory was in danger of becoming self-referential²⁷ by projecting onto social reality a collective movement, which was meant to justify its own prognoses, but which had in fact merely been constructed by ascribing certain interests to workers." (Honneth 2017, 39) Concomitantly, socialist theorists relied on a revolutionary proletariat as the internal opponent to the capitalist system. The third flaw of the socialist theory consists in the premise of the historical inevitability of human progress. This precludes opening socialist thinking to the idea of exper-

imentalism, proposed by John Dewey,²⁸ and also by above-mentioned Emil Višnovský as the general feature of pragmatism.²⁹

Let us turn now, however, to the discussion about the proper understanding of democracy, in which the role of the public sphere – the space for democratic will-formation, is necessary for discussing, challenging and overcoming the past and potential future "errors" (i.e. wrong generalizations). According to Honneth, as expressed in his study "Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today" (Honneth 2007), there are two dominant streams in the theory of democracy, which aim at assigning a more central role to democratic will-formation than political liberalism: republicanism and proceduralism. Despite the common ground, i.e., their respective critique of liberalism, there are significant differences:

[w]hereas republicanism takes its orientation from antiquity's ideal of a citizenry for whose members the intersubjective negotiation of common affairs has become an essential part of their lives, proceduralism insists that citizens' virtues are not needed to reactivate the process of democratic will-formation, but simply morally justified procedures. Thus, in the former model, the democratic public sphere is the medium of a self-governing political community; in the latter, it is the procedure through which society attempts to solve political problems rationally and legitimately (Honneth 2007, 218).

However, according to Honneth, there are more than merely two radically democratic alternatives to political liberalism, and he suggests John Dewey's theory of democracy as a third path. I argue, in line with Honneth, that such a suggestion may appear surprising, since both normative models of democracy – republicanism and

²⁷ This was even more salient in the works of Karl Marx: "In both his early and later writings, Marx assumes that the aims of his own theory are already shared by a collective subject within social reality – a subject that, despite all the differences between the concrete feelings of the individual members possesses a shared interest in revolution. As a consequence of this highly dubious methodological presupposition, socialist theory would henceforth be bound to the virtually transcendent precondition of an already present social movement, even though it was necessarily unclear whether it actually existed in social reality." (Honneth 2017, 40)

²⁸ "By assuming historical inevitability, as John Dewey would later remark matter-of-factly, socialists robbed themselves of the chance to view themselves as a movement whose best way of realizing the idea of social freedom under given historical conditions was to experiment socially. Instead, all representatives of socialism were convinced that they already knew what the new social organization of freedom would look like without ever having to explore the opportunities for change offered by rapidly changing circumstances" (Honneth 2017, 46).

²⁹ It is important to mention that the idea of experimentalism plays a crucial role in Honneth's attempt to renew a certain idea of socialism as well.

proceduralism – claim Dewey as a theoretical predecessor. There is not enough room in this article to comprehensively introduce Dewey’s theory, or Honneth’s interpretation. Regarding the above-mentioned problem of the post-1989 transformation, I will only introduce a few ideas relevant to developing a more proper understanding of democracy. The thrust of Honneth’s interpretation lies in the following two points: (1) the difference between Dewey on the one hand and Arendt and Habermas as the most important proponents of republicanist and proceduralist tradition, respectively, on the other; (2) Dewey’s rediscovery of the notion of democracy as an ethical ideal.

“Although Dewey shares with Arendt and Habermas the intention of criticizing the individualist understanding of freedom,” Honneth writes, “he sees the incarnation of all communicative freedom not as intersubjective speech but as the communal (*gemeinschaftlich*) employment of individual forces to cope with given problems” (Honneth 2007, 222). Honneth adds that by proceeding from this idea of voluntary cooperation, Dewey is committed here more to Marx than to Tocqueville, and emphasizes that, from the outset, Dewey appreciates the internal connection between cooperation, freedom and democracy. Equally significant is Dewey’s criticism of the quantitative model of democracy. In Dewey’s view, democracy may not be understood instrumentally as a numerical principle for the establishment of state order; “for him it is too unrealistic, too much a mere fiction, to believe that social life unfolds without any association between the individuals prior to the formation of a political unit.” (Ibid.) So Honneth concludes:

[t]he idea of the democratic public sphere exists on the basis of social presuppositions that can be secured only outside this idea itself; it must expect each citizen to share so much common ground with all others that an interest in involving oneself actively in political affairs can emerge at all. However, this much common ground can evolve only where individuals have already been able to experience communicative relatedness in the pre-political domain; and in [Honneth’s] view, this vacant spot in a politically one-sided

theory of democracy is filled by Dewey’s idea of social cooperation, i.e., of a division of labor under conditions of justice (Honneth 2007, 235).

As Honneth emphasizes, in Dewey’s concept of society (heavily influenced by Hegel – especially in his earlier phase), the idea of a “social organism” plays an important role.³⁰ It is necessary to point out, however, that for Dewey, “each individual is entitled not just to a part of the freedom that has been made socially possible, but always also possesses the entire sovereignty through which all individuals, as a people, jointly become the sovereign bearer of power” (Honneth 2007, 223). Honneth then emphasizes that John Dewey broadened the ideas presented by Plato and Aristotle, which dealt with the relation between individual freedom and political community:

Dewey concedes that antiquity’s ideal of aristocracy does not essentially differ in substance from the democratic idea. In both ideals, citizens are said to attain freedom through self-realization in conformity with the ethical ends that together constitute the ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*) of the polity. Hence any difference between the two ideals must consist not in the ends, but in the means of the political constitution: whereas the aristocratic ideal believes only a small group of very talented individuals to be capable of ethically appropriate self-realization, such that the majority of the population has to be urged paternalistically to conduct a virtuous life, the democratic ideal is confident that all members of society can perfect themselves of their own free will in the desired direction of the good pursued by the members of society (Honneth 2007).

Honneth concludes that Dewey rediscovered the notion of democracy as an ethical ideal epitomized by the three guiding principles of the French Revolution, liberty, equality, and fraternity: a “democratic constitution presupposes individual freedom in the sense of an unconstrained personality development that, on the condition of institutionalized equality of opportunity, allows all members of society to develop the capabilities and strengths that enable them in association with all other

³⁰ The reason behind emphasizing the idea of “organism” – or better, of an organic approach to democracy –, is that such an understanding of democracy can be found in James Krapfl’s interpretation of the Czech and Slovak revolution(s) of 1989.

to contribute fraternally, or better, solidarily, to the pursuit of jointly shared ends” (Honneth 2007, 225).

As mentioned above, Slovakia is far away from such conditions. Moreover, there is a strong tendency in post-1989 political writings to belittle the role of citizens or to interpret the motivation for a revolution solely by people’s desire for more material consumption (which is partly true, but hard to assess), which the former regime was not able to deliver. James Krapfl used an interesting method of interpreting the revolution in Czechoslovakia, which described the expectations of most Czechoslovakian citizens. In his interpretation of the revolution in Czechoslovakia, he did not draw only on the post-revolutionary history books, which mainly focus on the developments in Bratislava and Prague, the Slovak and Czech capitals. Rather, he based his reflections on detailed archive work in which he explored the grassroots revolutionary activity in 1989 through posters, leaflets and reports of public meetings etc. He also took a closer look at the peripheral regions to show that what happened indeed constituted a mass movement, not just a “cabinet revolution” as a deal between old and new rulers. Krapfl lists six key ideals of November 1989 as the main message from the revolution of 1989: nonviolence, self-organization, democracy, fairness, socialism, and humanness (Krapfl 2013, 74-110). Thus, he highlights the strong normative aspects of that revolutionary motivation. According to Krapfl,

the Gentle Revolution articulated new ideas about representation and the culture of democratic politics. Whether or not they had read Arendt, Czechoslovak citizens agreed that ‘political freedom... means the right ‘to be a participator in government,’ or it means nothing.’ Whereas American revolutionaries at the end of the eighteenth century had innovated by instituting checks and balances among branches of government, Czechs and Slovaks at the end of the twentieth century innovated by proposing checks and balances between government and people. Collectively, their demands for referenda, the power to recall deputies who had betrayed their trust, and other mechanisms for confronting lawmakers with public opinion amounted to a new model of democracy that was neither “liberal” nor “totalitarian,” but sought to combine the virtues of representative and direct democracy while avoiding

their defects. With this model, and with their concern for representing modernized social estates, Czechs and Slovaks essentially sought to humanize democratic institutions and make them responsive, to ensure meaningful participation of the people in the government of their affairs. They turned their attention not just to the institutional side of the equation, but to the popular side as well, seeking to nurture a democratic political culture. In this concern, the revolutionaries of 1989 were united with those of 1789, but whereas the French had sought to create a democratic culture through rationalist means, Czechs and Slovaks – characteristically – adopted a more organic approach, emphasizing democratic practice rather than ideology. In this, too, their approach was novel (Krapfl 2013, 109–110).

James Krapfl points out – and this needs to be emphasized – that such great thinkers as Jürgen Habermas or François Furet were not able to see any novelty at all. He claims that “Habermas and Furet proffered these judgments, of course, without actually consulting much evidence” (Krapfl 2013, p. 105). In this sense, there is something significant about the critical social theory today which focuses its interest mostly on analyzing four countries, i.e., Germany, Great Britain, France and the United States. The consequence of such blindness and narrow-mindedness is lingering West-centrism, which can be found also in Honneth’s work. Yet, for all that has been said, his social philosophy might still play an important role in attempts to strengthen democracy in Slovakia. However, for this to happen, it is necessary to further discuss, develop and even question Honneth’s version of his pragmatic critical theory, especially with regard to 1) the negative impacts of globalization (including the consequences of environmental crises) and 2) cultural and civilizational differences. Point 1) deserves a reservation – despite the aforementioned circumstance, many existing problems are hardly solvable within the borders of one country, let alone a country as small as Slovakia. Surprisingly, however, Honneth does not inquire much into the dynamics of global capitalism or the possibilities of reducing its negative impacts.³¹ Point 2) ad-

³¹ Christopher Zurn summarizes in his concluding speculation about Honneth’s work that “the ‘struggles and wishes of our age’ are, however, *environmental* and *global* struggles and

dresses the intercultural facet of globalization. Naturally, Honneth himself is well aware of the variety of reactions to the same ideas in different societies during intercultural encounters,³² but in this respect, like in his approach to global capitalism, he does not offer much in terms of thorough analysis. Indeed, members of such societies from across the world often not only have fundamentally highly diverse ‘patterns of recognition’, but also different world views, i.e., ontological and cosmological perspectives (S. N. Eisenstadt; J. P. Arnason). If there is to be an emancipatory theory capable of offering the tools for the emancipation of individuals from inappropriate social conditions (i.e., for social progress) under the context of globalization, it must develop (and not merely declare) – specific sensitivity in order to see the ‘dialectics’ between the “universal” and the “particular” in its interdisciplinary analyses and inquiries.³³

I would not claim that the Czechoslovak activists’ understanding of democracy, so important for Krapfl’s analysis, can be directly equated with Dewey’s conception. However, there is at least an indirect connection between Dewey and Honneth on the one hand and the popular understanding of democracy by the majority of Czechoslovak citizens on the other through the ideas and works by the first Czechoslovak president and philosopher Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. In general, there is a certain continuity between Masaryk’s thought and the philosophy of pragmatism, and his ideas already played a certain role during the Prague Spring of 1968, which can, in many respects, be regarded as the forerunner of 1989. In order to comprehend what went wrong over the past thirty years and which normative direction can be taken, the affinity between their ideas and ideals promises a successful (and creative) adaptation of Dewey’s and

Honneth’s thoughts in Slovakia today. In fact, both for Dewey and for Masaryk, democracy was a way of life, an ethical ideal – and not merely a political regime with specific kinds of procedures. According to Krapfl, “Czechs and Slovaks in 1989 elevated humanness and human dignity above ideology; they insisted on never losing sight of human reality whatever rules, bureaucratic procedures, and other man-made systems might decree; they recognized that these systems can never fully encompass every human situation” (Krapfl 2003, 107–108). However, this did not mean that the activists of 1989 found procedures irrelevant; rather, they did not find them sufficient. Many of them would definitely appreciate Dewey’s rediscovery of the notion of democracy as an ethical ideal. Hence, in the end, let us mention another very important theme, which should be part of our ethical framework today.

Instead of a Conclusion: Towards Dialogical Cosmopolitanism

Although their various and specific roots are difficult to trace, we can identify many *identity movements* across the globe in the past, but especially today. The same is happening in Slovakia. The growing interest in the “revival” of certain aspects of traditional Slovak culture, especially of Slovak folklore, is omnipresent. From new fashion collections with folk ornaments, through popular singers and music bands singing traditional songs and playing folk music, to the renaissance of various traditions of Christmas, Easter, and many others.³⁴ This indisputably has many favorable consequences that are praiseworthy such as interest in interpersonal relations, family, local communities, neighborhoods, etc., most of them pointing in a direction that Višňovský, Dewey and Honneth would be sympathetic towards. Nevertheless, there is still a great danger that those positive feelings and passions may escalate into unbalanced ethnocentric glory of one’s own culture and nation and dismissal of all nondomestic elements. What we currently experience

wishes. Capturing them in thought – specifically in an interdisciplinary social theory with emancipatory intent – will, I believe, require expanding Honneth’s critical social theory through new categories and modes of analysis adequate to new perils and promises” (Zurn 2015, 212).

³² See, for instance, his brief comment regarding gay marriages in his book about socialism (Honneth 2017, 100).

³³ Cf. my attempts to open such a discussion (Dunaj 2017, Kögler – Dunaj 2018).

³⁴ Cf. for instance (Feinberg 2018).

(and not only in East-Central European countries), is an increasing number of nationalist resentments against threats from abroad. This fear has an explainable core. Indeed, many recent deviations in society have been connected with the negative impacts of global capitalism and geopolitical games of superpowers and must be somehow stopped. However, the “closing door” solution and the comeback to our “traditional values” is not only problematic (nobody really knows what those values exactly are), but very dangerous as well. Just remember how badly Slovaks treated the Slovak Jews during WWII and how aggressively a huge part of the population treats the Slovak Roma people today.³⁵

In this sense, I would like to conclude that the big task mainly before philosophers and intellectuals in the East-Central European region is to once again open the debate over cosmopolitanism, and this idea should be of key importance in democratic self-understanding. It is indeed relevant to consider Honneth’s reservations about one of the most famous versions of cosmopolitanism – namely, that of Ulrich Beck, which can be found in Honneth’s comments on the future cosmopolitan or non-cosmopolitan character of socialism (Honneth 2017, 100).³⁶ However, we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater, as do many critics of cosmopolitanism (Honneth does not do it, he just opens the problem), for there are other versions of cosmopolitanism, which chiefly prioritize the dialogical nature of such an endeavor. As Maria Rovisco and Magdalena Nowicka state in their introduction to the *Ashgate Research Companion to Cosmopolitanism*, there is a new research direction, represented by authors like Fuzuki Kurasawa, Hans-Herbert Kögler and Pheng Cheah, but also Nick Stevenson, Anthony Cooper, Chris Rumford and others, which

brings forth a more robust theorization of critical cosmopolitanism as reconstructive critique of alternative perspectives and concrete practices ‘from below’ that are underpinned by cosmopolitan principles. In this new understanding, cosmopolitanism is not necessarily seen as a project of global governance that exists beyond the state form. In fact, the citizenship and the territoriality of the state are now seen as capable of renewal not only by optimizing the conditions that enable meaningful cosmopolitan experiences, but also by facilitating adherence to cosmopolitan principles by a range of state and non-state actors. This is visible, for example, in the possibility of modes of action in negotiations between states and the contribution of bottom-up resistance and legal innovation taking place around the world to the resilience of domination within and across state borders (Rovisco – Nowicka 2018, 3).

The general openness and non-dogmatic mode of the pragmatist philosophical tradition is a very promising point of departure for adopting the idea of dialogical cosmopolitanism, as proposed by Hans-Herbert Kögler. According to him, the capabilities required for a fruitful and adequate participation in global discourse are acquired in particular social and cultural (even familial) settings. As such, they always remain bound with specific meanings and value orientations of one’s home culture and context. But then, they also allow for a dialogical expansion into other contexts and reflexive distancing from one’s own, thereby avoiding ethnocentric over-generalization (Kögler 2018). Works by authors such as John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Richard Rorty (despite various differences among them, also regarding Kögler’s conception) and others reveal a sharp eye for the “local-global” dynamics and, as such, may be very useful in overcoming the growing conservative and nationalist tendencies (not only) in Slovakia. And even if a significant part of the Slovak Left dreams of the return to the pre-1989 state of affairs, we cannot but agree with Emil Višňovský’s analysis again. He emphasizes that one thing is certain about the discussions of a meaningful future political program – there is no going back to the situation before 1989 (Višňovský 2014, 104). The slogan “The way back is impossible, you must go for-

³⁵ Not to mention increasing islamophobia (even though there are almost no Muslims in Slovakia), the EU hate (despite Slovakia’s slim chances to compete against global players), homophobia, etc.

³⁶ According to Honneth, Ulrich Beck’s stipulation to think “methodologically” only in cosmopolitan terms within the theory of society was, in this regard, too premature, as it did not take into account to what extent the broad areas of our social reality are still determined by national regulations alone.

ward!", coined by Ľudovít Štúr³⁷ and 'posted' on one of the most frequent streets in Bratislava (named after him), should also be permanently reminded to all neoliberals, who are mentally stuck in the late 1990s, to all those Marxist-Leninists and Neo-Stalinists, who would wish the restoration of the political system of 1948–1989, to all Fascists, who long for the resurrection of the Slovak State of 1939–1945, and to all conservatives who would even want back the kingdom of the early 20th century, in short, to extremists of all creeds. To me, the message adapted for the 21st century reads, "towards a more open outlook on society as an organic part of the globalized yet interconnected world, towards (political) creativity and genuine dialogue".

Closing notes: While, naturally, other interpretations of the revolution are possible as well, the normative potential of the above ideals (that is, those listed by Krapfl and combined with dialogical cosmopolitanism) for current human emancipation is worthy of inquiry. Yet, what is perhaps most significant is that Slovaks (or Czechs) do not have to feel that democratic and socialist ideals were a "foreign import" from the West (or from the East). In fact, these have been an inherent part of their self-actualization, of their historical "struggles for recognition" for centuries. Both nations have enough resources and tradition of their own to have to rely solely on this foreign import (and/or indoctrination) from either side.³⁸ On the other hand, despite the obvi-

ous reasons behind, and potential for, the 1989 revolution, the last 30 years have revealed serious shortcomings which, if left unaddressed, could mean the collapse of these liberal-democratic regimes – or rather their transformation into a kind of illiberal system, as already seems to be the case in Hungary and Poland (at least such a strong tendency may be observed there). One of the theses I have attempted to put forward in this study is that we misunderstood the concept of freedom, reducing it to the freedom of the market – a 1990s import from the West, where it manifested itself as a neoliberal "revolution". Paradoxically enough, here we can identify certain parallels with the import of Communism from the East, especially its Stalinist ideology, to the home arena. Many (including JP Sartre³⁹) explain the failure of socialism in our country by not implementing "our" socialism (such as that TG Masaryk might have embraced as well) but its Stalinist form instead. The "takeaway" for today is that we have not carried out "our" social and participatory democracy, but its neoliberal version.

To back my interpretation, I first reached for the analyses by influential Slovak authors – Emil Višnovský and František Novosád, and then briefly touched on a broader European context, using the works of Axel Honneth. In the fourth part, which is of key importance from a philosophical perspective, I have attempted to show that it is still possible, even desirable, to build on certain theoretical concepts from abroad. Slovakia is not an island and many problems are similar, if not the same, in almost all modern societies – hence the reference to John Dewey in addition to Axel Honneth. To prevent any objections claiming there is a new attempt to import something from the outside, I have pointed out, using James Krapfl, that many of Honneth's and Dewey's ideas have not only been long present in our society, but were even rather widespread, especially in 1989.

To conclude, what has to be pointed out is the need to extend the normative ideals by the perspectives that

³⁷ One of the three most recognized political figures in Slovak history (together with Milan Rastislav Štefánik and Alexander Dubček)

³⁸ As early as 1848, in *The Claims of the Slovak Nation*, one can identify not only national or political motives, but also social ambitions and hopes. The widespread idea of equality can perhaps be most aptly illustrated with the 1864 revolutionary poem by Samo Chalúpka *Mor ho (Crush him!)*, where he emphasizes: "God's truth decreed to Slovak folk is strong / To be enslaved is far from right; to be a master is a greater wrong/ The rights of man his peers' should not exceed / Freedom and glory is our holy creed!"

In a similar vein, another poem by Karel Kuzmány written in 1848 and equally important for the interpretation of normative ideals of modern Slovak history, entitled *Kto za pravdu horí (Who burns with passion for the truth)*, betrays some cosmopolitan features:

"He, who burns with passion for the truth in holy sacrifice / The one who's ready to forgo his life for humanity's rights / Whose tears for poor will always fill his eyes / To him my song of glory

soars above the skies."

³⁹ Cf. Sartre's essay "The Socialism that Came in From the Cold" in (Liehm 1968).

neither Dewey, nor Krapfl, not even Honneth have elaborated on in detail: the problems of negative effects of globalization, and how to deal with them adequately. I regard the return to closed nation-states as impossible, so I propose to extend the ideals of the Czech and Slovak revolution(s) of 1989 as recounted by Krapfl by dialogical cosmopolitanism, the idea developed by Hans-Herbert Kögler, which, while being “rooted”, is still open enough to perceive and embrace the global context and problems, including the current serious environmental crisis.⁴⁰

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