

DISCUSSION

ABOUT OUR STATE-BUILDING

Karolina Adamová*

Abstract: *In this essay the author reflects on the subject of state-building, its interpretation and impact on the society. The government usually understands state-building differently than the opposition. The question is raised whether the development does not lead from state-building to “herd-building”, when smaller and larger groups behave like an easy-to-manipulate herd. But how can we revert this process?*

Keywords: *state-building, herd-building*

Karel Čapek was once accused by his critics of being too fond of state-building and too cautious. Čapek was rejecting such allegations because he understood that state-building was seen by his critics as unconditional support of the current government devoid of any critique. After all, even F. X. Šalda suspected in 1930 K. Čapek, but also F. Peroutka and Fr. Šrámek, of such state-building attitudes.¹

However, Karel Čapek wished that communists, more than anybody else, would drive state-building and show more respect towards the state and strive to build it, rather than destroy.

Čapek was not an extremist, he was a man with humanist ideals who believed in the existing social order and its gradual improvement. In his essay *About General Things, i.e. Zoon politikon / On the Creation of the State* [O věcech obecných čili Zóon politikon / O té státotvornosti] he rejected having “state-building” beliefs in the sense described in Šalda’s critique. He wrote: “Being in favor of the current order – what do you mean? Current order is a struggle, and who would be in favor of a mere continuation of a struggle? What fool would take on the fight we are fighting? Nobody on the left or right wants the current order, perhaps only those who wish to use it for political profiteering, all the rest care only about their party’s victory. Well, let’s assume it’s about the victory of a big idea. But be assured, there will be no victory of a big idea if it’s a victory of fearful and undisciplined men. Remember what men, what mental states, what principles, what views come to life in our political and moral hatchery. I cannot help thinking that things do not look bright for us. In spite of all this boasting and all this radicalism, we are a nation of flabby ideals and feeble zeal. I do believe that growing to be righteous means learning to fight; that those shall win, who use fewer phrases, prophecies and generalizations and have more genuine interest in the entire and unabridged reality; seek truth, not dogmas; say fewer words but do more activism. That the truth stands with those, who do not await a new order but seek to improve what can be improved today.”²

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¹ Šaldův zápisník II. 1929–1930. p. 196.

² ČAPEK, K. *O té naší státotvornosti. O věcech obecných čili ZÓON POLÍTIKON*. Praha 1991, p. 103.

In 1946, during a writers' congress, Peroutka told mockingly about state-building: "During the First Republic the notion of state-building was the subject of much derision. But never before today have Czech writers submitted quite so passionately to the idea of state-creation, or state-building, as they now call it."³ According to Peroutka, contemporary writers linked the efforts to build and develop the state with socialism.

But what is state-building, an expression many wave around as they please? Well, usually those wave it around who wish to shield the current order against criticism. Any government, however good, can be much improved. A state-building government in this sense can attempt to hide corruption and other social evils. But today also those claim to be defend state-building who constantly criticize the government, even when criticism is completely out of place.

But what if criticism is unjustified? Should it be forbidden? Certainly not, the government should be able to respond to such critique – and find strong arguments. Only criticism overstepping the boundaries laid down by the law, or even violating them, can be punished.

One would almost want to say, as they would say before 1989, that criticism should be constructive.⁴ But that meant criticism that harms nothing and allows the government business to continue as usual. That is toothless criticism. On the other hand, "constructive criticism", especially in the 1950s, had the lethal potential of destroying the individual who dared utter it. It varied, depending on who uttered it and against whom.

"On Modern State-building" was a topic contemplated also by the Czech historian R. Kvaček. He considered the question very relevant, especially with respect to the relationship with Europe. He believed that individual states and nations should not be lost in Europe, but they should keep their political and cultural particularities.⁵

Kvaček pointed out the extremes in the understanding of state-building and unified Europe – on one side excessive nationalism and on the other side dissolution of member states in globalized European unity.⁶

But I feel that Kvaček here targeted the statehood, i.e. understanding the state for what it is and what it should be, and sovereignty, rather than state-building. This is quite clear from the description of state-building and state politics and activities of individual political parties in the Austrian Monarchy in the 19th Century.

Also the President of the Federal Court, S. Bross, contemplated the relationship with Europe in his contribution – Reflections on the State-building process in Europe. He saw state-building primarily through the optics of the EU constitution, basic human rights and the case law of the Federal Court. Also he argued that the unification process should respect and preserve cultural and other particularities of the individual member states.

The terms *statehood* and *state-building* were often used as convenient. For example, Zd. Kučera in his contribution – We believe in democracy and freedom ever growing

³ <http://www.ucl.cas.cz/edicee/data/antologie/zdejin/1/peroutka.pdf>.

⁴ www.psp.cz/ 42. Session of the Chamber of Deputies of the CR, 2011, contribution of the then Minister of the Interior St. Gross.

⁵ http://historie.upol.cz/esf/downloads/Limity_a_moznosti-Kvacek.pdf. For history of Czech statehood see also MACHOVEC, M. *Česká státnost*. Praha 2006.

⁶ The same.

[Věříme v demokracii a ve svobodu vždy větší a větší] pointed out that T. G. Masaryk was an important champion of statehood and state-building.⁷

Also philosopher and sociologist J. L. Fischer struggled with the notion of state-building. In his article *On State-building* from 1923 he wrote that “state-building” is one of the terms “whose understanding is difficult beyond surpassing”, however, he interpreted it as any effort to build the state.⁸

In January 2013 Petr Vápeník wrote in his blog an interesting essay that was hard to overlook. He stated that admiration for the state and active attitude towards the state has become an obsolete category and that the development has moved from statehood to “herdhood”. He described well the residents of a state. In his words “They usually have difficulties characterizing their own herd. For this they compensate by belittling and scolding other herds. They know all too well that members of other herds can be best recognized when the entire herd starts jumping – and they don’t (exactly as claimed in a popular slogan: Who is not jumping is not one from our herd!). However, nothing ever brings them to stop trying to lure the lost sheep (and sometimes lost cattle) into their herd...!”⁹

This essay has a very rational basis. Young people, and not only they, have almost forgotten what is state-building and patriotism and prefer their own herd, where they feel fine. However, they may find themselves feeling lonely. Herds isolate themselves and repudiate all that is different with distrust, rejection and often with unjustified criticism.¹⁰ So, are we not witnessing the transformation from statehood to “herdhood”? If yes, we must stop it, but how?

⁷ KUČERA, Z. Věříme v demokracii a svobodu vždy větší a větší. In: Olga Nytrová, Markéta Hlasivcová, Václav Strachota (eds.). *Nepolitická politika a jiná zamyšlení*. Praha: Církev československá husitská - Kulturní rada a LHODR, 2007, p. 26.

⁸ Josef Ludvík Fischer, *O státotvornosti*. See also Výbor z díla Olomouc 2013. Review - GABRIEL, J. *STUDIA PHILOSOPHICA*. 2014, Vol. 61, No. 1, p. 79.

⁹ <http://pvapenik.blog.cz/1301/o-stadotvornosti>. See also KOSTLÁN, F. *Naši civilizaci ohrožuje ztráta kritického rozumu a stádnost. Referendum 2012*. <http://pvapenik.blog.cz/1301/o-stadotvornosti>.

¹⁰ Compare RIESMAN, D. *Osamělý dav*. Praha 1968.