

## EUGEN LÖBL (1907 – 1987)

Eugen Löbl was born on 14th May 1907 at Holíč. He completed his school education in engineering at an industrial college and continued his studies at the College for World Trade in Vienna. In his youth he joined the DAV, which grouped communist and leftist intellectuals. Löbl cooperated especially with V. Clementis, L. Novomeský, G. Husák, D. Okáli and others. Under their influence he became a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1931.

His first job was in the construction office of the Nejedlý company in Bratislava (1925 – 1926). From there he moved to a job at the insurance company Riunione Adriatica di Sicurita in Bratislava, where he worked in the motor vehicle department until 1938. From 1937 he was secretary of the Union of Friends of the USSR. In 1939 he went to Krakow on orders from the party and later to London, where he worked at the Czech Refugee Trust Fund, which helped Czechoslovak refugees. In 1941 he became secretary of the Union for Czechoslovak – British Friendship. Two years later, the Czechoslovak government in London appointed him as a national economic adviser to minister Ján Masaryk for the UNRRA agenda, and in the same year he became a leading official in the Ministry for Economic Renewal in London. During his stay he prepared materials for a book on the history and techniques of foreign trade. He completed the manuscript in 1949, but the State Security authorities destroyed it.

From 1945 he worked as deputy minister at the Ministry of Foreign Trade in Prague, holding this position until his arrest in 1949, which caused his expulsion from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. He spent three years in remand imprisonment and was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Slánský trial of November 1952 for “treason, espionage and sabotage”.

In 1955, as a result of a heart attack, he was put in the hospital section of Pankrác prison, where he wrote testimony about the investigation methods, preparation and course of the trial at the request of representatives of the general prosecutor. In a letter from 28.7.1965, he asked the Central Committee of the Communist Party about publication of a book. It happened only in 1968 under the title “Svedectvo o procese” (Testimony about the Trial). Löbl described the suffering and especially the psychological pressure to confess his “guilt” while he was in prison. The book was regarded as a bestseller at the time, but a year later it was already put on the list of banned books.

After being released from prison in 1960, Löbl was



employed as a stockman in the enterprise Odevy of Bratislava. In 1963 he was cleared of guilt and rehabilitated. On 1st April 1964, he was accepted into the service of the State Bank of Czechoslovakia as director of the regional branch in Bratislava. However, this function did not correspond well to his professional abilities and qualities, as Löbl stated in a letter sent to the wife of General Klen in 1966: “After my rehabilitation,

I should have received the function of deputy minister of foreign trade, but when I published my views in several articles, I fell into disfavour and was set aside as director of the regional branch.”

He devoted his theoretical works and considerations to the problem of making the socialist economy more effective. In July 1965, he wrote to the chief director of the State Bank of Czechoslovakia T. Šindelář: “A predominance of the consumer or a buyer’s market is desirable. Supply should slightly exceed demand. If we do not want to allow inflation, the credit limit must not be exceeded”. Excessive intervention of the state in the economy and especially administration of the currency was foreign to him. “If the government wants to have a stable currency and entrusts an institution with this task, this institution is superior to the government in the area of stability of the currency”. Together with Otto Šik, he participated in preparation of economic reforms to harmonize planning with the market economy. He also devoted great attention to reform of the Czechoslovak banking system in an attempt at institutional separation of central and commercial banking. The proposed economic model emphasized increased economic independence of enterprises and their maneuvering abilities.

His position was not simple even in the post of regional director of the State Bank of Czechoslovakia, since his positions and expressions public condemned any injustice. A letter he sent directly to J. Lenárt sharply criticized the activity of the central authorities, whose unqualified decisions caused economic difficulties for the state.

He was invited to lecture in the capitalist states because of his knowledge and learning. However, all his journeys were approved or not approved by the ideological department of the Central Committee of the Communist Part of Czechoslovakia, which he addressed in a letter of 24th May 1967 after being refused permission to lecture in Austria: “Therefore I turn to you for an explanation of why you are discriminating against me”. In the same year, the Slovak Academy of Sciences pub-



lished his book written in prison “Úvahy o duševnej práci a bohatstve národa“ (Thoughts on Intellectual Work and the Wealth of the Nation), in which he criticized Marxism and outlined the possibilities for political and economic development in Czechoslovakia.

After the tragic events of August 1968, Löbl guessed that his ideas on economic reform were permanently buried, so he decided to finally leave the country. In a letter to the general director of the State Bank of Czechoslovakia O. Pohl of 20th September 1968, the regional director F. Mišeje stated: “E. Löbl has travelled abroad in connection with the entry of the armies of five members of the Warsaw Pact to our territory, and so I propose that he be dismissed from the function of

director of the regional branch of the State Bank of Czechoslovakia with effect from 1st October 1968“.

Löbl settled in the USA, where in 1969 – 1976 he worked as a professor of economics and political sciences at various universities. He became deputy chairman of the World Congress of Slovaks, where he worked as the chief national economics expert. He worked closely with Š. B. Roman, with whom he wrote a popular-scientific book “Zodpovedná spoločnosť“ (The Responsible Society). His publishing activity continued successfully abroad. He died in 1987 in New York.

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