

Political Transformation of the City at the Beginning of Normalization

Karol JANAS

Department of Political Sciences of Alexander Dubček University of Trenčín, Študentská 2, 911 50 Trenčín, Slovak Republic
Corresponding author E-mail address: karol.janas@tuni.sk

Abstract

Slovak political system went through lots of changes during the years of normalization process. Apart from economic stagnation it was political stagnation spreading after the year of 1968 in comparison with quite liberal political situation in the early 1960s. The influence of existing political regime became stronger and even brought restrictions of minimal political freedom that started after reform movement in 1968.

Keywords

Political system, election, normalization, Communist Party, Považské strojárne.

1 Introduction

The renewal process and its violent interruption and occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact had impact on the functioning of public administration too.¹ The growing power of regime influenced all political structures, high politics and low politics as well. Local and Municipal National Administration Committees were not spared and the screening of political activities during the abortive attempt to implement the reform led to subsequent purges.² Since the loyalty of originally elected officials was uncertain and the political government also wanted to screen the possible new candidates for national committees thoroughly, they set aside originally planned elections and the mandates of deputies were prolonged. Therefore at the beginning of normalization process in 1969 the local governments in the cities were still led by the political representatives elected in 1964. Analogously to 1960 there was only one candidate for one election district in 1964.³ Altogether there were 46 elected candidates – members of the Communist Party of Slovakia – and only 14 were formally impartial because without the approval of the Communist Party it would be impossible to be nominated. The elections were held on June 14, 1964. Pavol Bohuš became the chairman of the Municipal National Committee in unanimous vote. Karol Smatana became the Deputy Chairman and Francis Kačík was nominated and selected Secretary of the National Committee.⁴ All three were elected members to Municipal Council of the National Committee and managed the city. At the same time several departments were established such as Agriculture Department, Finance Department, Education, Culture and Social Security Department, Construction Planning, Transport, Water Management and Local Economy Department, Department of Organization, Administration and Home Affairs.⁵ There were six specialistic commissions: Commission for Finance and Planning, Construction Commission, Commission for Service and Local Industry, Commission for Education and Culture, Commission for Social Security and Health Service, Commission for Public Property Protection, and in 1967 a new Local Commission of Local People's Control arose. The entire development of the city was influenced by a plant called Považské strojárne (Engineering Works). It was a major engineering company established in the thirties of the twentieth century in Považská Bystrica.⁶ Initially it was an armament plant, but at the turn of the

¹ One of the most visible results of the renewal process, which was successfully implemented at least in the abridgement form, was the establishment of the Federation. The Constitutional Act on the preparation of federal constitutional arrangement was approved by the National Assembly on June 28, 1968. Establishment of the Slovak Socialist Republic and its state bodies had an impact on the management of public administration in Považská Bystrica too. Most problems solved nationwide in Prague were transferred to national level administration in Bratislava. See: BENČÍK, A. – DOMAŇSKÝ, J. – HÁJEK, J. – KURAL, V. – MENCL, V.: *Osem mesiacov pražskej jari*. Bratislava : Osveta, 1990, p. 104.

² The study was elaborated on Považská Bystrica as an example. The city was the seat of the district and was one of the most industrialized cities within Czechoslovakia.

³ City Chronicle of Považská Bystrica, unpagged source.

⁴ JANAS, K.: *Od Februára po pokus o reformu*. Trenčín : TnUNI, 2016, p. 33.

⁵ City Chronicle of Považská Bystrica, unpagged source.

⁶ *Ščokino – Považská Bystrica*. Martin : Osveta, 1985, unpagged source.

sixties and seventies it started focusing more on non-military manufacture. The development of Považská Bystrica was influenced by those industrial changes significantly.⁷

2 Political and Social Transformation of the City

At the beginning of normalization period there were 15, 510 inhabitants in Považská Bystrica according to population census in 1970, out of which 7, 768 were men and 7, 742 were women. The numbers were distorted by the fact that the temporary dwellers, mainly students and commuters were counted as well, and the overall figure reached 1, 241 residents. The city was purely Slovak. 15, 014 inhabitants, which was 96.8%, were of Slovak nationality. Apart from them there were 439 Czech residents, 5 Polish citizens, three residents of German nationality, 22 citizens of Hungarian nationality, 10 Ukrainians and the nationality of 17 people was not identified. The whole cadastre covered 24.85 square kilometers and the population density per square km counted 624 citizens. This was the highest population density in the district of Považská Bystrica, where the average density reached 117 people. Throughout Czechoslovakia the population density was even lower, just up to 112 inhabitants. High population density caused problems particularly in newly constructed urban neighborhoods. Planning management tried to design enough green public areas, parks and playgrounds. Thanks to relatively high investments lots of trees and flowers were planted. 7, 761 residents were employed, the others were children and pensioners. The citizens worked mostly in industry, not so many in offices, shops or schools and agriculture. The rate of workers in agriculture was the lowest, only 186 people, which was 2.4% of all dwellers. It is worth considering that up to 6, 571 (84.7%) of employed residents had jobs right in the town.⁸ Political authority paid significant attention to development and growth of the city. Whereas the production of Považské strojárne (Engineering Works) of that time focused mostly on armament manufacturing the earnings were notably higher in comparison to other sectors. Housing construction planning was also in extensive progress so that to meet the requirements of employees in Považské strojárne (Engineering Works). Thanks to considerable investments made in housing development during normalization process in Považská Bystrica the lack of accommodation and housing problems were out of question. Decent living conditions guaranteed that during the beginning of the occupation there were nearly no protests. The citizens of Považská Bystrica supported the reform movement, they engaged themselves in activities during Prague Spring openly.⁹ During the occupation some articles accompanied by the photo of Dubček were published in the local weekly newspaper condemning the interruption of reform process.¹⁰ Nevertheless, when the normalization process started the situation in the city quickly returned to its pre-reform order. Since Považské strojárne (Engineering Works) was a strategic plant, communist leaders did not allow any protests or riots. And because of nearly every family's prosperity being dependent on that company, the citizens surrendered and soon transferred the resignation throughout the entire city. People constricted themselves and with some exceptions, they stopped being interested in politics completely. In spite of this fact they suffered from purges and repressions of normalization period, too.¹¹

The regime started consolidating and spreading its political power gradually. Originally planned elections in Považská Bystrica as well as in other cities throughout Czechoslovakia did not take place in 1968. The parliamentary period was prolonged until the year of 1971.¹² Municipal National Committee Assembly acted as supreme body in the city that time. Between the years of 1966 and 1971 the assembly held sessions 44 times. Assembly deputies were those who made a decision on the most important matters in local economy and culture, approved the budget and did the budget calculations for municipal bodies and organizations. They also supervised the performance of elected leaders and were carrying out task performances of theirs. Borough National Committee Council still acted as executive body. The council decided about all fundamental issues of life and the development of the city. Their responsibilities implied education, construction, health care and social welfare development, supervising cultural and social institutions, economy, finance, road building planning, population movement, agriculture employment, activities of Board of Civil Matters, and the like. After 1968 there were major changes in membership of National Committee Council. Eight members resigned in 1971

⁷ METZKER, Z.: *Manet M 90*. Považská Bystrica : Veterán klub Manín, 2016, pp. 22-27.

⁸ City Cronicle of Považská Bystrica, unpagged source.

⁹ JANAS, K.: *Považské strojárne. Od Muničky po ZVL*. Žilina : Knižné centrum, 2009, pp. 92-95.

¹⁰ Obzor, 28. 8. 1968.

¹¹ JANAS, K.: Považská Bystrica od roku 1945 po súčasnosť In: *Považská Bystrica. Z dejín mesta*. Žilina : Knižné centrum, 2006, p. 248.

¹² JANAS, K.: *Od Februára po pokus o reformu*. Trenčín : TnUNI, 2016, p. 36.

including the chairman of Municipal National Committee Paul Bohuš. It was a considerable interference with the political function of the Council. Eventually, eight out of thirteen members including the chairperson had to leave due to slightest pretences. However, there was a lack of experienced politicians and that was why several of them returned and took over their posts again. There were nine resignations in Chamber of Parliament in 1971. The members left due to busyness, health conditions, relocation, death, and even emigration.¹³

In that period of time the budget of Považská Bystrica consisted of city's own financial resources that originated from activities of Municipal National Committee in the field of construction, education, health care, culture and local economy. Furthermore, it included state taxes entrusted to national committees' competences such as agricultural taxation, citizens' income levy, property taxation, house management levies, administrative fees, school canteen allowances, cinema revenues and also payments for technical services inside the city were included. Industrial and economic organizations contributed with highest taxation payments. Furthermore, the budget comprised of additional resources, funds, subsidies, grants and loans. The main amount of expenditure was contributed for domestic trade, education, health care and nurseries, culture and information, internal management, local management, services, landscape sanitation and demolition, cemetery management plan, housing and community amenities, urban and construction planning. 27 inventory commissions worked on city property inventory control and it was carried out and finished by December 31st, 1968. Overall the city property worth 149 409 959.72 Czechoslovak crowns and covered buildings, machinery, material supplies, and so on.¹⁴

New elections to national committees were held on 26th and 27th November 1971. All authorities paid close attention to their preparations. In fact it was a lapse of two years only since the events in 1968. The spirit of freedom was still slumbering, but the inhabitants also started to feel the burden of standardization. Some special promotional and agitation commissions were created. There were three stages in the preparations for the elections. The first step was to review the work of deputies and prepare the list of candidates. The list of candidates was discussed at municipal level of the Communist Party of Slovakia and in the city committee of the National Front. Committees of social organizations also commented on choices. Several public meetings were organized to reconsider the action plan of Municipal National Committee. Firstly, the citizens were acquainted with the draft of election programme and Urban Development Plan for the period of 1971-1975. Secondly, the list of candidates was reviewed in the City Council National Committee. During this stage three agitation centres started to work from September 1, 1971. In addition, some propaganda couples were appointed mainly composed of members of the Communist Party. During the third stage the consideration was given to drawing up proposals for the composition of election commissions, appropriate polling stations were selected and technical support options were agreed. In October some public meetings were held and the candidates of the National Front to the Municipal National Committee were introduced. There were sixty-six constituencies and eleven electoral wards created in Považská Bystrica, out of those sixty-six candidates to the Municipal National Committee, forty-nine were men and seventeen were women. Forty-nine candidates were members of the Communist Party of Slovakia, the rest were impartial. The list of candidates to the Municipal National Committee was elaborated of thirty workers, two peasants, twenty-five members of the intelligentsia and eight pensioners and housewives. 10, 565 ballots were issued out of which 10,556 casted the ballot. Altogether there were 10, 532 voters who voted for the issued list of candidates, which made 99.8% of all voters.¹⁵

Inaugural meeting of the newly elected Municipal National Committee was held on December 15, 1971 at the pioneer camp in Podskalie near Považská Bystrica. JUDr. Miroslav Čermák was again elected Chairman for Municipal National Committee in Považská Bystrica, Ignác Blaškovan became Vice Chairman and Mária Dvořáková was elected Vice Chairwoman. Jozef Bubela became Secretary Assistant. At the same time the following commissions were established: Commission for Finance and Planning, Commission for Construction, Commission for Education and Culture, Commission for Health Care and Social Welfare Planning, Commission for Public Order Protection, Commission for Local Economy and Traffic Development, Commission for Trade Development, Public Control Council and Working Group Council dealing with agricultural issues.¹⁶ The elections to the higher representative bodies were also held in 1971.¹⁷ Nominations to District National Committee were the following: Švejda Ladislav, Mgr. Miroslav Čermák, MD. Pavol Kišš, Etela Rosinová, Ing. Vojtech Gajdošík (he was also the chairman of the District National Committee), Irena Podmulinová, Joseph

¹³ City Cronicle of Považská Bystrica, unpagued source.

¹⁴ JANAS, K.: *Od Februára po pokus o reformu*. Trenčín : TnUNI, 2016, p. 34.

¹⁵ City Cronicle of Považská Bystrica, unpagued source.

¹⁶ Law of Slovak National Council no. 121/1971 NC SR.

¹⁷ Law no. 69/1967 Coll.

Kalenčík, Jozef Adamik, Viera Reháková, John Mlynčár, Ladislav Ondrášik. Ing. Vojtech Gajdošík was nominated to Regional National Committee in Banská Bystrica. Herbert Ďurkovič was nominated to Slovak National Council, Ing. Ján Boucik was nominated to House of Commons of Federal Assembly and William Kožík was nominated to House of Nations of Federal Assembly.¹⁸

The Municipal National Committee Council remained the executive and managing body of the city. They hold sessions chaired by JUDr. Miroslav Čermák every other Friday. Systematic orders and guidelines issued by State Planning Commission and Government Regulations coordinated the budget of municipal national committees during the new electoral term.¹⁹ City's own financial resources originated from own activities of National Committees in the field of construction, education, health care, culture and local economy. Additionally from taxation entrusted to the responsibility of National Committee such as agricultural taxation, citizens' income levy, property taxation, house management levies, administrative fees, school canteen allowances, cinema revenues and also payments for technical services in the city were included. Industrial and economic organizations contributed with highest taxation payments. The budget used to be supplemented with funds, subsidies and budget grants originated from higher national committees. Most expenditures went to domestic trade development, education, health care and nursery schools development, culture and information, internal management, National Committee management, local management, services, landscape sanitation and demolition, cemetery management plan, housing and community amenities, urban and construction planning.²⁰

In the early years of normalization process in cities like Považská Bystrica the emphasis was on holiday celebrations related to Communist Party, which appropriated, such as National Liberation Day or Slovak National Uprising Day. Indeed the emphasis was on holidays associated to Communist Party. In 1971 the 50th anniversary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was commemorated. On the one hand since the attempts to implement the reform and occupation processes were still fresh, the officials of Communist Party at all levels aimed to prevent any riots or protests. On the other hand they did their best to prepare magnificent and noble celebrations. The main celebration event was attended by selected communists, there were five extra trains sent only from Považská Bystrica. People lived double lives at that time. At public they presented loyalty to ideas of socialism, but at home they spoke freely and even did not refuse the achievements of western culture. That turned out when Žilina hosted Vienna and American ice show, viewed by 919 people from Považská Bystrica. Individual liberty, however, began to curtail. In 1972 the normalization process was completely in progress. The second year of so called Fifth Year Plan was running and the normalization regime was ready for another round of celebrations. It was a surprise that the accent was not on the 55th anniversary of Great October Socialist Revolution, but on the 50th anniversary of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, ordinary people who demonstrated to support the regime in public were in private looking forward to Summer and Winter Olympic Games. People were mainly attracted by Winter Olympics in Sapporo broadcast at night especially when Czechoslovak figure skater Ondrej Nepela was awarded the gold medal. Summer Olympic Games were held in Munich. Kidnapping and murder of Israeli athletes by Palestinian terrorists from the organization Black September resonated in Považská Bystrica as well. Another great sport event was the ice hockey World Championship where the Czechoslovak team won gold medals again after a twenty-three-year long interval. The most important political event in Považská Bystrica was the Slovak National Uprising memorial inauguration.²¹ In contrast the political regime was dealing with a serious problem at the same time. The influence of the Catholic Church refusing the communist regime posed challenge for the city representatives. In the fifties and sixties of the twentieth century the Catholic Church had a fixed position in the city in spite of repressions. People secretly supported the Church and despite the opposition the religious institution invested in the renovation considerably thanks to donations of followers. In the years of 1968-1969 the old roof was replaced and the church tower was made of copper sheets.²² At the beginning of normalization process the authorities did not want to speak out against professing religion openly therefore they tried to deprave the course of religion events as much as possible. Major sport, culture and social events were held and inspected frequently mainly during masses and religious holidays to distract people from attending them.²³ Teaching religion was restricted significantly. Children who attended

¹⁸ City Chronicle of Považská Bystrica, unpagued source.

¹⁹ Government decree no. 100/1966 Coll.

²⁰ City Chronicle of Považská Bystrica, unpagued source.

²¹ City Chronicle of Považská Bystrica (1972-1973), unpagued source.

²² *Chrám navštívenia Panny Márie v Považskej Bystrici a dejiny považsko-bystrickej farnosti*. Považská Bystrica : Farský úrad, 2001, p. 22.

²³ City Chronicle of Považská Bystrica, unpagued source.

religion lesson were in difficulty when selected Grammar Schools or Comprehensive Schools to attend.²⁴ The pressure and repression was not only on Roman Catholic Church. Though the Evangelic Church had less followers, limitations and repressions of religion and spiritual life were spreading out gradually there too.²⁵

Common daily life of citizens was also intensified. Municipal Inspection of Public Policy was established on December 1, 1972.²⁶ It was a special department within Municipal National Committee and dealt with public order, environment and cleanliness, protection of green areas and also interfered in technical services, home management and enterprises called Restaurants and Jednota based in Považská Bystrica. That special department coordinated socialist legality, civil coexistence and property protection. It was led by appointed clerk who was responsible to the Head of Internal Affairs Department of the Municipal National Committee. Municipal Inspection of Public Policy started to work on February 16, 1973. It had four members and the first head was Peter Juríček. The members were authorized to impose fines up to 100 Slovak crowns.²⁷

3 Conclusion

The town of Považská Bystrica was developing and getting larger rapidly during the years of normalization. Having grown bigger the city needed new administrative structuring. Považská Bystrica was classified according to urban districts after implementing new divisions. The town was growing continually and thanks to Považské strojárne (Engineering Works) it was in progress and was becoming larger in the 1970s. The plant was one of the best gear manufacturers and thanks to that earned even better position within engineering industry throughout Czechoslovakia. Považské strojárne (Engineering Works) belonged to Rolling Bearings Corporation. The fact that the Directorate General of Rolling Bearings Corporation was based in Považská Bystrica in the late 1960s reflected the importance of the company too. Having a DG in a town like Považská Bystrica was quite unusual as DGs of such major conglomerates were mainly seated in Prague.²⁸ Not only having the DG in the town attracted many excellent top engineers from all over Czechoslovakia, but also the modern production, sufficient employment opportunities and almost none accommodation obstacles attracted the job seekers intensively. The development of Považské strojárne (Engineering Works) had positive impact on the development of the city. The population rose to 30, 112 residents by 1980.²⁹

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²⁴ BORČÁNYI, J.: *Katolíckym perom spod Manína*. Považská Bystrica : Alfa a Omega, Rímskokaatolícky farský úrad Považská Bystrica, 2016, pp. 155-156.

²⁵ *Pamätnica Cirkevného zboru ECAV v Považskej Bystrici*. (edited by M. Kortman). Považská Bystrica : CZ ECAV v Považskej Bystrici, 2013, p. 29.

²⁶ Decree of Government Slovak Socialistic Republic no. 18/1972.

²⁷ City Cronicle of Považská Bystrica (1972-1973), unpagged source.

²⁸ JANAS, K.: *Považské strojárne. Od Muničky po ZVL*. Žilina : Knižné centrum, 2009, pp. 92.

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