

Havel the Intellectual – Friend or Enemy of Slovakia?

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More than twenty-two years ago, Vaclav Havel, a great intellectual led the revolution which changed the lives of many people living in Czechoslovakia. However, he soon became hated by many, mainly Slovaks who blamed him for destroying the industry there. After his recent death, there are again many people talking about his big intellectuality which enabled him to lead Czechoslovakia during the time of change and his relationship to Slovakia. Havel was a great thinker, the president who led all nations within Czechoslovakia into the Western Europe. Blaming him for destroying a Slovak economy was just a game of a Slovak former Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar who tried to cover his own fails by something else. President Havel was a man who helped the country to become free and respected in the whole world as he was able to fight for the values of freedom. Even though he might be maligned at the beginning, now he is respected by many Slovaks as well. This paper examines Havel's ability to lead a multinational country in a time of change and his relationship to Slovakia.

In order to be able to lead people, there is a need of being kind of extraordinary, talent to motivate others. Havel was a great intellectual who was capable of formulating ideas into a language understood by all the other people. Even though Havel was not famous before the revolution by masses, his thoughts were known by many mainly due to his essay "The Power of the Powerless" and work formulating the points of the biggest freedom rights movement Charter 77 (Bilefsky, Perlez, 2011). His effort to make the country more democratic gradually helped to weaken the power of the communist governing there. He did not do anything quickly without considering the consequences of the steps. However, he was still saying the truth as he believed to the words of his friend Ivan Jirous that "truth and love must prevail over the lies and hatred," (Welch, 2011). Saying an opinion confronting opinions of those who have the power was mostly not accepted in the communistic regime and Havel was well aware of it. Nevertheless, he still believed it had a meaning to fight against this regime. He was sentenced to five years in prison for his ideas (Bilefsky, Perlez, 2011). Many people at

this time might not even realize that sacrificing his freedom eventually brought the freedom to everyone in Czechoslovakia. Therefore, they should be grateful for the life fulfilled with freedom they have been living since velvet revolution.

The democracy of Czechs and Slovaks is not the effort of Havel's eagerness and commitment just before 1989. Even though it was a big step for all the nations in Czechoslovakia, a real hard work just came afterward. As he became popular, he was elected as the first democratic president of Czechoslovakia (and later Czech Republic itself) after more than forty years (Bilefsky, Perlez, 2011). Being a president of a fresh-born democracy was a very difficult task as was a need for reconstruction of the whole society. It was a big challenge even for Havel. As Jiri Pehe, his former chief political adviser said "[at the beginning], he had difficulty changing his mentality from being a dissident to a politician," (Bilefsky, Perlez, 2011). Havel was still an intellectual full of idealism. However, there was a need of strong compromises in the world of real politic. Therefore, it was very complicated for Havel to get used to this position as making ideas real is not an easy job. Even though he had to make a lot of compromises, he never gave up his ideas. When a big corruption scandal revealed in 1997 in Czech Republic, Havel insisted on resignation of Vaclav Klaus, a prime minister at that time (LA Times, 1997). It was Havel's intellectual spirit which he used when writing the speech leading Klaus to resign. It can be considered as moment when his lifetime motto took place in his decision making again. Unfortunately, Klaus was his enemy in many other issues which eventually led to splitting of Czechoslovakia into two independent states.

Even though Czechoslovakia finally split into two independent states, Havel opposed to it for a long time. His idea was to keep Czechoslovakia as one multinational state where everyone respects each other (Snyder, 2009). He was trying to keep the spirit of the first Czechoslovak president Tomas, G., Masaryk. This idea; however, was misused and misinterpreted by his two big rivals, men which split Czechoslovakia - Vaclav Klaus and a

former Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar. In addition, Meciar spread the idea that it was Havel who destroyed the arms industry, a very strong part of Slovak industry (K. M., 2011). As it was later shown, this was not true. The economical situation in Slovakia was not so good at the time of the government of Vladimir Meciar, so blaming Havel for the economical situation just helped Meciar to keep his popularity high as many people thought he is the one fighting for Slovak against awful Czechs. As Daniel Vrazda (2011) explains the decision to quit the production in arms factory ZTS Martin was made even before 1989 as the demand for the products was decreasing. “Obviously [Havel] could not make a decision about it. I would never put the quitting of production together with the name of Mr. Havel,” says Jozef Uhliarik, former CEO of ZTS Martin (Vrazda, 2011). This just shows how inefficient was Meciar’s government who blamed Havel for its own failures. Havel still respected Slovakia and next government and generation were very thankful to him for all the things he did for Slovakia, things which enabled the country to become a modern country.

Slovakia is a modern, respected country and a member of both the EU and NATO. Gradually, Meciar lost his influence here and young people who are not affected by his government directly know the truth now. Young people respect Havel for his bravery and courage to fight against the totalistic regime because they realize how many advantages it brought them. He was at the Pohoda Festival in 2008, the best Slovak festival, and many young people came there to listen to him and show him a respect by a big applause (K. M., 2011). It can be said Havel was still respected by Slovaks as an intellectual. They might not like him because of his politics, but the things he did for the democracy in Slovakia will always be remembered.

There may be one person born a century which is able to connect and lead other people repressed. Vaclav Havel was the man who really did it and helped the country to change. Great changes he initiated in Czechoslovakia made the living there different as people

suddenly became free. Freedom has positive as well as negative consequences; therefore, there is no surprise many people might blame Havel for negative social and economical effects of the freedom. Whether he was the revolution leader or the president, he was still the intellectual who was able to lead the people in good as well as bad times. Even though some people think he was the one who made Slovakia a poor country, it was just defaming of people who tried to blame Havel for their own fails. Thankfully, there are many young people in Slovakia nowadays who know the truth and adore him for the freedom they have today. May his life be the example for others. For those powerful who rule over the powerless, showing that it is their responsibility to serve the people by fighting for democracy.

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