



Jan Antonín Baťa se synem Janem Tomášem před reklamním oddělením firmy, 1938
MZA SOkA Zlín, fotoarchiv

Summary

The Image of Jan Antonín Baťa created among the Czechoslovakian public, or at least its part, after the Second World War and especially after the communist putsch of February 1948 in then Czechoslovakia remains unchallenged. On the one hand, Jan Antonín Baťa is still considered a traitor and Nazi collaborator sentenced for those crimes by the National Court, which in itself is untrue as he was never convicted of those crimes. On the other hand, he is seen as an incapable successor to his genius brother Tomáš who got to the position of the CEO of the Baťa Company by accident. Moreover, it is often assumed that Jan Antonín was prevented from doing serious damage to the Baťa Company only thanks to the highly qualified chief co-workers inherited from his brother.

What is undeniable is the fact that Jan Antonín Baťa was exculpated by the National Court of all charges brought up against him. He was condemned for acts that had not been included in the original charging document. Not only was he not sentenced for treason or collaboration with the German occupants, the National Court failed to adequately prove that he was guilty of the charges he was actually sentenced for. Furthermore, Jan Antonín Baťa was not supposed to be tried by the National Court, which had been set up to judge the members of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia governments, as well as collaborating organizations such as Vlajka (The Flag). The whole trial was not conducted in accordance to proper legal procedure, as the guidelines stated by the presidential decree that established the National Court were overlooked. Jan Antonín Baťa did not receive the charging document even though he made his residence known to the authorities and as a result he was tried in absence. During the criminal process, the defence rights to question witnesses of the prosecution or to summon their own witnesses were blatantly violated. The key witness of the prosecution was not present at the court and his testimony, as well as several other testimonies, was only read. Two of the three defence lawyers withdrew from the case stating the irregularities of the trial as their reason. The third attorney could not excuse himself as he was court appointed. There was only one goal of those proceedings – deliver the verdict before 4th May 1947 when the decree on the National Court expired.

The National Court had to find Jan Antonín Baťa guilty, so that he did not have the right to appeal. So that his property, which consisted of the largest joint-stock company on the state territory, could be confiscated without any recompense. And last but not least, so that not only he but the very Baťa name and the whole system called batism (which he personified), were disgraced.

The public was never fully informed of the judicial proceedings. The media, including but not limited to the communist Rudé právo (Red Justice), provided biased coverage of the trial. For it was extremely important and desirable that the Czechoslovakian public imprinted into their minds a picture of Jan Antonín Baťa as a spineless criminal. And that was achieved to the fullest extent. Jan Antonín Baťa died on 23rd August 1965 without ever clearing his name.

In his memoirs entitled *The Stolen Work*, he wrote: *"Czechoslovakia can only lose in nationalizing its industry. It will lose its vitality, its industrial go-getness and will become a colourless state as there are so many. People – they will naturally get used to it, they will forget with passing time and only in history they will look for the culprit in the form of Germans, Nazis who undercut the strength of the Czechoslovakian industry and sent it back in its development by 50 years. No one would want to admit that it was caused by the national trusts, because everyone will be ashamed of them... as they are beginning to be now."*

They stole our work. They stole our work. They stole a company that we had been building for 50 years from nothing... except our effort, enthusiasm, courage, skills... and sacrifices that no one is aware of."

The trial of Jan Antonín Baťa in the National Court was conducted factually and technically with one goal and one goal only – to condemn the defendant regardless of the evidence submitted. Even though Jan Antonín Baťa notified the court of his whereabouts in Brazil, he never obtained the charging document and even the sentence stated the residence as “allegedly in Batatuba”. The head of the judicial senate dismissed all the motions of the defence, denied the right to question the key prosecution witnesses and refused to summon several of their own witnesses. Nevertheless the prosecution failed to prove every one of the charges in the charging document and in the end Jan Antonín Baťa was convicted of acts that would be only dubiously punishable under the law.

He was convicted because *“as a Czechoslovakian citizen abroad in the period from the middle of the year 1939, that is, in the time when the republic faced high levels of danger; he had purposely damaged the interests of the Czechoslovakian Republic by declining to openly affiliate himself to the Czechoslovakian resistance and impeded his employees doing so and acted in a way that led him and his plants to the blacklists of England and the United States.”*

The trial was speedily ended on 2nd May 1947 in order to allow the National Court, which concluded its existence on 4th May, to issue the sentence. Otherwise the process would have been transferred to a regular court.

The logical conclusion that comes to one’s mind is that Jan Antonín Baťa was condemned so the Czechoslovakian state was not bound to pay him compensation for the nationalized company. For the same reason, to avoid the compliance, the state swiftly condemned the members of the wartime board Dominik Čipera, Hugo Vavrečka and Fratišek Malota, when the speculations that Tomáš Baťa Junior was about to sue for the compensation arose.

Jan Antonín Baťa was also sentenced as a bearer of the name Baťa, and a successor in the tradition of batism as an economic and social system, in order to disgrace this entire system that was a thorn in the side of the incoming government’s rule.

The trial of Jan Antonín Baťa constitutes a stain on the shield of the post-war Czechoslovakian legal system that still called itself democratic.

Eighteen years after the fall of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia, which in the meantime had split into two independent states that became members of NATO and European Union, Jan Antonín Baťa finally received justice.

A municipal court in Prague reopened his case in June 2007 after state attorneys, in other words the prosecution, had filed a petition. The court annulled the original sentence of the National Court on 25th June and thus returned the case to the state attorney’s office to investigate. Therefore Jan Antonín Baťa was no longer a condemned criminal but a person of interest. After not full five months the state attorney’s office concluded on 15th November 2007 that no crime had been committed and the case was dropped. Sixty years later Jan Antonín Baťa was finally declared innocent. His name was cleared and at least two of his children lived to hear the verdict. Jan Antonín Baťa’s words about truth always finding its way came true.

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Prameny:

Moravský zemský archiv v Brně, Státní okresní archiv Zlín (MZA), fond Baťa I/2, I/4, I/6, Svit I/2, VII, fond OÚ-ONV Zlín 1946-9.

Národní archiv Praha (NA), fond Národní soud (NS), fond 832, 828, 850.

Archiv Ústavu TGM (AÚTGM), fond Edvard Beneš (EB), oddíl II, svazek II/1, II/2.

Archiv ministerstva zahraničních věcí ČR (AMZV), fond Londýnský archiv (LA), Londýnský archiv – doplňky (LA-D).

Archiv Univerzity Palackého Olomouc (AUP), fond Prof. MUDr. Jan Kabelík, DrSc. (JK) – nezpracovaný.

Osobní archiv Jana Antonína Bati, Sao Paulo, Brazílie (AJAB).

Osobní archiv Johna Nashe, Boston, USA (AJN).

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