

# EMANUEL ŠLECHTA – BETWEEN RATIONALIZATION AND POWERLESSNESS

Professor, Innovator, and Entrepreneur in the Interwar Period and the Immediate Aftermath of World War II<sup>1</sup>

J IŘ Í S E D L Á Č E K – M A R C E L A E F M E R T O V Á

SEDLÁČEK, Jiří – EFMERTOVÁ, Marcela. Emanuel Šlechta – Between Rationalization and Powerlessness: Professor, Innovator, and Entrepreneur in the Interwar Period and the Immediate Aftermath of World War II. *Historický časopis*, 2025, 73, 5, pp. 903-928, Bratislava.

Most experts today do not know the name Emanuel Šlechta (1895–1960), yet his life resembles a curve he might once have drawn on a schedule – as a pioneer of Czechoslovak scientific work organization. He was a professor at Czech Technical University in Prague (CTU in Prague), a rationalizer, technocrat, entrepreneur, innovator, and minister in several governments during the difficult postwar period.

Between the wars, he focused on international cooperation, technological progress, and modernization in democratic Czechoslovakia. The reality after 1939 – war, concentration camp, and the politics of the 1950s – was chaotic and cruel. He survived Buchenwald not as a passive victim, but as a man who retained faith in reason and human dignity. After the war, he sought to restore the ideals of the First Republic and change the country as a builder, not as an ideologue. As Minister of Technology, Construction, and Work Rationalization, he tried to connect expertise with public service. This, however, proved fatal. In a state that increasingly valued loyalty to the communist ideology over expertise, Šlechta was too independent, nonpartisan, and complex. As suspicion grew that he was not ideologically steadfast, pressure increased from both inside and outside. The political system he had helped build ultimately began to destroy him.

His decision to leave life with his wife Anna in March 1960 should not be seen as weakness, but as the last rational act in a system that had lost all rationality. Psychologically, it was both an act of despair and a way to preserve personal dignity after surviving six years in a concentration camp. How did E. Šlechta navigate such a complex historical trajectory? What did he contribute to his field and to Czechoslovakia? What conditions shaped his work? This paper explores these questions through the key stages of his life.

Keywords: History of Science nad Technology. Czechoslovakia. 1918–1939. 1945–1960. Education. Inovation. Emanuel Šlechta. CTU in Prague.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/histcaso.2025.73.5.2>

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1 The authors would like to acknowledge the support of the Historical Laboratory of (Electro) Technology, FEE CTU in Prague – SVK 26/25/F3.

## Introduction

The social anchoring of the personality of Emanuel Šlechta (1895–1960)<sup>2</sup> fully corresponds to the economic and social development of the Czech lands and Czechoslovakia at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, between the wars and just after World War II. Šlechta grew up as an only child in a modest family of a chimney-sweep in Kutná Hora, where he attended the municipal school and the Higher State Real School, where he graduated with honours in 1914.<sup>3</sup> This entitled him to enter the Czech Technical College in Prague, but he did not complete his higher engineering education until after the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia in 1921 at the Czech Technical University in Prague.<sup>4</sup> His graduation during the first decade of the 20th century was prevented by the First World War and his compulsory involvement in it. After graduating in technology, he began his career as a technical expert, entrepreneur, innovator and university teacher and became a representative of the economically, socially and culturally emancipating Czechoslovakia in the period between the wars. Engineers of his kind became important figures in the business and technical environment and were at the core of the emerging Czech technical intelligentsia.

There were them who, in the last third of the 19th century, became the key carriers of technical progress in the Czech lands and mediators between the professional and wider public<sup>5</sup>. Through their publications, engineers made a

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- 2 Lot of archival materials on the personality of Emanuel Šlechta in various Czech and foreign archives can be found. In the Czech Republic, archival materials are available mainly in the Národní archiv (NA), Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS), Archiv Českého vysokého učení technického v Praze (AČVUT), Archiv Akademie věd České republiky (AAV), Archiv Poslanecké sněmovny České republiky (APS), Památník národního písemnictví – Literární archiv (PNP-LA) etc. There is no monograph-biography dedicated to E. Šlechta. It should be noted that some archival materials about Šlechta's everyday life are also missing, having been lost after Šlechta's imprisonment in 1939 and during his six-year stay in the Buchenwald concentration camp. The availability of other sources, e.g. from Poland, the USA and Great Britain, is often problematic and is currently still being researched. On the contrary, all works published by Emanuel Šlechta are available: *Hospodárná velikost sériové výroby*, 1927, *Americký industrialismus*, 1928, *Organizace průmyslových podniků*, 1930, *Plynulá a přerušovaná výroba*, 1938, *Srovnávání průmyslových podniků*, 1946, *Zvýšení výkonnosti*, 1947, *Úvahy o válce v Buchenwaldu*, 1948, *Věrní Sovětskému Svazu*, 1953, *Indiáni v pueblech*, 1956, *O úloze bývalé Národně-socialistické strany: sborník statí a článků*, 1959, etc.
  - 3 Archiv Českého vysokého učení technického v Praze (AČVUT), fund (f.) Fakulta elektrotechnická, (no.) 14, Osobní spisy, profesor Emanuel Šlechta.
  - 4 Ibid.
  - 5 DRAŠAROVÁ. Soupis právních předpisů a dokumentů ke společovacímu právu z fondů Státního ústředního archivu v Praze od poloviny 18. stol. do roku 1918. In *Sborník archivních prací*, 1990, Vol. 40, p. 297-343; DRAŠAROVÁ. Možnosti použití typologické metody při zpracování spolkové problematiky. In *XXII. mikulovské sympozium 7.–8. října 1992*. Praha 1993, pp. 117-126.

significant contribution to the dissemination of new technical knowledge, both through professional literature<sup>6</sup> and lectures addressed not only to an educated audience but also to the general public<sup>7</sup>. Šlechta, who had joined this society at the beginning of the 1920s, thus became not only a witness, but above all an active agent of the new era, both positively and negatively, in the general peripeteia that followed.

After the establishment of an independent Czechoslovakia in 1918, the new state inherited favourable economic conditions.<sup>8</sup> From the former Austria-Hungary<sup>9</sup> it took over approximately 70% of all the industrial production of the monarchy, especially the engineering, armaments, glass, textile and electrical industries.<sup>10</sup> Czechoslovakia thus became one of the most industrialised countries in Europe<sup>11</sup> right from the very beginning of its existence. Another important factor was the high literacy rate of the population and the well-developed technical education,<sup>12</sup> including professional associations, which enabled the training of qualified specialists for the economy.

The economic stabilisation was also supported by the introduction of the Rašín reform in 1919<sup>13</sup> with the creation of its own currency – the Czechoslovak

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- 6 100 let České matice technické, 100 let české technické knihy: výstava. Plzeň 9.–30. listopadu 1995.
  - 7 DRAŠAROVÁ. Stát, spolek a spolčování. In *Paginae historiae*, 1993, no. 1, pp. 152-177.
  - 8 LACINA. *Hospodářství českých zemí 1880–1914*. Praha 1990; JAKUBEC and JINDRA. *Dějiny hospodářství českých zemí: od počátku industrializace do konce habsburské monarchie*. Praha 2006.
  - 9 LACINA. *Formování československé ekonomiky 1918–1923*. Praha 1990; HALLON. *Industrializácia Slovenska 1918–1938: rozvoj alebo úpadok?* Bratislava 1995.
  - 10 EFMERTOVÁ. *Elektrotechnika v českých zemích a v Československu do poloviny 20. století: studie k vývoji elektrotechnických oborů*. Praha 1999; HALLON. *Koncepcia systematické elektrifikácie v Nemecku a Československu v rokoch 1918–1938*. In BARTH et al. *Konkurence i partnerství: německé a československé hospodářství v letech 1918–1945*. Praha 1999.
  - 11 FALTUS and PRŮCHA. *Všeobecné hospodářské dějiny 19. a 20. století*. Praha 2003; CUHRA et al. *České země v evropských dějinách. Díl čtvrtý, od roku 1918*. Praha; Litomyšl 2006; HALLON. *Kronika Slovenského štátu*. Praha 2019.
  - 12 ŠPIRITOVÁ. Ústřední matice školská v letech 1880–1919. In *Paginae historiae*, 1993, Tome 1, pp. 178-195; POKORNÝ. České vysoké školy technické v Praze a v Brně v činnosti úřadu českého ministra-krajana ve Vídni a zákonodárných sborů. In *Acta polytechnica*, 1990, (serie 6), no. 4, pp. 87-99; *Boj za druhé české vysoké školy*. Praha 1899; BOHÁČ and ŠULCOVÁ. *Československé střední odborné školy od osvobození do dneška*. Praha 1979; BOEHM. *Die Deutsche Technische Hochschule in Prag und ihre Vorstufen: zweieinviertel Jahrhunderte akademische deutsche Ingenieurausbildung (1718 bis 1945)*. Friedelsheim/Pfalz 1988; TAYERLOVÁ et al. *Česká technika = Czech Technical University*. Praha 2004; KRATOCHVÍL; KOTEK and KREJSA, eds. *Globalizace současného světa a technické školství na přelomu tisíciletí: 30.11.–1.12.1999*, FSI VUT. Brno 1999.
  - 13 Archiv České národní banky (AČNB), f. Alois Rašín. *Paměti Dr. Aloise Rašína*. Praha 1929;

koruna, and thus a relatively stable financial policy<sup>14</sup> was established. Czechoslovakia had its own tax, banking and customs systems, and it soon developed a modern economic infrastructure.<sup>15</sup> In this respect, Czechoslovakia was the most economically prepared successor state<sup>16</sup> after the collapse of the multi-ethnic Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

Despite its strong industry, however, Czechoslovakia had to cope with the disintegration of the former monarchy's internal market, which meant the loss of traditional outlets for its products. Foreign trade had to be oriented towards new partners, especially in Western Europe and the Balkans. Moreover, the economic structure of the country was uneven, with the industrialised parts of the country outpacing those with predominantly agricultural production.<sup>17</sup>

Czechoslovakia's international position was strengthened after World War I by the Versailles system,<sup>18</sup> which ensured its existence and recognized its borders. Moreover, the weakening of Austria and Hungary allowed Czechoslovakia to play a regional leading role. Nevertheless, stronger economic integration of the region was lacking – efforts at economic cooperation under the so-called Little Agreement of 1921<sup>19</sup> remained limited.

A significant turning point came after 1929 with the arrival of the world economic crisis, which hit Czechoslovakia very hard. Industrial production fell by up to 40%,<sup>20</sup> unemployment reached extreme levels and the crisis hit the

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*Z protokolů schůzí 1. československé vlády 1918–1919.* Praha 1974; LACINA. *Alois Rašín.* Praha 1992.

- 14 VOKROUHLECKÝ. *Komparace československých měnových reforem 1919, 1945 a 1953.* Bakalářská práce, Univerzita Karlova v Praze 2004; *Almanach československého peněžnictví.* Praha 1928.
- 15 PRŮCHA et al. *Hospodářské a sociální dějiny Československa 1918–1992.* Brno 2004–2009, Tome 1-2.
- 16 KLIMEK and KUBŮ. *Československá zahraniční politika 1918–1938: kapitoly z dějin mezinárodních vztahů.* Praha 1995; RYCHLÍK. *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století: spolupráce a konflikty 1914–1992.* Praha 2012.
- 17 KÁRNÍK. *České země v éře První republiky.* 3. díly, 1918–1938. *Díl první, Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918–1929), Díl druhý, Československo v krizi a v ohrožení (1930–1935), Díl třetí, O přežití a o život (1936–1938).* Praha 2000–2018; KAMENEC and FIALOVÁ. *Malé dějiny česko-slovenských vztahů.* Bratislava 1996.
- 18 KLIMEK. *Jak se dělal mír roku 1919: Československo na konferenci ve Versailles.* Praha 1989; RENOUVIN. *Le traité de Versailles.* Paris 1969; ARAUD. *Histoires diplomatiques. Leçons d'hier pour le monde d'aujourd'hui.* Paris 2022.
- 19 TÓTH. Conclusion of the Czechoslovak-Romanian Little Entente Treaty of Alliance in Spring 1921. In SKŘIVAN and SUPPAN. *Prague Papers on the History International Relations.* Prague 2008; SLÁDEK. *Malá dohoda 1919–1938: Její hospodářské, politické a vojenské komponenty.* Praha 2000.
- 20 LACINA. *Velká hospodářská krize v Československu 1929–1934.* Praha 1984, pp. 68–111.

border areas adjacent to Germany hardest, with political consequences.<sup>21</sup> It was only from 1934 onwards that the economy gradually stabilised, mainly thanks to exports and state protectionist measures. Although Czechoslovakia regained its place among the highly industrialised countries of the world in the second half of the 1930s, geopolitical changes in Europe, especially the growing pressure from Nazi Germany, led to a significant weakening of its international position. The Munich Agreement of 1938 meant not only territorial losses, but also the economic and political weakening of the state.<sup>22</sup>

In the inter-war period, Czechoslovakia was essentially a democratic and economically strong, stable state that was able to cope with the initial challenges, but its long-term economic prospects were gradually weakened by external and internal factors. Despite the world crisis, the state maintained a high degree of industrialisation, but the geopolitical situation and the onset of World War II eventually undermined its further independent development.<sup>23</sup> After the end of World War II in 1945, Czechoslovakia faced the task of rebuilding its destroyed economy, infrastructure and state administration. In May 1945, the Czechoslovak Republic was restored, but with some fundamental changes – the pre-war form of the First Republic was not restored, but a new regime known as the Third Republic (1945–1948)<sup>24</sup> was established. Key political and economic changes were held during this period: nationalisation of large industries, banks and mines were organised on the basis of the Benes Decrees,<sup>25</sup> the Communists (KSČ)<sup>26</sup> won the elections in the Czech lands in 1946, while the Democratic Party<sup>27</sup>

21 KÁRNÍK. *České země v éře První republiky. Díl druhý. Československo v krizi a v ohrožení (1930–1935) a Díl třetí, O přežití a o život (1936–1938)*. Praha 2000–2018.

22 KVAČEK and HEYDUK. *Československý rok 1938. Česká Kamenice; Praha 2011; 30 let od Mnichova 1938/1968: kořeny, příčiny, a důsledky*. Praha 1968; HAZDRA; VLČEK et al. *Mnichov 1938 a česká společnost: sborník z mezinárodního symposia k 70. výročí mnichovské dohody*. Praha 2008.

23 BENEŠ et al. *Rozumět dějinám: vývoj česko-německých vztahů na našem území v letech 1848–1948*. Praha 2002; BRYANT. *Praha v černém: nacistická vláda a český nacionalismus*. Praha 2012; PADEVĚT. *Kronika protektorátu*. Praha 2021.

24 CHOLÍNSKÝ. Klíč k sovětizaci Československa. In *Paměť a dějiny*, 2013, no. 02, pp. 3-15.

25 BLUMENWITZ. Die Beneš-Dekrete aus dem Jahre 1945 unter dem Gesichtspunkt des Völkerrechts. In HLAWITSCHKA, ed. *Die Politik von Dr. Edvard Beneš und Mitteleuropa*. München 1993–1994, pp. 71-84; JECH and KAPLAN, eds. *Dekrety prezidenta republiky 1940–1945: dokumenty*. Brno 2002; KUKLÍK. *Mýty a realita tzv. „Benešových dekretů“: dekreta prezidenta republiky 1940–1945*. Praha 2002.

26 NEDVĚDICKÝ. Svobodné volby 1946? Praha, viz <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j-s3IBk0Sfo&t=843s> (on-line 2025-11-21); MACHALA. Retribuce a parlamentní volby 1946. In *Paměť a dějiny*, 2013, no. 02, pp. 39-51.

27 Výsledky z volebných krajov na Slovensku. In *Čas: ústredný orgán Demokratickej strany na Slovensku*, 29. 5. 1946, Vol. 3, no. 120, p. 2; BERTA et al. *Volby do zákonodarných orgánov*

dominated in Slovakia and the expulsion of the German and partly Hungarian population from the borderlands was implemented.

The turning point was February 1948,<sup>28</sup> when the Communists staged a coup d'état and took the full control of the state. This was followed by the construction of a Soviet-style totalitarian regime<sup>29</sup> which affected all areas of life. That meant the liquidation of political opposition, persecution, censorship and the rise of the State Security Service (StB).<sup>30</sup> The 1950s brought political trials, repression and arrests of the uncomfortable in the army, churches and among intellectuals. A centrally planned economic system was introduced, with an emphasis on heavy industry, the collectivization of agriculture, and the industrialization of Slovakia.<sup>31</sup>

Stalinization<sup>32</sup> continued under the presidencies of Klement Gottwald (1948–1953),<sup>33</sup> Antonín Zápotocký (1953–1957),<sup>34</sup> and later Antonín Novotný (1957–1968).<sup>35</sup> During the 1950s, ideological control, repression and the cult of personality culminated.<sup>36</sup> After the deaths of Stalin and Gottwald in 1953, there was a slight relaxation, but no real change in the system.

The period 1945–1960 thus represents the transition from democratic renewal to full communist dictatorship.<sup>37</sup> After the hopes of the post-war period came

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*na území Slovenska 1920–2006*. Bratislava 2008, kapitola 4 Voľby do Ústavodarného národného zhromaždenia v roku 1946, pp. 95-102; HOROBOVÁ. Vo voľbách 1946 slovenski demokrati porazili komunistov na hlavu. In *Sme*, 29. máj 2001.

- 28 BLAŽEK. Únorový převrat pohledem Ústředny StB při ministerstvu vnitra, situační zpráva 21. až 25. února 1948. In *Paměť a dějiny*, 2008, no. 01, pp. 102-115.
- 29 KÁRNÍK et al. *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu do roku 1989. 8 tomes*. Praha 2003–2011.
- 30 PERSAK; KAMINSKI; ŽÁČEK and BLAŽEK, eds. *Čekisté. Orgány státní bezpečnosti v evropských zemích sovětského bloku 1944–1989*. Praha 2019; KOUDELKA. *Státní bezpečnost 1954–1968. (Základní údaje)*. Praha 1993; GULA. Vývoj typů spolupracovníků kontrarozvědky StB ve směrnících pro agenturní práci. In *Securitas imperii*, 1994, Vol. 1, pp. 6-17; POVOLNÝ. Operativní technika a StB. In *Securitas imperii*, 2003, Vol. 10, pp. 73-145; KŘEN. Dokumenty StB jako pramen poznání minulosti. In *Soudobé dějiny*, 2005, Vol. 12, no. 3-4, pp. 708-733.
- 31 KOCIAN. ed. *Tematická příručka k československým dějinám 1948–1989*. Praha 2019.
- 32 KOLÁŘ. *Soudruzi a jejich svět: sociálně myšlenková tvářnost komunismu*. Praha 2019; BARNOVSKÝ. *Prvá vlna destalinizácie a Slovensko: (1953–1957)*. Brno 2002.
- 33 KROLL. *Gottwald a jeho doba*. Praha 2019.
- 34 STEHLÍK. *Zápotocký: příliš mnoho životů*. Brno 2025.
- 35 KAPLAN. *Kronika komunistického Československa. Antonín Novotný – vzestup a pád „lidového“ aparátčika*. Brno 2011.
- 36 PERNES. *Krise komunistického režimu v Československu v 50. letech 20. století*. Brno 2008.
- 37 BOBEK, MOLEK and ŠIMÍČEK, eds. *Komunistické právo v Československu: kapitoly z dějin bezpráví*. Brno 2009 CIVÍN. *Československý komunistický režim v letech 1985–1989*.

February 1948, which brought the country into an era of communist ideological surveillance of citizens, economic planning and restrictions on civil liberties. It was not until the early 1960s that the first signs of efforts to reform the system began to emerge, but these were not yet politically viable.<sup>38</sup>

In the period following the Second World War, Emanuel Šlechta, in his ministerial positions, cooperated closely at the institutional level with the Board of Slovak Commissioners, particularly with Jozef Lukačovič (1902–1991),<sup>39</sup> who served as his counterpart in the field of engineering, technology, and construction, especially in relation to the construction of the Váh Cascade (1930–1960).<sup>40</sup> Under Lukačovič's management and nationwide approval procedures, overseen by Emanuel Šlechta, the implementation of the entire Váh Cascade advanced significantly, becoming one of the largest water-management projects in contemporary Czechoslovakia. By 1960, all nine stages of the Váh hydropower plants had been completed, creating an integrated chain of hydraulic structures with substantial energy-producing, flood-control, and economic functions. This technical and organizational achievement was regarded at the time as one of the most successful infrastructural projects of Slovakia's post-war development.

It is in this complex context that the mechanical engineer, publicist and originally National Socialist politician Emanuel Šlechta first emerges as an

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In *Středoevropské politické studie = Central European Political Studies Review*, 2005, Vol. 6, no. 2-3, p. 207-227; ČERMÁK et al. *Slovník komunistické totality*. Praha 2010.

- 38 SCHULZE WESSEL. *Pražské jaro: Průlom do nového světa*. Praha 2018; VONDROVÁ. *Reforma? Revoluce? Pražské jaro 1968 a Praha*. Praha 2013; BOBULOVÁ. *Ekonomické reformy v ČSSR v 60. letech*. Diplomová práce. Masarykova univerzita, Brno 2011.
- 39 He was a Slovak Roman Catholic priest who, after 1945, was active in the Democratic Party and served as a member of its presidium; he held the office of Commissioner for Posts (1946–1947) and Commissioner for Information (1947–1948). He cooperated with the Communists covertly and later openly, which allowed his career to continue advancing. Bishop A. Lazík excommunicated him in 1948, but in 1951 was forced to revoke the excommunication. Lukačovič held the office of Commissioner for Technology (1948), Commissioner for the Construction Industry and Building Affairs (1948–1955), and Commissioner for Communications (1956–1960). He served as a deputy of the Slovak National Council (1945–1964) and as a member of the National Assembly in Prague (1964–1968). In 1950, he was Vice-Chairman of the National Peace Committee of Catholic Clergy. Ústav paměti národa (ÚPN), Bratislava, f. A 2/1 Zbor poverencov, Slovenská poválečná vláda, b. 12-25, f. B 3/5 osobní spis Jozef Lukačovič, b. 1-10 (politické zápisy, CV Lukačoviče, církevní a státní aktivity, aj.), f. C 1/7 Slovenská národní rada (zápisy z komisí, protokoly a usnesení aj.).
- 40 LUKAČOVIČ. Vodohospodářské problémy Slovenska. In *Vodní hospodářství*, 1951, no. 4; JANÁČ. Hydrokraté a česká vodohospodářská mise ve dvacátém století (1930–1960). In *Soudobé dějiny*, 2017, Vol. 24, no. 1-2, pp. 19-53 (DOI: [10.51134/sod.2017.002](https://doi.org/10.51134/sod.2017.002)); EFMERTOVÁ and HRTUS. *Czechoslovak Rivers Singing in Electric Wires: Changes in Historical Landscape Related to the Construction of Water Management and Energy Structures on the Vltava and Váh Rivers*. 37 pp. manuscript (in press, accepted for publication in France at the Sorbonne).

important personality in the 1920s and 1930s. At that time, he established himself as a teacher at the Czech Technical University in Prague and began his entrepreneurial journey of transferring technological innovations, especially from the United States to Czechoslovakia, during his stay there from 1923 to 1926.<sup>41</sup> He thus conveyed important scientific and technical information (scientific organisation and management of work, rationalisation, linking the technical and cultural social spheres, etc.) to the republic, which he later applied throughout his subsequent career, and wanted to see directly applied to the Czechoslovak economy and technology. Therefore, he also intensively devoted himself to his own business to gain experience and expert advice and to popularise technical innovations in the trade press.

Tracing Šlechta historically in this context can be done from many points of view, but in this paper the authors would like to highlight, within the trajectory followed, the answers to the questions above through three areas that the activities of E. Šlechta, namely his Central European rationalizations in collaboration with Professors František Hasa from Prague and Karel Adamiecki from Poland, the importance of his appearances and support for scientific organization and management of the work, including the interruption of these efforts by his imprisonment in Buchenwald, and the post-war period that held so much promise for him but ultimately took his life.

### **Central European rationalisation with the work of Šlechta**

After World War I, in the heat of which he fought on the Russian and Italian fronts as a private soldier and where he was wounded in the arm, which enabled him to leave the war, he received his diploma from the Czech Technical University in Prague in 1921. There, Emanuel Šlechta studied mechanical engineering, pursued higher mathematics, mechanical technology and accounting in industrial plants, and started traveling to further his education.<sup>42</sup>

In 1922, he started working as an engineer in the sugar department of the First Czech-Moravian Machine Factory in Prague, where he participated in the reconstruction of the sugar factory in Ovčary in the Kolín region together with experts from other important companies such as Bráf and Co. and Škoda Plants. Subsequently, with the support of the Masaryk Academy of Labour (acronym in Czech as MAP)<sup>43</sup> and its prominent representative Stanislav Špaček (1876-

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41 AČVUT, f. Emanuel Šlechta (f. prof. CTU in Prague).

42 Ibid.

43 Established by Act No. 86/1920 Coll., with the aim of supporting the technical and socio-economic development of the republic through research institutes and expert committees and with the support of President T. G. Masaryk in the amount of 1 million Czech crowns (Kč).

1954),<sup>44</sup> he joined the Mining and Metallurgical Company (Lazarská 7, Prague 2), where he stayed until his arrest by the Gestapo in 1939, and where he began working for the Czechoslovak Committee for the Scientific Organisation of Labour. Labour organisation and management was a modern field that Šlechta had discovered during his stay in the USA and which he transferred to Czechoslovakia. It was primarily the work of the American Frederick Winslow Taylor and the Frenchman Henri Fayol that brought many innovations to industrial practice, especially in administration, management and corporate governance. In Czechoslovakia, these were already promoted and used in practice by the proponents of this scientific theory (Stanislav Špaček, Václav Verunáč) and management practice in large enterprises (Franz Hummelberger – Poldi Kladno, Karel Loevenstein – Škoda Plzeň, Tomáš Baťa in Zlín).

By that time Šlechta had already completed the aforementioned work experience in the USA, where he worked at the Baldwin Locomotive Works in Philadelphia, was a machine tool designer and headed the department of standardization of locomotive cladding systems at Niles Tool Works in Hamilton, then became assistant chief engineer at The Great Western Sugar Co. in Denver, Colorado, a member of the Society of American Mechanical Engineers (A. S. M. E.) and participated in shop work in the Philadelphia branch of the Society. After returning to Czechoslovakia in 1926, he had excellent knowledge to apply modern scientific organization of work and enough new technical knowledge, which he immediately put to use in his employment at the Škoda plant in Hradec Králové.

In December 1927, he became a silent partner in the machine shop of entrepreneur T. Aupěk in Kutná Hora.<sup>45</sup> Apparently, he used the funds he earned in America here. It was a machine shop with 15 machines, a foundry and a forge, which employed about 45 people at the time of the boom. He was going to introduce mass production here on the American model and consulted Stanislav Špaček about it.<sup>46</sup> He considered what would be the most suitable product (he suggested, for example, American locks with flat keys). He also considered items for modern households, e.g. burners, refrigeration, winterizing machines etc. He hoped to get a license for production from American companies. His plans were somewhat affected by the coming economic crisis. However, it also brought demand from entrepreneurs to transform their companies to a different

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44 Archiv Akademie věd České republiky (AAV), f. Osobní spisy, no. NAD 438, Stanislav Špaček, 1896–1951.

45 POSPÍŠIL. *Zmizelá Kutná Hora: Stavby první republiky*. Kutná Hora 2019, pp. 150-158, and also AAV, f. Osobní spisy, no. NAD 438, Stanislav Špaček, sign. II.b) 1 A, inv. č. 543, letter from E. Šlechta to S. Špaček from 1. 8. 1929.

46 Ibid.

kind of production, and so, in addition to his share in Aupěk's machine shop, he focused on external consulting for industrial companies. He also had a stake in the ESTA record factory.<sup>47</sup> Together with the banker František Hašek, Mr Šolcký, the director of consumer cooperatives, and Jaroslav Šalda, he significantly influenced the operation of the Melantrich publishing house as a shareholder.

From the plant in Hradec Králové, Šlechta moved to Bata's plant in Zlín in 1927. He applied his knowledge of the scientific organization of work to the problems in the Bata workshops – he completely rebuilt the machine shops and the forge with hardening shop and designed a different location for the warehouse. He arranged a tool room and made an inventory of all tools and machines, made inquiries about the correct speed of machines, standardized the knives and production procedures used, and focused on the management of mass production where it was not working yet.

The work carried out here became the basis for his further studies at the Czech Technical University in Prague, where in 1929 he submitted his dissertation *The Economic Size of Serial Production*. On 28 November 1928, in connection with his work on the dissertation, he was elected as an expert of the 6th National Economic and Social Department of the Masaryk Academy of Labour. In March 1929, he received the authorization of authorized civil engineer for machine building. This allowed him to conduct design work, sign and verify technical documentation, perform calculations, act as an expert in the field of organisation and management of work and rationalisation in the construction of machinery, and to negotiate on behalf of his clients with the authorities, e.g. when authorising production or construction work. In order to work, he had to be of good civil standing and have a clean criminal record. From 1929 he also held the position of permanent expert witness in the field of general engineering at the Regional Commercial Court in Prague. In 1935 he added to this activity an associate professor's degree in mechanical engineering at the Czech Technical University in Prague. In 1930–1938 he was a permanent adviser on industrial financing to the Anglo-Bank and the Land Bank in Bohemia. These were all important positions which signalled that Šlechta had become a widely addressed and respected expert in the field of engineering, rationalisation and scientific management and organisation of work.

His preparation for a wider embedding of his work in the field of scientific organisation and rationalisation thus led to the opportunity to establish new domestic and international contacts. He sought these mainly from individual national societies and, associations, such as the French Comité National de

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47 SZCZEPANIK. Film a nahrávací průmysl: případ Ultraphonu. In *Illuminace*, 2007, Vol. 19, no. 3 (67), p. 102.

l'Organisation Française (founded in Paris in 1901) and the Comité International de l'Organisation Scientifique (acronym CIOS), as well as nine other national committees: Belgian (Comité National Belge de l'Organisation Scientifique), Bulgarian (BONOT, Comité National Bulgare de l'Organisation Scientifique), Spanish (Comité National Espagnol de l'Organisation Scientifique), American (Joint Committee on American Participation in International Management Congress), Dutch (Neederlandsche Institut voor Efficiency), Italian (Ente Nazionale Italiano per l'Organizzazione Scientifica del Lavoro), Polish (Comité National d'Organisation Scientifique en Pologne), Romanian (Institut Roumain d'Organisation Scientifique) and Czechoslovak (Czechoslovak National Committee for Scientific Organisation, founded 24. 6. 1924 – Czech acronym ČSKO – Československý národní komitét pro vědeckou organizaci).<sup>48</sup> In addition, as Secretary of the ČSKO, he was in contact with the corresponding corporations in Germany, England, Austria, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Russia, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, Yugoslavia.<sup>49</sup>

This really assumed that he was able to organize, prepare and implement his work rationally, but also that he was recognized abroad and that he was able to apply his language skills.

The first international congress for the scientific organisation of labour was convened by the Masaryk Academy of Labour in Prague in 1924, where the organising committee was headed by Stanislav Špaček. Other Czech personalities such as František Hasa and Emanuel Šlechta subsequently represented the country on the international expert committees of the various congresses held between 1924 and 1938 (Brussels 1925, Rome 1927, Paris 1929, Amsterdam 1932, London 1935 and Washington 1938). Stanislav Špaček managed to attract not only representatives of the Taylor Society and the American Engineering Council to the first congress in Prague, but also the leading authorities in the field – Frank Bunker Gilbreth (1868–1924) and Lillian Moller Gilbreth (1878–1972), American pioneers of scientific management and founders of time and motion studies, which became the basis of modern industrial engineering, ergonomics and management. Frank B. Gilberth noticed that some of his workers worked more efficiently than others and recorded and systematically analysed their work movements. From his analysis, he came up with a reduction of these movements and the concept of therblings, which was a characterization of the basic 17 movements that made up any work task.

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48 *Československý národní komitét pro vědeckou organizaci*. Praha 1933.

49 *Zprávy ČSKO*, November 1929, Vol. II, no. 9.

His wife, Lillian, added psychology to scientific management, promoting the human factor, creativity, and employee well-being. Thus they combined technical efficiency (Frank) with a human approach (Lillian) in the scientific organization of work. Above all, the Gilbreths' approaches were analyzed at congresses by reference to the work they had done in the U.S. Army, in the civil service, and at General Electric. Congresses were also held in various European cities in the 1930s, and the Gilbreths' work influenced the European rationalization movement<sup>50</sup> (under the slogan *Find the least tedious and smartest way to do work comfortably*), including Czechoslovakia, where their findings, Taylor's results of time stages of individual tasks (with a key method based on standardization, division of labor, control, i.e. according to the motto *Find the fastest way to make a person work more*) and Fayol's theory of leading the company as a whole (according to the motto *Find the best way to organize and lead the whole company*) Psychotechnical Institute.<sup>51</sup> The latter began to test time studies, work norming and ergonomics in public and private enterprises. It had been working since 1921 at the Masaryk Academy of Labour and focused on research on human performance, psychology, physiology and sociology of work on the scientific approach to work performance. From the beginning, the institute conducted practice-oriented research in real work environments, such as railways, post offices and ministries. Psychotechnical tests have been introduced as a condition for the authorisation of activities, e.g. for tram drivers or train drivers.

Emanuel Šlechta also worked on these activities and found the closest cooperation in the field of rationalisation and scientific management with professors František Hasa (1863–1945)<sup>52</sup> in Prague and Karel Adamecki (1866–1933)<sup>53</sup> in Poland. Their collaboration was a key moment in the development

50 *Applied Motion Study* (1917), *Fatigue Study* (1916), *Management and the Worker* (1924).

51 The institute was headed by František Šeracký from 1921 to 1936. Just before World War II, the institute was taken over by the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment. During the war, it functioned as the Institute of Human Labor (Institut für Arbeitswissenschaft) and after 1947, it became the Czechoslovak Institute of Labor and subsequently the Institute of Occupational Safety, and its original purpose essentially disappeared.

52 Prof. Ing. František Hasa, Dr. h. c. was a Czech mechanical engineer, professor of mechanical (engineering) technology at the University of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering and rector of the Czech Technical University in Prague and the Brno University of Technology, chairman of the Czechoslovak National Committee for Scientific Organization. See Ing. Dr.h.c. František Hasa profesor ČVUT v Praze v. v. čestným členem SIA. In *Věstník SIA*, 1937, Vol. 5, no. 7-8, pp. 179-180.

53 Prof. Karol Adamecki came from a miner's family, graduated from the Higher School of Crafts in Łódź and in 1891 graduated from the Petersburski Państwowy Instytut Technologiczny, later he headed the Department of Principles of Industrial Organization and In-

of the scientific organisation of work in interwar Central Europe. At that time, Šlechta had already published and had his scientific works<sup>54</sup> positively received by experts and could thus second both personalities. Their activities made a major contribution not only to the professionalisation and rationalisation of industrial processes, but also to the consolidation of an international professional network that linked Czechoslovakia, Poland and other European countries in their efforts to modernise the economy through the principles of scientific management. Their activities brought new methodological tools for the rationalisation of production and public administration, the appropriate selection and assignment of workers in various fields, promoted the internationalisation of professional discourse and helped to create a solid institutional foundation for applied management. Their collaboration was essential for the transition from craft-led production to modern, scientifically organised industry.

How did it go specifically? These three men were, each in their own way, at the birth and development of the scientific organisation and management of work in their respective countries:

Karol Adamiecki, a Polish professor of technology and management theorist, had already at the turn of the century created the foundations of schedules (the forerunner of flow charts), devoted himself to the analysis of production flows and the rigorous planning of work processes.

František Hasa, a professor of engineering technology at the Czech Technical University in Prague, played a fundamental role in the institutional anchoring of scientific work management in Czechoslovakia and in the organisation of international congresses, where he was repeatedly elected vice-chairman of the International Committee of the CIOS.

Emanuel Šlechta, represented the younger generation. He was secretary of the Czechoslovak National Committee for Scientific Organization and editor of the journal *Zprávy ČSKO*, which became the main channel for the dissemination of scientific knowledge and practical experience.

Their cooperation was both institutional (congresses, the CIOS committee, intergovernmental contacts) and professional – they exchanged experiences from industrial practice, organised seminars and published findings on the implementation of rationalisation methods in individual sectors (e.g. railway workshops, steelworks, offices, mines).

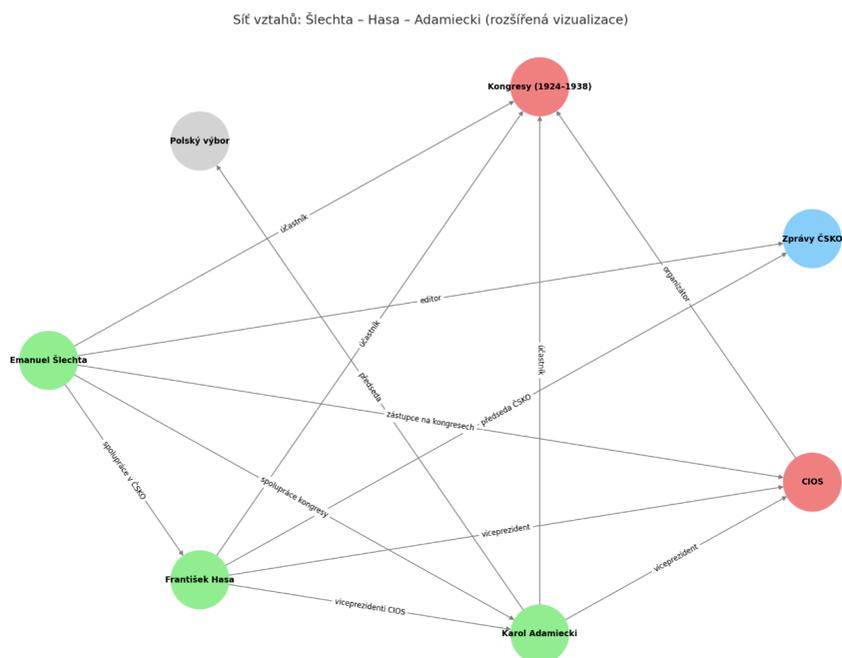
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dustrial Enterprises at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering of the Warsaw Polytechnic. See CZECH. *Karol Adamiecki*. Płock-Toruń 2019; *Zprávy ČSKO*, Leden 1930, Vol. 3, biography of Prof. Adamiecki.

54 *Hospodárná velikost sériové výroby*, 1927, *Americký industrialismus*, 1928, *Organizace průmyslových podniků*, 1930, *Plynulá a přerušovaná výroba*, 1938.

Diagram 1:

The relationship of the Šlechta – Hasa – Adamecki work network in the 1930s



Legend: in green (personalities Šlechta, Hasa, Adamecki), in red (international frameworks, CIOS, congresses), in blue (publications in the *Zprávy ČSKO* – News ČSKO), in grey (national committees and institutions).

Their joint work is a testimony to the transfer of American Taylorism, French Fayolism, the Gilbreths' knowledge and scientific management to the Central European environment. These engineers did not adopt models uncritically – they adapted them to local cultural and economic conditions. Thus, they brought a Central European approach to the complex rationalisation of work, which included not only time studies, but also the standardisation of work operations, office organisation and documentation (especially in Poland), research into psychotechnics (e.g. selection of workers), and the development of scientific management terminology, which was newly codified in the Czech language. All these aspects formed the basis for the systematic modernisation of production, both in heavy industry and in the state administration.

Their cooperation led to concrete applications in industrial practice:

Adameicki's scheduling tables made possible to plan complex production processes in time – a precursor of modern project management.

Hasa introduced research laboratories and testing stations at the Czech Technical University in Prague, here tools and machines were tested before being put into production, leading to improved production efficiency.

Šlechta developed methodologies for reorganizing plants, such as locomotive workshops in Czechoslovakia, and his proposals were presented at international congresses (London 1935, Washington 1938). He also introduced an approach to continuous and intermittent work in terms of productivity.

Through their joint work, they made possible to use the knowledge of rationalisation and scientific organisation of work not only in large enterprises, but also brought suitable diagrams for medium and smaller enterprises. In addition, they developed international cooperation, which enabled to compare results in different countries and to transfer best practices. Mutual visits, exchange of literature and joint congresses strengthened the network of experts that persisted after the death of Adameicki and Hasa (see Diagram 1).

### **Šlechta's Road to Buchenwald**

Emanuel Šlechta also participated in political life of the first Czechoslovak Republic, where from 1935 he was registered in the centre-left Czechoslovak National Social Party.<sup>55</sup> He influenced the Czechoslovak economic, academic and technical spheres through his work in the Czechoslovak banking sector, as an associate professor at the Czech Technical University in Prague, as an entrepreneur and innovator in the field of rationalisation, and as a chartered civil engineer with his own consultancy. This was most evident between the wars in his close association with the international rationalisation movement (CIOS) and its European partners, where he represented the Czechoslovakia at

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55 In the first half of the 20th century, National Social Party was an important political party with a fundamental influence on the direction of the country. It was founded in 1897 as the National Workers' Party, and the following year it was renamed to the Czech National Social Party. After the establishment of Czechoslovakia, it operated as the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, and in 1926 it adopted the name Czechoslovak National Socialist Party. During the First Republic, it was an important and influential political party that sat in most governments. After 1938, the party became partially part of the National Labour Party, which was dissolved by the Nazis a year later. In exile and in the domestic resistance, the party focused on the fight against the Nazis. In the post-war regime of regulated democracy in 1945–1948, it was the second strongest party. At that time, it was called the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party and was led by Petr Zenkl and Prokop Drtina. The free development of the party was interrupted by the communist coup in February 1948, when communist supporters were installed in the party leadership.

congresses of the Scientific Labour Organisation. While he thus profiled himself as a technocrat promoting the scientific spirit of progress, his appearances abroad and in the Czechoslovakia certainly had a political impact, even if he himself had no direct political office.

He continued his scientific activities in the field of scientific management and work organization and rationalization, which he supplemented with his own business not only in his hometown – Kutná Hora, but also in Prague. Before the outbreak of World War II, Šlechta held 3,600 shares in the Prague Paint and Varnish Factory, akc. spol., Praha-Vysočany.<sup>56</sup> In the same period, he also owned 300 shares of the Factory Sublima, a joint stock company for impregnating wood.<sup>57</sup> In both cases, the aim was to save the property of the Jewish owners so that their companies would not be arized. In the case of the first factory, Šlechta helped the Jewish Klein family, with whom he negotiated ownership before the family was deported to Terezín. Although Šlechta himself was later arrested and imprisoned, he managed to keep the shares of the Paint and Varnish Factory in his possession throughout the war, and then returned them to the Kleins. Factory Sublima was the property of the Jewish Fröhlich family, relatives of his wife Anna (1910–1960),<sup>58</sup> whom he married in 1937 and who worked as an editor. The Fröhlich family perished in Auschwitz.

In 1938–1939, he was a member of the newly formed National Unity Party, which the National Socialists joined, and in 1939 he became a member of the National Union Committee. He was active in the resistance at the beginning of World War II and was arrested in 1939.

Between 1939 and 1945 he was imprisoned as a political prisoner for six years in the Buchenwald concentration camp about 10 km from Weimar in Thuringia, Germany. The Nazis began construction of the concentration camp on the Ettersberg hill in the wooded countryside near Weimar in July 1937, originally for Germans who disagreed with the regime. Not only was the Gustloff-Werke armaments factory with 13 production halls, garages and their workshops, where 6,000 prisoners produced firearms for the Wehrmacht, but also a zoo and the luxurious villas of senior SS officers were located next to the camp. The enclosure consisted of an entrance gate to the camp with a guard tower, of which there were 22 in total around the camp. To the right of it was a bunker with 20 cells for the punishment of prisoners, and behind the gate was the large Appelplatz, where twice daily prisoner counts were held, the infirmary and the crematorium. Prisoners passed through the gate daily in five-stage work crews. The camp was not primarily an extermination camp, but a hard labour

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56 ABS, f. Speciální operativní svazky (ZO), Emanuel Šlechta, no. ZO-111 MV, b. 1.

57 Ibid.

58 ABS, f. Osobní spisy, Anna Šlechtová, 1954-1968, no. ZO-424 MV, inv. č. 27, b. 4.

camp (hard work in a quarry, in forestry, mining potash, work in other outdoor hard jobs outside the camp etc.).

At Buchenwald, there was a special compound for prominent political prisoners near the camp's main administration and barracks for 3,000 SS men. Prominent prisoners included leading members of the European elite (e.g. the Italian princess Mafalda of Savoy, Ernst Thälmann), often interned as Sonder- und Ehrenhäftlinge – special or “honorary prisoners” who, due to their political or economic value (property, influence in banks, corporations, etc.), had relatively better conditions and were often treated more like hostages. They could wear civilian clothes with red armbands, grow beards and longer hair, write home once a week (others once a month), receive parcels, and above all, they did not have to work and were not subject to camp punishments. The Nazis disapproved of this practice and tried to move prominent people into groups of political prisoners, mostly by nationality.

Czech prisoners first arrived to the camp in the autumn of 1938, having been transferred from Dachau. After March 15, 1939, the arrested prisoners were Communists, People's Party members, Social Democrats and National Socialists. In the camp, they were initially also designated as Ehrenhäftlinge, later Protektoratshäftlinge, wore a red armband like the others (later a red triangle with a black T in the middle, indicating a Tscheche), and gradually moved from the prominent area to the national blocks – for the Czechs this was block 20 or 12.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, the so-called “best commandos” were also formed, which included interpreters and the Ahnenforschung, which included Czech painters (Emil Filla, Zdeněk Alda and Josef Čapek), who worked in a small workshop behind Block 50 to create fake noble family trees for the SS. Prominent Czechs included political figures such as Petr Zenkl, František Soukup, Ivan Markovič, Josef Plojhar, Emanuel Šlechta, Alois Neuman, journalists Lev Sychrava and Ferdinand Peroutka, historian Jaroslav Werstadt, sports official Vilém Mucha etc.

The imprisonment of Emanuel Šlechta is reported in the Database of Czech Prisoners in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp 1937–1945, stored in the Terezín Memorial.<sup>60</sup> The report shows that Emanuel Šlechta was arrested by Gestapo in Prague at his home (Karlova 34/551, Prague 2) and deported to Dachau on 10 September 1939. From there he was transferred to Buchenwald on 27 September 1939 with camp number 4251 and stayed in blocks 20, 39, 45 and Flügel D. He was assigned to the Divisionsnachschieblager, Blockarbeit. He probably also worked as a translator in the respective commando. He was

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59 BURNEY. *The Dungeon Democracy*. New York 1946.

60 RAPAŤÁ et al. *Databáze českých vězňů v koncentračním táboře Buchenwald 1937–1945*. Terezín 2022, p. 151. NA, f. Buchenwald – kartotéka vězňů československé státní příslušnosti 1939–1945, no. (inv. č.) 1-2, b. 1-7.

liberated on 11 April 1945 by soldiers of the American and British armies. Together with him, 4,380 Russians, 3,800 Poles, 2,900 French, 2,104 Czechs, 1,800 Germans, 1,240 Hungarians, 622 Belgians, 570 Yugoslavs, 550 Austrians, 324 Dutch, 242 Italians, and 1,467 Spaniards and other nationalities gained their freedom. A total of 20,000 persons.<sup>61</sup>

Emanuel Šlechta was important to the Nazis for many reasons: firstly, he was involved in technical activities in various areas of the Czechoslovak machine industry and could thus bring knowledge of the contracts of Czech companies, their production focus and profits, etc. He had contacts abroad in the field of rationalisation and scientific organisation and management of work, which was also useful for employment in concentration camps. He had contacts with bank representatives and with political figures and businessmen. He was in business himself, and the ownership of his companies, even those he had taken over just before the war, remained in his possession and yielded profits that he could apply in the camp. Also, his employment in the divisional supply depot and on block work was not liquidating; on the contrary, in the process he was able to acquire friendly contacts that came in handy when he returned to Czechoslovakia.

The move to the homeland was more difficult not only because of health problems, but also because of the distance and the impossibility of using transport connections home right away. Therefore, the labour organization in the camp started to publish a prison newspaper, Czech News (*České noviny*), and two magazines, KLB45 (Events, Information, Culture) with news about the situation in the camp after liberation, or TRN (Humor, Jokes, Latrines). On April 15, 1945, the Czechoslovaks published the first free speech of all Czechoslovaks, which was originally an illegal 6-member Czechoslovak national committee. Its radio performance was given by Šlechta, Sychrava and Stahl.<sup>62</sup>

After returning to Prague at the end of May 1945,<sup>63</sup> Emanuel Šlechta initially engaged in journalistic activities and contact with foreign politicians and members of the restored National Socialist Party.

### **Šlechta to its peak and its fall after 1945**

In the post-war period, he profiled himself as an economic expert for the National Socialists and was a member of the broader party leadership, where he became an exponent of Communist influence, even though he was not originally part of the openly left wing. His rise, particularly in political positions, was meteoric. In June 1945 he was appointed chairman of the national administration of the

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61 *Buchenwald varuje: dokumenty, vzpomínky, svědectví*. Praha 1962, p. 618.

62 Archiv Národního muzea (ANM), f. Sběrka Bohumil Příkryl, no. 5, 280, KLB 45, no. 1, p. 1.

63 ŠLECHTA. *Úvahy o válce v Buchenwaldu*. Praha 1948.

Živnobanka (Czech Business Bank), where he remained until February 1948. As time passed, he leaned more and more towards the Communists. In February 1948 he supported them. He became deputy chairman of the Central Action Committee of the National Front and newly constituted the Czechoslovak Socialist Party (CSS), now subordinate to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Of the 24 members of the party's pre-February presidium, Šlechta was the only one who actively collaborated with the communist regime, and he quickly rose to the leadership of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party as chairman. His chairmanship was confirmed by the CSS national conference in October 1954.

His position in the new society was strengthened in the long term, and therefore Emanuel Šlechta was also given a ministerial post after February 1948 in the second government of Klement Gottwald after the resignation of the People's Party leader Jan Kopecký as Minister of Technology. He retained the post until 1950 in the government of Antonín Zápotocký and Viliam Široký, in which he became Minister of Construction (building industry) after the reconstruction of the government in 1950. He also held this position in the subsequent second government of Viliam Široký until 1956. He then served as Minister-President of the Government Committee for the Improvement of the Agricultural, Forestry and Water Industry (for Construction) in this government from 1956 to 1960.

In the 1948 elections he was elected to the National Assembly on behalf of the CSS and retained his seat after the 1954 elections, sitting in Parliament until his death in March 1960.

In addition to these activities, E. Šlechta returned to the Czech Technical University in Prague, where he was appointed professor and became head of the Institute of Industrial Enterprise Management. At the CTU in Prague he was interested in the possibility of university ownership of companies, which would support the pedagogical and scientific activities of the school with their profits. Indeed, after World War II, as a result of the decrees of the President of the Republic and property transfers in connection with collaboration, war and nationalisation, some Czech industrial enterprises came under the transitional administration of the state. Some of them were even bequeathed directly to the universities as an inheritance, which led to an unprecedented situation. The Czech Technical University in Prague found itself in the position of heir to several manufacturing enterprises. Specifically, there were three enterprises: the Janáček Foundry and Engineering Plant at Ransko, the Ing. Jaroslav Velinský, Armory and Chemical-Pyrotechnic Factory Jablůnka nad Bečvou, and the Kameníček Machinery Plant in Prague Hostivař. The first enterprise was bequeathed to the CTU in Prague by Růžena Janáčková, the other enterprises were bequeathed to the school by national administration. The CTU in Prague was faced with the

decision whether to accept and operate the enterprises and make them useful in its practice or to leave them to the state.

The discussion was led by a committee (Jaromír Jiráček as the dean, Vojtěch Jareš, Emanuel Šlechta as an expert in business management and rationalization and Otakar Maštovský, Josef Řezníček, Václav Krouza as technical and economic experts) appointed by the University of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering. Šlechta drew up economic opinions on the state of Janáček foundry at Ransko, arranged a bank examination of Živnobanka, formulated proposals on how to take over the company without tax burdens and warned of the risks of unclear inheritance proceedings and neglected assets. He also tried to help the CTU in Prague with his political influence on behalf of the school in negotiations with the ministers of industry, education and the office of the prime minister, then Klement Gottwald. Despite intensive negotiations, testimonials, political contacts and efforts at strategic management, it became clear that the CTU in Prague did not have the resources to run the company. Therefore, the Kameníček and Velinský plants were nationalised and the Janáček foundry at Ransko was going through a complicated inheritance procedure, so the government cancelled the transfer of property to the school. The foundry was incorporated into the Chotěboř Metal Works.

This example showed that Šlechta is a truly capable manager, and that he played a key role as a mediator between the university, the state, the banking sector and the political authorities. His activities documented his exceptional efforts to preserve the technocratic model of management, which, however, proved unsustainable in the advent of the communist regime. At the same time, it showed Šlechta's very broad professional knowledge and skills, as well as his advantageous contacts, and such an independent-minded personality with a clear goal became suspicious to members of the Communist Party and the state security forces.

As a result of the political changes after 1956 and the revision of the Stalinist period, but also the improvement of the international political situation, Šlechta began to cautiously consider a more independent political existence of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party (CSS). He established contacts with similarly oriented satellite non-communist parties from Eastern Europe and with socialist political entities from the Western world. As early as in September 1955, the National Front leadership criticized him for his foreign contacts and coalition-building ideas through the mouth of his former cellmate at Buchenwald, the deputy chairman of the CSS and lawyer Alois Neuman (1901–1977).<sup>64</sup> Resentment, perhaps even envy, grew and soon suspicions of hostile activity,

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64 NEUMAN. *Jak jsem žil: hrst vzpomínek a kus historie*. Praha 1971.

of divulging state secrets, of promoting the USA and of contact with agents of imperialist states, and of embezzlement soon emerged.<sup>65</sup> His awards of the Klement Gottwald Order and the Order of the Republic, given in 1955, did not help.<sup>66</sup> This began to be very serious for E. Šlechta's position.

His wife, Anna Šlechtová, also attracted attention, as she activated the Melantrich publishing house as a publishing house independent of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, economically linked to the CSS, and founded the Ars bookstore and exhibition hall. From August 1949, the Melantrich publishing house was headed by its director Anna Šlechtová with the cooperation of the editor-in-chief Karel Jiše. However, he was arrested in August 1952 and his responsibilities were taken over by the director Šlechtová. In 1953, the company adopted the name Svobodné slovo – Melantrich. Václav Kopecký (1897–1961), an influential functionary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Minister of Information 1945–1953 and Minister of Culture 1953–1954),<sup>67</sup> criticized the overly benevolent attitude of the CSS towards the pre-February past and expressed his dissatisfaction with the operation of Melantrich. Therefore, in 1959 the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia decided to limit the Czechoslovak Socialist Party's difficult-to-control financial resources and the publishing house was de jure closed down. At the same time, the bookstore and the Ars exhibition hall also disappeared. Later that year, however, the CSS founded a new publishing house under the name of the daily Svobodné slovo, with competences limited to political education.

Anna Šlechtová had to leave the newspaper Svobodné slovo. And she was also suspected of hostile activity in the illegal Czechoslovak Socialist Party, of contacts with a Gestapo confidant, of contacts with an agent of the imperialist state, and of embezzlement and machinations at the Melantrich publishing house.<sup>68</sup>

But the pressure continued. The June 1959 meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party decided to limit the political activity of the Czech Socialist Party. The party had to hand over some of its buildings and the secretariat and had to promise that Emanuel Šlechta would step down from its leadership at the right time. This occurred as a result of internal party rivalry on March 16, 1960, when he was replaced by Alois Neuman. After their experience with political trials, the Šlechta couple expected an impending arrest, and therefore committed suicide together on March 17, 1960.

65 ABS, f. Speciální operativní svazky, 1943/1948–1960, no. NAD 32, Osobní spis Emanuel Šlechta, 1951–1971, ZO-111 MV, svazky 1–16, b. 1 (speciální depozit – fond Z).

66 KAPLAN. *Mocní a bezmocní*. Toronto 1989.

67 KAPLAN and KOSATÍK. *Gottwaldovi muži*. Praha; Litomyšl 2004.

68 ABS, f. Osobní spisy, Anna Šlechtová, 1954–1961, no. ZO-424 MV, inv. č. 27, b. 4.

The *Rudé právo* newspaper<sup>69</sup> reported that the minister died after a short, serious illness, and the government held Šlechta's funeral on March 21, 1960, in the Great Hall of the Crematorium of the Capital City of Prague in Strašnice,<sup>70</sup> with the participation of numerous delegations. The funeral service ended with the national anthem. The urns of the Šlechtas were buried in the evangelical cemetery in Kutná Hora.

## Conclusion

The life and work of Emanuel Šlechta (1895–1960) are a fascinating example of a personal destiny that is dramatically intertwined with the history of Czechoslovakia in the first half of the 20th century. Šlechta represents a type of technocratic intellectual who tried to transfer modern foreign scientific knowledge into practice, not only in the field of industrial practice and business management, but also in state administration and education. In his time, he was one of the main popularizers of scientific organization and management of work and rationalization of industry and had a fundamental influence on the formation of the technical-managerial culture of the young republic. However, his fate is also a warning testimony to the clash of rationality and ideology in the 20th century.

### *Scientific contribution and technocratic vision*

Šlechta's professional career was shaped from the beginning by the pursuit of systems thinking. After graduating from mechanical engineering at the Czech Technical University in Prague in 1921 and after his experiences in the USA, where he practiced in major companies and encountered the first applications of scientific management, he transferred these modern principles to domestic industry and state administration. Šlechta was also an active participant in the international rationalization movement (congresses and national committees). He applied his findings in Central Europe in cooperation with two Czech (Šlechta, Hasa) and one Polish experts (Adamiński). He belonged to the first generation of experts who brought American scientific organization and management of work (Taylor, Gilbreth's) to Central Europe and combined it with the European (Fayol, Verunáč) tradition of planning, ergonomics and industrial psychology.

He worked at the Czech Technical University in Prague from the late 1920s in the field of mechanical engineering as an associate professor, later a professor, but also taught work organization and management and rationalization and published a number of professional texts. He collaborated with the Masaryk

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69 Dr. Ing. E. Šlechta zemřel. In *Rudé právo*, 19. 3. 1960, p. 2.

70 ČTK Pohřeb prof. dr. Ing. E. Šlechtý. In *Rudé právo*, 22. 3. 1960, p. 2.

Academy of Labor and became a prominent promoter of transferring efficiency to industry and state management. His efforts were built on faith in science, technology and human reason.

During World War II, he was imprisoned in Buchenwald for six years for his resistance activities. After the war, he became involved in politics with the support of the communists, in state management, and again in teaching at the Czech Technical University in Prague. At that time, he tried to push through an original proposal that technical universities should own manufacturing companies and thus generate profits to support research and teaching. In this regard, he played a key role in negotiating the donation of companies from the national administration and from inheritance to the Czech Technical University in Prague. Despite Šlechta's thoughtful analyses and bank assessments, as well as negotiations with officials, his efforts clashed with a lack of understanding of his intention, the reality of nationalization, unfinished inheritance management, and the advent of a state-controlled economy – the rationally technical and managerial model proved unsustainable in the new communist era.

### ***Between rationality and ideology***

Šlechta's political career was also significant – as a member of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party (later the Czechoslovak Socialist Party), he became Minister of Technology and Construction after World War II and also worked in the government construction committee, thus participating in the post-war reconstruction of the state. His work was successful and he neglected to perceive the political influence of the Communist Party and its ideological control. Even though he was awarded two state decorations, leading figures of the Communist Party began to criticize his intellectual superiority, work results and way of life. Šlechta thus appeared to be too independent, professionally strong, but politically unsuitable. After various ups and downs, in the second half of the 1950s he was accused, similarly to his wife Anna, then director of the Melantrich publishing house, of inappropriate contacts with the West, of spreading hostile ideas and of economic machinations. When Šlechta was removed from the leadership of the CSS in March 1960 and threatened with arrest, the couple decided to commit suicide together on March 17, 1960. It was the last act of people who could not (and did not want to) continue living in a system that denied everything they represented professionally and morally. It was truly the last rational act in a system that had lost its rationality.

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