

Several unpublished proposals for the design of the Czechoslovak national flag

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ABSTRACT: Eleven flag proposals found in the archives of Jaroslav Jareš are described. Although the idea of using the triangle in the Czechoslovak national flag can be attributed to this artist because he suggested a flag with a triangle already on 3 November 1918, he could not influence decisions of the members of the Arms Committee because he was called by a military command to Slovakia in July 1919. Another person could. Isidor Zahradník, the minister of railways, was a member of the Constitutional Committee and a reviewer of the governmental draft law. He criticised the governmental flag proposal and recommended his own three designs, known, until recently, to vexillologists only by written descriptions. Drawings of these flags were discovered in the archives of I. Zahradník last year and are presented here for the first time.

The illustrations for this paper appear on Plates 32-33.

1 Flag designs of Jaroslav Jareš

At the 8th Congress of Vexillology in Vienna, I presented an account of proceedings in the Arms Committee in 1919 and 1920, in its Arms Subcommittee which was created for the re-examination of a triangle flag design in January 1920, in the Constitutional Committee and in the Czechoslovak National Assembly where Law No. 252 was finally confirmed on 30 March 1920. Those who were present at the congress 18 years ago may remember that my lecture was accompanied by drawings of many flag proposals which were discussed in

the above mentioned institutions. Unfortunately, they are well known only to vexillologists and not to the general public. Some of them accompanied my lecture and were shown in the Proceedings of the 8th International Congress of Vexillology. Czech vexillologists may be familiar with them from an article by Z. Svoboda. [1]

As I presented in Vienna, most Czechs believe that the Czechoslovak national flag was created by the Czech artist Jaroslav Jareš whose drawing was thought to have won a flag contest in 1920. This was believed because art exhibitions and articles on the work of Jareš published in many newspapers in the 1960s displayed Jareš's flag proposal, which looked identical to the adopted Czechoslovak national flag.

However, his proposal had been in his archives. The minutes of the above mentioned committees do not mention it and as Z. Svoboda [2] refers, J. Jareš was called by a military command to Slovakia in July 1919. Therefore he was not in Prague at the time when committees discussed flag proposals. It is only coincidence that his undated drawing was the same as the approved flag design.

Nevertheless, the idea of using the triangle in the Czechoslovak national flag can be attributed to Jaroslav Jareš. He suggested a flag for the Czech (*sic*) republic describing it as a black triangle placed over the tricolour of white over blue over red in a weekly *Socialistické listy* already on 3 November, 1918. A copy of this issue is in the files of the Arms Committee. Their members had to have been familiar with it. However, no minutes mention the discussion on such a design.

These two proposals were not the only ones made by Jaroslav Jareš. He drew at least ten sketches for different types of Czechoslovak flags (merchant, war, naval, Presidential flags) in May and June 1919 when he was a member of a group of artists in the *Umělecký sbor*. All these proposals are preserved in the Army museum in Prague. [3] Many of them have a blue triangle at the hoist, but none are similar to the Czechoslovak national flag.

Further proposals made by Jaroslav Jareš have been kept in his archives and have been occasionally displayed in artistic exhibitions. The drawing almost identical to the Czechoslovak flag (to be exact, the only difference are the flag proportions 1:2 rather than the official ones of 2:3) has been among them. According to memories of the second wife of Jaroslav Jareš, she discovered them in a big parcel covered with dust in 1933 while Jareš was out and she was cleaning the house. When he came home, she showed him her findings and he confessed to be the author of the Czechoslovak national flag. He was annoyed because he wanted the parcel to be opened only after his death. [4] When she wanted to know the details, he said that the proposals were made when he was 33. He drew them in a café in 1919, when his first wife was seriously ill and he could not afford to have a studio.

While studying the archival materials dealing with the history of the Czechoslovak national flag, I tried to contact the family of Jaroslav Jareš in 1984. Since he died in 1967, I could only interview his second wife and his daughter. His

wife was ill at that time and she did not answer my letters. Sometime later, his daughter wrote me, and invited me to her new house. She showed me his flag proposals and allowed me to photograph them. I found eleven flag proposals, of which four were never shown at exhibitions, nor described in newspaper articles. All were drawn on four sheets of paper. Two sheets had dimensions of 16.3 cm × 33.8 cm. The first one depicted the proposal for the Czechoslovak national emblem and above it the official Czechoslovak flag (Fig. 1), but with another flag placed in the upper corner at the hoist. This smaller flag was white over red with a black wedge charged with a white chalice. Three flag proposals were on the second sheet of the same size. A white over red flag with a black wedge at the hoist separated from horizontal stripes by a blue fimbriation in a shape of ypsilon (Fig. 2), and a tricolour of white over blue over red with a black wedge with a smaller flag in the upper corner at the hoist. The smaller one repeated the big one and had a red chalice in the black wedge (Fig. 3). The last drawing (Fig. 4) showed the official Czechoslovak flag.

Even the third sheet was known from exhibitions. Its dimensions were 40.2 cm × 23.7 cm. There was a wide blue vertical stripe along the fly of the flag in the first proposal (Fig. 5). The black triangle extended to it and separated the white triangle from the red one. The second proposal (Fig. 6) had the same black triangle and the blue stripe along the fly. In addition the triangle was charged with a red sun with eleven rays and placed in a tricolour of white over blue over red. The last one (Fig. 7) had three horizontal stripes, white, blue and red and a small black wedge extended only to one third of the flag and charged with a red chalice. This proposal was similar to that (except for the red chalice) described in *Socialistické listy* on 3 November 1918.

Four hitherto unknown proposals were drawn on the same kind of sheet (there were parts of a geometric sketch dated 1907 on the back of both sheets) which has dimensions of 33.4 cm × 40.2 cm. The first proposal (Fig. 8) has a black triangle splitting a white over red field. There is a red chalice on the triangle and a narrow blue border at three sides of the flag. The black triangle on the second proposal (Fig. 9) splits the field of white over red over white whereas the triangle on the third proposal (Fig. 10) does the field of white over blue over red. In both proposals the triangle is charged with a red sun (of 9 rays and 13 rays, respectively) and the blue border does not touch the hoist because the triangle goes just from the corners at the hoist. The last proposal (Fig. 11) is the simplest one of all four as there is no blue border. The black triangle splits a red over blue over white field and is charged with a red sun with eight rays.

There are no descriptions on these sheets and therefore we do not know if all proposals were meant for the national flag or for other types of flags. The symbolism of the colours and emblems is also missing. A lot of proposals show the pan-Slavic colours of blue, white and red. Black with a red chalice or a sun may reflect the Hussite movement in 15th century named after the Czech minister John Huss whose flags were thought to contain a similar colour

combination and devices.

Unfortunately, I failed to find another proposal by Jaroslav Jareš which was illustrated in an article by Josef Vopařil in the weekly *Naše rodina* published in 1979. [5] This was similar to the Czechoslovak national flag except for the blue triangle which extended to two thirds of the flag and was separated by a narrow red stripe from the white one and by a narrow white stripe from the red one. The same proposal (Fig. 12) was shown in an article in *Socialistické listy* in 1919. The article was signed by J. Říha [6] and criticised the flag proposal which appeared as an illustration in the governmental draft law of 30 October 1919. Jaroslav Jareš wrote a lot of articles for *Socialistické listy* and often used pen-names. He may have used a pen-name J. Říha. This hypothesis was neither confirmed nor denied by Jareš's daughter when she saw the article from *Socialistické listy*.

2. Designs of Isidor Zahradník

As mentioned previously, Jaroslav Jareš was in Slovakia in 1919 and 1920 and could not influence discussions on the new flag. Many other people could. When the governmental draft law (Print 1773) showing a blue triangle extending only to one third of the flag was issued on 30 October 1919, a lot of criticism arose. The first opponents were members of the Constitutional Committee because it had to be discussed there first. M. Hlinomaz [7] mentions the member of Parliament Isidor Zahradník who reviewed the draft law in the meeting of the Constitutional Committee on 15 January 1920. I. Zahradník rejected the proposed flag design and was said to submit another, more complicated one. According to Hlinomaz who reviewed archival materials only from the State Central Archives in Prague, this design was derived from the flag of American Czechs. The proposal by Zahradník showed five stars, their colour was unknown to Hlinomaz.

Z. Svoboda [8] sheds more light on the activity of Isidor Zahradník. He writes about three proposals by Zahradník, describing them as five white stars in a blue field laid to the canton of a white over red flag in two different ways. The third variant should be similar to that by Preissig-Štefánik where four white stars were in the middle of a blue flag with narrow red and white stripes along the top and bottom. Neither Hlinomaz nor Svoboda illustrated these designs.

When the governmental draft law (Print 1773) came to the Constitutional Committee on 6 November 1919, it was Isidor Zahradník, the minister of railways, who was appointed to review it. A search of Zahradník's archives led to the discovery of a thin file of flag proposals. [9] This file contains the governmental draft law with red pencil notes written by Zahradník. On a sheet of paper titled 'Report of the Governmental Draft Law' he writes: "On behalf of myself I confess that I neither like the flag as it is proposed by the government nor consider to be efficient..."

A double sheet of paper dated 19 December 1919 and signed by Zahradník

has particular interest for vexillologists as it shows three flag proposals. The first one (Fig. 13) is a white over red flag with a small blue canton (its width corresponds to one fourth of the flag width and its length is one third of the flag length) depicting five white five-pointed stars. The second proposal (Fig. 14) is very similar to the first one except for the canton (its dimensions correspond to one half of the width and length of the flag). The third proposal (Fig. 15) has five horizontal stripes of red, white, blue, white and red in an approximate ratio of 1:1:6:1:1. The blue stripe bears five (2+3) white five-pointed stars. All these proposals were influenced both by the American flag and the flag which was used by the Czechs and Slovaks in America. Another document from the file reveals that Zahradník consulted friends about his proposals. It is a letter of 3 January 1919 (*sic!*) from the Army office of the President where the undersigned recommends the first proposal.

According to the documents kept in the Archives of Parliament and the State Central Archives, Zahradník criticized the flag design illustrated in the governmental draft law in the Constitutional Committee on 15 January 1920 and in the Arms Committee on 19 January 1920. He showed his three proposals and argued against the blue triangle and the white colour at the edge of the flag. He believed the triangle was aesthetically unacceptable and the white would merge with the sky. One member of the Arms Committee pointed out that white at sea was a very contrasting colour. Many members rejected the third proposal because blue had become a dominant colour, but had little historical significance.

We should credit Zahradník for his approach to the question of Czechoslovak symbols. Unlike other opponents he agreed with the opinion of heraldry and art experts from the Arms Subcommittee which met on 23 January 1920 and recommended adopting the flag design proposed by the government after the blue triangle was extended to the half of the flag. He supported this flag design modification in subsequent meetings of the Constitutional Committee and it is to his credit that the Czechoslovak flag was adopted on 30 March 1920.

Thus, a thin file of papers from the years 1919 and 1920 kept in the Library of the Premonstratensian monastery in Prague has provided another stone in the mosaic of documents on the history of the Czechoslovak national flag.

Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to record my debt of gratitude to the daughter of the late J. Jareš for showing me the drawings of his flag proposals, to Dr M. Hlinomaz and Dr P.R. Pokorný for calling my attention to the files of Dr I. Zahradník and finally to my family who have borne with patience the limitations associated with the writing of these papers.

References

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- [2] Svoboda, Z., "Vznik Československé státní vlajky," *Vexilologie*, **36**, 625.
- [3] Svoboda, Z., Hlinomaz, M., "O vzniku československé vlajky," *Haló sobota*, 15 November 1986, p. 5.
- [4] Drozdová, M., "...a hrdě vlaj!" *Večerní Praha*, 25 October 1968.
- [5] Vopařil, J., "Jak vznikla naše státní vlajka," *Naše rodina*, 2 May 1979, p. 12.
- [6] Říha, J., "Státní vlajka je definitivní?," *Socialistické listy*, 16 November 1919.
- [7] Hlinomaz, M., "Vývoj československé státní symboliky v letech 1918-1990," *Sborník archivních prací*, 1992, **42**, No. 1, p. 97.
- [8] Svoboda, Z., *Československá státní a vojenská symbolika*. Prague: 1991, p. 41.
- [9] File No. 4 of the archives of I. Zahradník kept in the Library of the Premonstratensian monastery in Prague.

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Plate 32

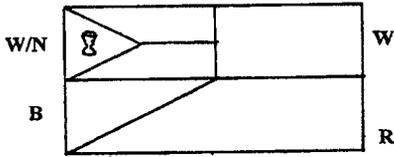


Figure 1

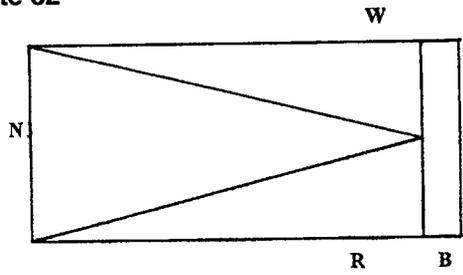


Figure 5

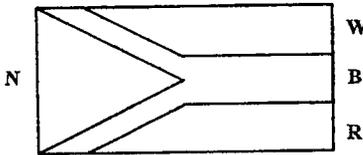


Figure 2

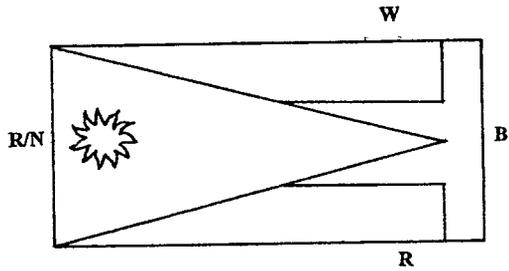


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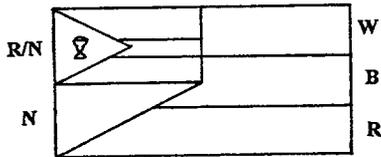


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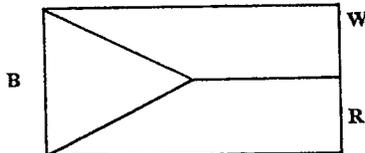


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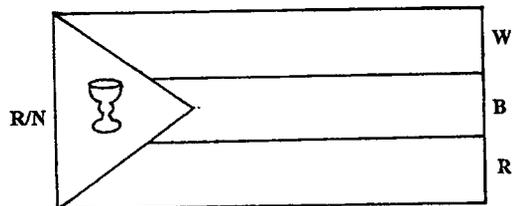


Figure 7

Plate 33

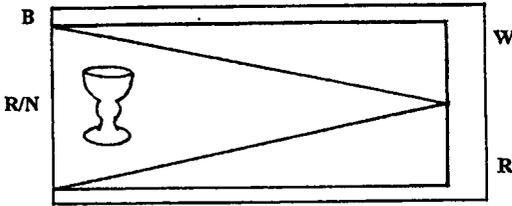


Figure 8

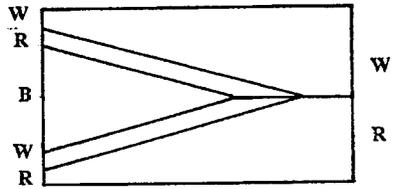


Figure 12

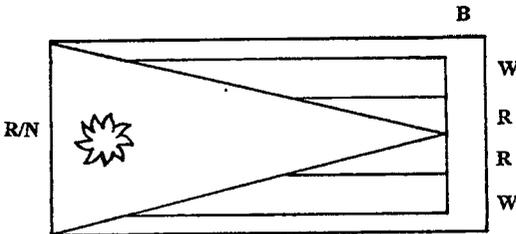


Figure 9

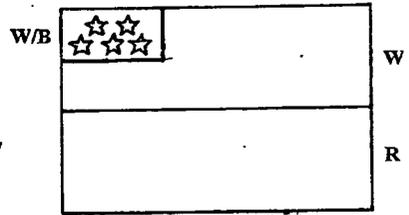


Figure 13

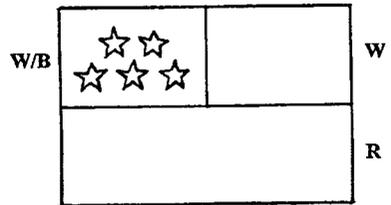


Figure 14

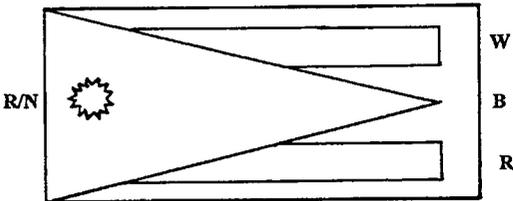


Figure 10



Figure 15

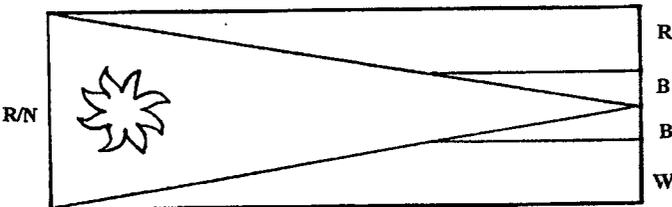


Figure 11