

Election Day With the Young Czech Party in the Malá Strana

I

At three o'clock in the afternoon, they knew in the editorial office of *The Day* that the victory of Dr Vilém Funk was a certainty and they were discussing whether they should print a special edition in which it would be announced that the Young Czechs had succeeded in winning by a gigantic majority in the Malá Strana.

The editorial committee resolved to bring out the special edition and a member of the editorial staff was given the job of writing an enthusiastic article on the outcome of the election.

At a quarter past three, the *National* already had an article set up for the evening edition under the heading: 'Victory Assured for Dr Funk'.

And then at half past three, in the offices of the Young Czech weekly *The People*, Miss Süssová, the 'Young Czech Maid of Orleans', was given the proofs of her own article for the special edition of *The People* which was to proclaim the complete victory of Dr Funk.

She had written that article out of a heart brimming over with political fervour. In ringing tones, the Maid of Orleans declared:

The fact that Dr Funk has triumphed in today's election by such a splendid majority is one for which we have to thank those fearless warriors who, undeterred by the fury of the demagogues, voted unanimously for Dr Funk as a man most thoroughly acquainted with conditions in the Malá Strana, an exceptionally level-headed politician, a master of economic management and a sincere friend of the inhabitants of our lovely Malá Strana and of Hradčany. This level-headed politician was opposed by Dr Šviha who, on being informed that he had lost by such an overwhelming majority, burst into tears. And it is in tears that National Social politics must end, whereas our proud and victorious Young Czech banner stands unfurled over Royal Hradčany. Not since the time of the coronation of Ferdinand the Goodhearted has the Malá Strana witnessed scenes of rapture to match

those that occurred when it became known that Dr Funk had been victorious. Many ladies threw flowers into Dr Funk's conveyance; the horses were unharnessed and the carriage was drawn by exulting crowds up to the Radetzky Monument, where Dr Funk made a speech about the progress of the Young Czech Idea. Old and young embraced each other . . .

It was a really lovely article, beautiful and strong, like the convictions of Miss Süssová herself who, as is well-known, comes of a long line of Young Czechs. Even before the birth of Christ, they say, her ancestors were Young Czechs. Yes, this was an article full of passion and unshakeable faith; the same faith that moved the French Maid of Orleans to believe that it was really she who was burning the English, not the English who were burning her.

'This special edition of *The People*,' she said prophetically in the printing-room, 'will be an historical document one day.' Then she went off to the Young Czech campaign office to make sure that they had delivered the roses that were to be thrown by Young Czech ladies - for a fee of one crown per lady - into Dr Funk's carriage.

You wouldn't believe the amount of work it takes before they're all dressed and fitted out, and then the effort involved in keeping a sharp look-out to ensure that they don't wander off in those dresses. There's just as much positive politics in that as there is in getting yourself pulled around in a carriage by public servants. When you enter positive politics, you're in the business of buying in enthusiastic support. Some, like the Roman Caesars, get to be pulled along in their carriages because people are afraid of losing their heads. The public servants who were pulling Dr Funk's carriage at this by-election were not in fear for their necks; they were pulling him down Neruda Street for six crowns a man. For twelve, they'd have pulled him to Břevnov and for fifty, as far as Slaný.

At four o'clock, a postcard was delivered to the Young Czech Election Headquarters, bearing a portrait of Dr Funk and the inscription: 'Imperial Deputy Dr Funk, elected for the Fifth Electoral District, 24th June, 1909'.

The man who had brought the postcard then went off to vote. And of course, he voted for Dr Funk.

II

All was hustle and bustle meanwhile at the Young Czech Election Headquarters. This was the point at which the clans gathered when, exercising their right of universal suffrage, they turned up for a free drink. It was all done very discreetly. A thousand glasses appeared on the table and after a while, those glasses were empty. Another four hundred appeared and met the same fate; beer is there to be drunk, just as a ballot-paper is there to be handed, not to the conductor in a tram, but to the official in charge of the polling-station.

And then, why shouldn't a Social Democrat make himself a crown or two when the struggle for social welfare is, after all, Social Democrat policy?

And it was in pursuit of their social interest that they made their way hence with somewhat uncertain steps, to the polling-station.

There was a cloakroom at the back where coats were lent out and hats exchanged, just as your Social Democrat exchanges convictions.

Dr Funk referred to them as his 'valued friends'.

Ah, what a beautiful harmony! And just as, in church, the believer breathes in the intoxicating odour of incense, so here, the air was redolent of the scent of beer and slivovic.

And then a dish of minced beef appeared on the table, emitting a smell that just *made* you go and vote Young Czech.

There were many who came here as Social Democrats. They would drink one beer, a second and then a third, acquire a ballot-paper with Dr Funk's name on it, knock back a slivovic for good measure, and go off to vote.

Dr Vilém Funk! The name that was to them as a spring of water to a thirsty man!

What's that point of having the right to vote if you can't get something out of it?

For extreme contingencies, the municipal drunk-carts were held in readiness, for it is the duty of the City Fathers to lend the voter their support.

They were called upon in only two cases. These two voters, drunk on beer and political fervour, had not managed to make it as far as the polling-station. At the police-station, they were found to be carrying ballot-papers in the name of the Young Czech candidate in their hands and badges supporting the Social Democrats on their coats. A stalwart citizen from Nový Svět in Hradčany was at the centre of a moving

scene. Back at the Young Czech Headquarters, he had drunk twelve glasses, and yet he had still managed to cast his vote. But when he emerged onto the steps outside the polling-station, he removed his boots and fell asleep. There was a similarity here to the case of the Athenian runner who carried his message on foot from Sparta to Athens and then, having delivered it, fell to the ground and expired. Heroic feats of this magnitude are few and far between in the annals of History.

'Victory is assured,' said the Young Czech campaign-manager at Election Headquarters. 'Drink up, friends, and when the election's over, there'll be a double ration of beer for you.'

III

At the Young Czech Club, meanwhile, they were getting the carriage ready. 'Don't pull the reins too tight: we want to be able to get the horses out straight away.' After an embarrassing episode with the public servants, they had hired people who were not wearing official caps. Young ones and old ones.

These people were on the point of graduating: passing their graduation-exam in the science of unharnessing the horses from Dr Funk's carriage; taking their Final Examination in the art of giving three cheers.

It was in the cellar that this latter activity was going on: the Viva, in fact. 'Three cheers for our beloved deputy Dr Funk!' 'Hip, hip, Hooray!'

Meanwhile, in a special location, they were rehearsing the musicians hired by the Young Czech Election Committee to fall in, as soon as the great and certain victory of Dr Funk had been proclaimed, behind the carriage, which would be being drawn along by old and young folk alike, and play. Play a victory march, that is. For the most part, they had had to go and vote for Dr Funk before the rehearsal, and that was because it was already down in black and white in *The People* that: 'from the mature electorate, the Young Czech officials on the spot swiftly selected a band, to provide an accompaniment for the cheering crowds.'

The carriage-horses got beer as well. It's a pity, by the way, that real animals don't vote Young Czech. Every horse in Prague would vote then.

'Good God! Look at the way you're taking out that horse, you clumsy oaf! Grab hold of the shaft at the front! Come on, man, put some heart into it! If you're going to rock the carriage about like that, you at the back, we'll have wasted six crowns on you! You've got to really *feel* that jubilation! And you've got to shout in unison. Come on lads, let's have a bit more fire!'

And it wasn't just six-crown-a-time youngsters they had there. A number of older, mustachioed men at eight crowns each were practising as well, for in its report, already set up for the printer, *The Day* had written:

And with one accord, old and young alike rushed to the coach, cheering with all their might, and unharnessed the horses. The joy that burst out at that moment is beyond description. Ladies threw roses into the coach; the people sang: 'Where my home is'. It was an unforgettable moment. The truth had prevailed. And behind those fervent crowds, the vanquished demagogues stood gnashing their teeth.

IV

At four o'clock, word spread that the voters of Vršovice had not come to Dr Funk's aid. The Young Czechs from Michle had gone missing as well. The people who sleep in the brickyards at Dejvice and in the quarries of Strahov had not turned up to vote for Dr Funk because the police had moved them on the previous night. But it would not do to say that the police were responsible for Dr Funk's defeat.

Dr Funk was assured of victory. The Young Czech cause was on the march. Special editions of *The Day* and *The People* had been set up.

And yet, 35,000 crowns had gone down the drain!

Dr Funk was already sitting in his carriage. All they had to do was set the horses in motion, drive out into the street and there were the six- and eight-crowners waiting to unharness the horses.

And it had all been for nothing!

Dr Šviha won. Dr Funk never had the horses taken out of his carriage.

And so the Young Czech election campaign was a fiasco.

But the Young Czech Maid of Orleans has not given up the struggle.

She is writing a long article for *The People* under the heading: 'A Moral Victory'.