

Resumé

Club of Inquisitive Children • Jaroslav Foglar and the Protectorate

Readers' Clubs, banned scouting and Curatorium for the Education of Youth in Bohemia and Moravia

Klub zvědavých dětí (Club of Inquisitive Children) referred to in the title of the paper was an educational series broadcast by Czech radio between 1935 and 1943. While it undoubtedly had an interesting educational effect at the time, we would be highly unlikely to pay much attention to this programme today if it had not been for the fifteen scripts prepared for it by the respected Czech writer Jaroslav Foglar (1907–1999), also known under his scout nickname Jestřáb (The Hawk) between 1941 and 1943.

Finding other Czech authors of books for youth who dedicated their lives to the education of the young as entirely as Foglar did and whose work has resonated as strongly with many generations as Foglar's would not be easy. For foreign researchers, Foglar may be seen to some extent as a combination of the Canadian wildlife artist Ernest Thompson Seton (1860–1946), Italian moralist Edmondo De Amicis (1846–1908), and the English journalist Arthur Ransome (1884–1967). However, none of these associations are precise. Some of Foglar's novels depicting the urban environment may also resemble the novel called *The Paul Street Boys* by the Hungarian writer Ferenc Molnár (1878–1952). Foglar's stories though are more vivid and some of his works remain a major part of Czech pop culture to this day.

Jaroslav Foglar was an **experiential educator**, both in practice and in his literary work. He dedicated sixty years of his life (1927–1987) to leading his initially scouts' and later tourist group for boys called Dvojka (The Second Troop) in Prague. He wrote more than twenty educational novels based on the life of boys, several extensive comics series, radio programmes and one play, and co-authored various handbooks and countless articles in newspapers and magazines. His non-conformist approach made him the target of repeated official restrictions by totalitarian regimes, but these were always followed by huge waves of Foglar-mania.

He grew up in a poor Prague family, and from the age of four as a half orphan. He was keen on literature and prone to deep experiences stemming from minor, everyday events. His values were influenced by the conflict between traditional moral postulates and the Czech church's defiance during that time. His lifelong work with youth was based on promoting ethical principles, honesty and fairness no longer calibrated by any higher sources. His principles relied exclusively on one's conscience and the social norm. When listing his sources of inspiration, Foglar repeatedly referred to the strong impact the educational novel for boys *Heart* by De Amicis made on him. He was also deeply moved by the biblical **altruism** in the opening sections of *Les Misérables* by the French socialist Victor Hugo (1802–1885). His close connection with nature,

which in Foglar's case bordered on **spiritualisation of nature**, was strongly influenced by his personal experiences, as well as the novels by the woodcraft founder E. T. Seton. Another characteristic feature of Foglar's work—the tendency to combine noble ideals of honour with morbid and frightening situations—reflects the author's fondness for reading pulp magazines.

Foglar's educational strategy was also founded very strongly on his own childhood experiences, which he gained as an unsupervised child of the streets rather than an organised scout group member. Around the age of 14, he and several of his friends started working on their own **personal development system** based on the then popular ideals of the classical aesthetic principle *kalokagathia*. Focusing primarily on physical exercise, he paid limited attention to mental development. However, immediately after reaching adulthood, Foglar discovered his desire to lead the younger generation systematically in their personal development.

The first decade of his educational activities was dedicated to his work as a scouts' group leader. Nonetheless, towards the end of this ten-year period, Foglar was already looking for opportunities to educate youth outside organised scouting. Besides short stories depicting the environment of the scout movement, he also started developing as a novelist for boys with stories mostly set outside the scouting environment. Foglar's books were successful, and he was able to leave behind his disliked occupation as a clerk, becoming an editor at the leading Czech publishing house Melantrich.

In 1937, Foglar appealed to children in *Mladý hlasatel* (Young Announcer), a commercial magazine for children established by Melantrich at his initiative, to **establish readers' clubs**. He urged magazine readers to associate in small, local special-interest groups, think of an attractive name for the group, find a club house, and perform their leisure activities, ideally useful for their personal development or benefiting their community environment. Despite the magazine publisher having certain doubts, hundreds of boys and girls responded to the appeal practically immediately. Foglar actively communicated with the clubs, advised or reprimanded them on their activities, and provided an opportunity to influence the contents of the magazine with a steeply growing print run.

Although Foglar presented this system of clubs as his own invention, examination of the wider context at the time reveals clear inspiration from many potential sources. He was familiar with various **sports** and **athletic clubs** and their club journals. He could also have been inspired to some extent by the **American system of school clubs** (such as *Key Club International*) and their club magazines, which was introduced as an experiment at several Czech schools at the beginning of the 1930s. In addition, a system of centrally coordinated community network of readers was popularised in the Czech lands from the end of the eighteenth century owing to the Czech National Revival. Even the term *club* denoting a publicly beneficial or community association was popular in Czechia on a long-term basis. Foglar observed in the scout movement how the system of scout crews worked (scout crews being micro teams comprising the scout groups). However, Foglar's readers' clubs were unique as he managed to pro-

mote this system as a part of a commercial leisure magazine for children and was even able to mentor individual clubs towards meaningful and publicly beneficial activities.

Certain speculations circulating from time to time in Anglo-Saxon countries question to what extent Foglar may have been influenced by the German tourist and wild-life movement *Wanderoogel*, which was organised around similar micro teams. There is no known evidence that Foglar was even aware of this movement. During the era of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938), the Czech and German cultures found shared interests with great difficulty. In addition, Foglar was unable to use his poor school German in practice. It is therefore necessary to look for the inspiration behind his unique system of clubs grouped around a methodically managed magazine in the Czech language environment.

Unfortunately, one of the most successful periods in Foglar's life coincided with an era of growing political turmoil in Europe. The writer first tasted success with his books when Nazis in neighbouring Germany were persecuting their opponents, arming themselves, expanded their army, and finding economic colonies in the international community. The beginning of the golden era of Foglar's readers' clubs and the occurrence of the writer's most successful comics series called *Rychlé šípy* (The Fast Arrows) with fictitious stories of a model club date back to the end of 1938. This was precisely the time when the original Czechoslovakia ceased to exist under the Munich Agreement signed by the western powers, and the Nazis annexed a large part of the Czech borderlands (the so-called Sudetenland).

The subsequent short period of the so-called Second Republic was affected by the general fear of the future, focus on national unification, and politicisation of existing non-conflict relaxation activities. This atmosphere also impacted the existing heterogeneous environment of local scout organisations, and most of them halted their activities. The four major organisations gathered together at the beginning of 1939 to establish the *Junák* (Young Hero) organisation relying on mutual compromise and allowing political engagement. However, the remaining territory of Czechia was seized by the Nazis in March 1939 and the **Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia** was established. The conditions under the Protectorate were comparable to those found in other occupied countries. The regime's ideological opponents and minority peoples were discriminated against or brutally persecuted by the Police or courts. Public life had to conform fully to the needs of the occupying power. Industry and the human potential of the local population was used for Germany's economic and wartime interests. Czechia became a de facto colony.

As the leadership of the *Junák* organisation avoided conflict with the authorities, certain major compromises were made. The organisation stopped using its traditional uniform with British colonial broad-brimmed hats. Some leaders started presenting the uniform Nazi organisation *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth) as the organisational model. *Junák's* new articles of association even stated that girls and boys of Jewish origin would be excluded from the groups. However, the occupant authorities still watched *Junák* with significant distrust and considered scouts to be a hidden source of political

dissent. This was partially due to the fact that during the years before the war, scout groups underwent public-defence training coordinated by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defence. At the beginning of July 1940, the occupying authorities organised a night-time attack without a sign of warning and literally **scattered many scout summer camps**. On 28 October 1940, the Junák organisation was officially abolished and its assets seized.

Foglar and his Dvojka scout group were also forced to start operating illegally. To continue in their activities in some form, many scout crews were transformed into readers' clubs of the *Mladý hlasatel* magazine. However, the *Mladý hlasatel* magazine **was officially banned** in May 1941. This was despite the clear profitability of the magazine, as well as the fact that each issue was exploited by Nazi propaganda with added political editorials, photographs of Nazi officials and articles praising the Hitlerjugend.

The ban of the popular magazine marked the end to one of the most successful stages in Foglar's life. At the same time, over 24 thousand readers' clubs suddenly found themselves in a vacuum. Foglar immediately started searching for a different medium around which the clubs could gather. First, he tried to continue his efforts with the *Rozhlas mladých* (Radio Youth) magazine, cooperating with this publication from the end of summer 1941. The first few months showed clearly that continuing in the tradition of *Mladý hlasatel* would be impossible. The radio magazine was established in 1934 as part of the state's support for promoting radio broadcasting to younger generations. The magazine was therefore part of the state's system supplementing tuition at schools from the very start. The educational programme *Klub zvědavých dětí* was created, and several similar activities were organised under the influence of the experimental school clubs from 1935. Broadcasting of Czech radio was brought under the control of the Nazis and collaborators after the Protectorate was established. Despite the passive resistance of many editors and technicians, the occupiers began to create a structure of radio programmes consistent with Nazi political ideology. In addition, the period when Foglar accepted the offer to lead the radio programme *Klub zvědavých dětí* unfortunately coincided with the temporary stay in the Protectorate of the infamous SS General Reinhard Heydrich. Under these circumstances, the last residues of liberal content disappeared from Czech radio broadcasting and Foglar was forced to change his original ambitions considerably. While he prepared the club page for the radio magazine, he was limited in any interaction with readers and listeners. He also had to be satisfied with his scripts only being used once a month, as other authors were preparing the programme's remaining scripts. Despite these difficult conditions, Foglar successfully kept up the serial story of a fictitious team of six children who met at the radio microphone once a month to discuss various news and interesting information. The unusual format of this programme gives us a glimpse of certain less known aspects of Foglar's personality in the materials created for *Klub zvědavých dětí*. However, Foglar was not given the opportunity to assert any significant initiatives in the programme and the programme was taken off air in summer 1943.

Besides Foglar's clear effort to avoid political topics, the scripts also show the occasional attempts of propaganda from the occupiers to include certain ideological topics

in the programme. It is astounding to observe how elegantly Foglar managed to remain apolitical in most of these cases. However, during the period when the programme was broadcast (September 1941 to June 1943), one significant change in the relationship of the occupying authorities to children and youth occurred which Foglar commented on in his script for *Klub zviadaých dětí*: In 1942, a central coordination body was established in the Protectorate to control all local, existing sports and tourist clubs for the youth. It was entitled *Kuratorium pro výchovu mládeže v Čechách a na Moravě* (Curatorium for the Education of Youth in Bohemia and Moravia). The purpose of Kuratorium was similar to that of the Hitlerjugend in Germany, *Hlinkova mládež* (Hlinka's Youth) in Slovakia, *Gioventù italiana del littorio* (GIL) in Italy, *NS Ungdomsfylking* in Norway, etc. – the afterschool activities of children and youth was now to be ideologically controlled from a central point to purposefully raise young people to support so-called Protectorate patriotism. This massive indoctrination was to be a tool for re-educating Czech youth to better meet Nazi economic and ideological needs.

Throughout Kuratorium's existence, the so-called Compulsory Service of the youth was the most visible activity of the central authority. Kuratorium entrusted the organisation of this service to the existing sports and tourist associations. The service took the form of two-hour meetings held every week, which were compulsory by law for all Czech children ten to eighteen years of age. As children attended this so-called spiritual education, the principles of Protectorate ideology involving a twisted interpretation of history proving German superiority and Czech inferiority were instilled in children. The second part of the meetings comprised drill exercises and athletic training to keep the youth in good physical condition. The process of "germanisation" was to raise young Czechs to be willing to serve the Greater German Reich, primarily in the form of physical labour. Kuratorium handed out large amounts of financing to train its Compulsory Service instructors, fund employee wages and print a host of ideological and instructional materials. A significant portion of its equipment, including gyms, playgrounds and sports equipment was obtained from officially banned sports clubs whose assets had been seized (the scouting organisation *Junák*, the national sports association *Sokol* and others). Positions within Kuratorium were formally given to Czech collaborators, but these individuals simply exercised the will of the appointed Nazi advisers from the Hitlerjugend.

Besides collaborators, Kuratorium also employed many Czechs assigned to their jobs by the Labour Office, and some of them even strived to secretly undermine the activities of the occupying authorities from the inside. While the communist historiography had the tendency to simplify the Czech youth's relationship to Kuratorium, describing it as an almost unified, sophisticated fight of Protectorate citizens against the occupying power, the opposite tendencies occur among some current researchers. Some papers present the Czech population as willing opportunists easily conformed by the propaganda published by Kuratorium happily marching towards the Greater German Reich. The actual mood among most of the population would have fluctuated somewhere between these two extremes.

The establishment of the youth magazine called *Zteč* (Assault) in autumn 1942 was the first tangible outcome of Kuratorium activities. The magazine targeted older youth and served pure propaganda. The *Správný kluk* (The Good Boy) magazine with a more entertaining concept was published for younger boys under fifteen years from the summer of 1943. Foglar saw this as a new opportunity. While he was probably forced to cooperate with *Zteč* and managed to end his cooperation after several months, he was interested in the *Správný kluk* project. The press department of Kuratorium happily used Foglar as a major draw card for new readers.

Foglar introduced a club page in the *Správný kluk* magazine and came up with a new **model club**—*Svorní gambusíni* (The Faithful Gambusinos). He made it clear to the magazine publisher at the start, however, that he did not intend to create any ideological programme for the club. His contribution stayed within the realm of conventional prompts to act fairly, maintain friendships and pass wildlife skill challenges. At first, there was no problem with this because interest in the magazine grew and Foglar did not refer to any aspects of the scout movement in any way. However, the seemingly calm conditions were disrupted by a critique from German advisers at the end of 1943, who saw the current activity of the Kuratorium as insufficient. A much stricter ideological concept was introduced even in the *Správný kluk* magazine from February or March 1944. Cooperation with Foglar was terminated immediately. While the magazine lost its most attractive aspect, the curators had no other choice, and this reflects well on Foglar.

However, the boys' clubs organised around Foglar's activities were subject to unification from the outside. The clubs were forced to apply a uniform ideological programme, which was literally identical to that of the Compulsory Service for Youth. The leadership of Kuratorium also drafted a plan for obtaining new instructors to mentor the youth in subsequent years. The best young boys who could prove that they had been properly germanised with flawless attendance at the Compulsory Service for Youth and perfect command of all the required physical training and spiritual re-education were to be recruited for responsible roles. Furthermore, they were to be active members of the *Správný kluk* clubs, as these remained optional, and participation in these club activities was seen as a sign of greater commitment. Boys suitable for the so-called *Vzorné roje* (Exemplary Swarms), elite youth and future instructors, were recruited from among these boys. The leadership of Kuratorium seriously worked with the vision that through its work, Czech youth would become eligible for a high level of living in the 1960s.

After Foglar's dismissal, the original line of charitable boys' clubs was therefore abandoned. At the same time, the lack of experience among the remaining editors of the *Správný kluk* magazine was quickly exposed as being unable to provide acceptable and methodical leadership to existing clubs. At the beginning of summer 1944, *Správný kluk* clubs numbered approximately four thousand, but ceased to grow. Communication between clubs and the editorial office was failing. The activity of clubs in the second half of 1944 and at the beginning of 1945 depended largely on the personal interests and

perseverance of individual boys. The activities continued in those districts where the local Kuratorium representatives took charge of the boys. It is surprising how easily these pubescents in certain smaller towns accepted the new programme and that parents did not prevent their sons from attending voluntary meetings with such boorish content. On the other hand, other families tried their utmost to avoid the Compulsory Service for Youth, although it was against the law. Nonetheless, Kuratorium did not manage to include all youth in its project due to a lack of suitable instructors, especially outside larger towns. It is estimated that at the time of its highest activity, around fifty percent of Czech boys and girls were involved in the Compulsory Service for Youth and approximately eight percent of boys may have been organised in the *Správný kluk* clubs.

Many former *Mladý hlasatel* clubs also registered as new *Správný kluk* clubs in 1943. However, Foglar was not able to repeat the initial great success of the scheme. This was partly due to a major part of former scout crews joining various sports associations between 1941 and 1943 and continuing scouting activities under their umbrella. They no longer needed the club institute. Many scouts joined the traditional Czech organisation called *Klub českých turistů* (Czech Tourist Club), with an organisational unit Dorost KČT (KČT Youth), nicknamed *KÁČATA* (Ducklings) based on the association's acronym. The operation under the umbrella of KČT (or other sports associations) was pure, necessary camouflage so that the groups could continue their activities despite the ban on scouting. With the establishment of Kuratorium, a new rule stipulated that existing associations would either be authorised to organise the Compulsory Service for Youth or they would not be permitted to organise any activities for the young.

Therefore, Foglar's Dvojka also joined Káčata and was registered at the same time as the *Správný kluk* club. Foglar's group is a good example of the everyday reality of life in the Protectorate. While the groups met the formal requirements, they continued to live their own lives. Foglar was among those group leaders who aimed to raise children apolitically. He was never active in politics himself and even less so during the dangerous years of occupation. He made sure that the Compulsory Service for Youth in his group was carried out in a friendly atmosphere rather than the militaristic style required by the official regulations. Neither did he introduce the compulsory *Heil Hitler* (Salvation through Hitler) greeting of the Kuratorium in his group.

Yet, even Foglar first **perceived the activities of the Kuratorium with a certain level of hope**. Information about the newly established institution presented in the daily press and radio gave the impression that Kuratorium could replace the abolished Junák and the Sokol sports associations. This is why he hoped that after years of semi-legal activities he would be able to operate without fear of being arrested. He may have yielded to the illusion partly because while working as an editor in 1939–1941, he was forced to accept that Nazi political propaganda would be a part of newspapers published for children during occupation. He saw this as the unavoidable evil. He may have lost some of his original, healthy immune response in such close and long-term contact with propagandist infection. Being cautious face to face with natural evil and the elegant lures of the Protectorate's Kuratorium could not have been easy.

However, Foglar's hopes were short-lived and he was cured as early as the beginning of summer 1943, when Kuratorium refused to permit the surprised Foglar to organise a summer camp. Similarly to the years 1941 and 1942, he had to abandon the idea of camping in tents yet again and seek alternative programmes and forms of accommodation. However, certain groups organised under Káčata became more courageous with the development of the war and gradual retreat of the German army. They camped out in nature without permits and more openly announced loyalty to the scout movement. Foglar disapproved of such tendencies, watching them with concern. Several incidents between the senior representative of Kuratorium and the local Káčata groups occurred especially in Prague during the spring and summer of 1944. Several dozen rebelling youth were gradually arrested by the Gestapo and brutally investigated, most being released later. It seems that the Gestapo operating in the Protectorate did not wish to provoke its leadership in Germany and tried to hush any indication of illegal youth organisations operating in the Protectorate despite the repression to date. Justified concerns of incompetent Nazis were being raised from the peaceful rear in the Protectorate to the dangerous front lines. However, the Gestapo made an exception in the case of the 19-year-old Vladimír Vojtěchovský, a Kuratorium officer, who was executed in Prague in November 1944 as exemplary punishment for allegedly approving of assassinating Hitler.

The **national athletic competitions** – *Den české mládeže* (Czech Youth Day) in 1943 and *Týden mládeže* (Youth Week) in 1944 became the prime events organised by Kuratorium. Their aim was to demonstrate the concord of the Czech youth with the ideas of the Greater German Reich. The youth trained at well-established sports associations and presented magnificent sporting achievements before several thousand spectators. To this day, the footage and images taken during these events may evoke a similar impression to the well-known propaganda piece *Olympia* shot during the Berlin Olympic Games in 1936. While the technical standards and film-making skills shown in the Prague footage falls short of the qualities of the German film by director Leni Riefenstahl, the sophisticated content of the footage may have had a similar propagandistic impact. The great sporting achievements easily obscure the negative aspects of totalitarian ideology for many of the spectators.

However, sporting events organised by Kuratorium were held at a time when the Nazi empire was past its peak. This is why Kuratorium did not have enough time to better prepare at least a part of the Czech youth ideologically. The institution ceased to exist along with the Protectorate in May 1945.

During the final year of occupation, Jaroslav Foglar was almost continuously pre-occupied with extreme worry of being totally deployed in the wartime economy or arrested by the Gestapo. No significant risk of this happening existed because he was extremely cautious. By the end of the war, even he was prepared to use the Nazi salute if necessary. It is all the more admirable that he continued to lead his group throughout occupation and tried to provide a meaningful, apolitical educational programme to the boys within the group.

After the republic was liberated, he returned to his editorial and writing activities aimed at experiential education of the youth. He also started organising his readers' clubs, with more than twelve thousand clubs registering this time. However, his nonconformist educational activities would soon start colliding with the Junák organisation as well as the new political dictatorship with the seizure of power by the Communists in 1948. Foglar was not investigated for his short-term cooperation with the Kuratorium magazines *Zteč* and *Správný kluk* after the war because his apolitical stance and the difficulties he experienced during the occupation were well known. He never abased himself to writing politically biased or ideologically focused articles.

In later years, Foglar repeatedly recalled the end of *Mladý hlasatel* and one night during the time of the occupation when he broke into the seized clubhouse of his Dvojka to take the group's chronicles and some of their camping equipment in secret. However, no mention was made of his memories of *Rozhlas mladých*, *Správný kluk* and Kuratorium. This was undoubtedly at least partly the era of the Protectorate not being a particularly happy and fruitful intermezzo between the two great successes he enjoyed before and after the war. The difficult and rather unromantic reality of the Protectorate era may be another reason for his scarce memories. In addition, this time may not have been easily comprehended by younger generations. Foglar tried to look back at the events during the time of the Protectorate to some extent in his autobiographical novel *Strach nad Bobří řekou* (Fear over The Beaver River), but this piece was received with clear hesitation even by his die-hard fans.

The complexity of the Protectorate era is further reflected in Foglar's fifteen scripts written for the radio programme *Klub zvědavých dětí* not having been published to date and the public not even knowing of their existence. Although certain passages are rather banal, even these scripts contain many inspiring elements. Most importantly, they are important documents reflecting the time. This is despite Foglar being a Czech writer whose "entire" collected works have been published. Foglar's novels, series of short stories of various quality, some radio programmes and selected records of the scout group chronicles were gradually published as part of this series. It is an interesting paradox that this period of Foglar's life has so far escaped the attention of researchers and publishers alike, yet it is centred around a series of Foglar's programmes motivating children to be inquisitive, think without bias and examine context.