

## Trojan's new Toman film disrupts our pathetic view of history and shows the naked truth about 1945 to 1948



Jiří Macháček as Zdeněk/Zoltán Toman | Photo by: Youtube.com

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When you go to see a Czech period film, you tend to expect kind-hearted humour, a steady supply of emotions and a certain degree of self-gratification and national pride.

Ondřej Trojan's new Toman could not be different. There is not a single ounce of nationalism, not a smudge of kind-hearted-humour, not a trace of kitsch. Instead, the crude reality of Czechoslovakia's post-war years. Hold the press, a Czech production filmed a feature devoid of our customary national lies. This makes watching it part shock and part absurd experience, but is all the more important and perhaps even therapeutic.

It is the first realistic film about the critical years between 1945 and 1948 ever filmed here. We tend to see these years as a relatively democratic period and 1948 as the first negative

event brought upon us by the communists. This is the norm in historical discourse, but could not be more wrong.

Trojan's Toman is a groundbreaking effort, because even the spring of 1945 is portrayed as a seamless transition from one brutal evil to another. And that is exactly what happened. While period newsreels show ecstatic crowds and euphoric speeches, in the background, packs of newly-arrived criminals quietly strangle everything resembling a civilised society, justice and freedom.

The main and dominant pack consisted of the ever-present NKVD, Stalin's political police, along with cynical Soviet 'advisers', who replaced the Nazis as our rulers. They were the people deciding on our fate. We only see them briefly in the film, but there is no doubt they had the decisive role in post-war Czechoslovakia.

Subordinate to these new Soviet masters, the fierce, cynical, permanently drunk, part primitive and part fanatic, but above all completely immoral mob of Czech and Slovak Communists are seen carefully dismantling all resemblance of natural and normal discourse and all remaining fragments of pre-war democracy.

Zdeněk/Zoltán Toman is a crafty Jewish-born communist, who uses his Party contacts to become the head of military intelligence. He is not above a touch of compassion with the badly suffering Central-European Jews, however, when he allows safe passage of thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing pogroms in Poland, he is not doing so out of sympathy, but to collect a fat fee for every single one of them to give some of it to the Communist Party's bottomless campaign coffers. He is trading in humans the same way he trades jewellery, gold and precious stones. He bankrolls the Communist Party's election campaign and supplies both communist and non-communist Government officials with luxury goods to appease them. He takes a hefty commission for himself. His downfall is not an act of justice, as was not his rapid rise to power. He is taken down by a pack of criminals he himself helped to take over the country.

The moral of Trojan's film works on several levels. On the psychological level, the same person behaves in a decent way at one time and becomes an inhuman and amoral thug at other times. Given our current social and political discourse, the film's most important talking point is the total absence of the conventional rose-tinted spectacles view of our history, so prevalent in the current Centenary celebrations. It is very liberating among all the newly-found pathos. After being liberated from the Nazi tyranny, Czechoslovakia immediately found itself taken over by another pure evil, brought on by Stalinist monsters, most of them Czechs and Slovaks. Toman got mixed up in their dealings and became a monster himself.

Every person who deals with monstrosities becomes a monster in the process. And the revolutionary logic makes sure they fall victim to the monstrosities in the end. What is really sad is the fact that the individual immorality of the accomplice to the general monstrosity results in innocent and vulnerable people from his family suffering the worst. While Toman eventually ended up receiving an Israeli honorary degree for helping Jewish refugees, his wife took her life and their son was given for adoption.

Innocent people suffered in the hand of the emerging power more than its partner in crime. As did the entire country and all of its people. However, these people are far from innocent, as the 1946 election results and the enthusiasm for Communism among the general population

attests. Apart from being an accessory, our nation became the victim as well. The concurrence of being a perpetrator and a victim is a characteristic trait of our national history, as illustrated by the fall from grace and disappearance of the Communist Party's General Secretary Rudolf Slánský, which is only hinted at toward the end of the film.

After watching Toman, one cannot help but wonder if there is reason for celebrating Czechoslovakia's Centenary. The Czech Republic seems worthier of celebrations, since it has always stood, at least so far, for returning to civilised Europe. Czechoslovakia's 100 years include some dark and very long shadows.

**Translated from** <http://forum24.cz/trojanuv-toman-narusuje-dojeti-z-dejin-ukazuje-drsnou-pravdu-o-letech-1945-48/?fbclid=IwAR05PAN-NaU3yR0QHQwM1bjLOcIdxh6EyYhSZzwYasnwd9zN76UxZMsDG2A>

