



SLOVAK
NATIONAL
MUSEUM

The Star of Clementis

Focused
on Object

Vojtech Hami



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Slovak National Museum
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Fig. 1. Gold Star of the Hero of CSSR.
SNM – Museum of History (S. Okkel)



Foreword

The Slovak National Museum – Museum of History curates over two hundred thousand collection items. Many of them are accessible to the public only once every few years, usually during a thematic exhibition. One such treasure is the Gold Star of the Hero of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

The publication you are holding in your hands aims to introduce you to the gem of Czechoslovak phaleristics. The honorary title associated with the decoration was established during the period of the Czechoslovak Republic (CSR), but was awarded only since 1965 after the Constitution was revised and the name of the state changed into the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR). That is why we use the term Gold Star of the Hero of CSSR throughout the publication.

The insignia of the highest honorary title of communist Czechoslovakia from 1955 to 1990 exists in only forty-three copies. It is therefore rightfully among the rarest objects in the phaleristics collection of the SNM – Museum of History. The museum acquired it relatively recently, in 1999, from the abolished Institute of History of the Communist Party of Slovakia.

The Gold Star with register number 3 was awarded *in memoriam* to the Slovak communist politician, lawyer and writer Vladimír Clementis. It epitomises the impressive and at the same time tragic story of its holder. The destiny of Clementis was very dynamic. His political orientation already began to take shape at a young age – he was involved in left-wing student circles and presented his political views in the *DAV* journal. In the interwar period, he joined the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) and earned a living as a lawyer in the civilian profession. On the eve of World War II, he sharply criticised the policy of the Soviet Union regarding the issue of the Soviet-German non-aggression pact of August 1939, for which he was later expelled from the Party. He participated in the anti-fascist resistance abroad and after returning to the liberated homeland, he held high positions in the state apparatus. After the forced self-criticism on the issue of Soviet politics, he was re-admitted to the Communist Party. As the Minister of Foreign Affairs, he defended the interests of Czechoslovakia on the in-

ternational stage, committed himself to the issue of population exchange between Hungary and Czechoslovakia and strived to ensure its legal and logistic support. Despite all his activities, however, he fell from grace, and during the purges in the Communist Party, he was sentenced to death in a fabricated political trial.



Fig. 2. Vladimír Clementis speaking at the All-Slavic Day on 5 July 1945.
SNM – Museum of History, Czechoslovak News Agency Stock Photo

The Gold Star of the Hero of CSSR is a symbol of the propaganda of the socialist establishment in Czechoslovakia. It is a reflection of the subordination of the state to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) as a true analogue of the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. We can rightfully call it a work of art, albeit marked by socialist symbolism. It bears the unquestionable imprint of its author, Otakar Španiel – the best medal maker of his time.

In our book, in addition to the honorary title itself, we will also focus on the related events. It is the story of Vladimír Clementis, but also partly of other persons who were awarded the honorary title of Hero of CSSR.