

# AN OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF BAŤA AND ZLÍN IN DATES

Zdeněk Pokluda

## 1876–1905

**1876** Tomáš Baťa is born in Zlín into a family of local craftsmen, which had long been settled in the town. One of Tomáš's direct forbears, Lukáš Baťa, is recorded as being a shoemaker here in 1667.

**1894** The siblings Antonín, Anna, and Tomáš Baťa establish a shoemaking business in Zlín, at the time a small rural town. In 1890, the population is 2,834.

**1899** Tomáš Baťa returns from a trip to Frankfurt am Main, Germany, with simple machines to improve production.

**1900** Tomáš Baťa heads the family company registered as 'T. A. Baťa', which employs about 120 people. Manufacturing is moved into a new factory building built next to the Zlín railway station. Over the next decades, large factory grounds develop near this building. From 1900 to 1907, Baťa's colleague František Štěpánek takes part in the organization of the company.

**1903** Apart from shoemaking, the Baťa company establishes a shop for metal-working, which constitutes the basis for its future machine manufacturing. The brothers Tomáš and Antonín Baťa, co-owners of the family firm, take part in a meeting at which the Zlín organization of the Social Democrat trade unions is founded.

**1905** Tomáš Baťa and three of his employees spend three months in the United States, working and gaining experience in shoe factories in Lynn, Massachusetts. Baťa then spends time in shoe factories in Leeds and Leicester, England, and in Pirmasens, Germany.

**1906** Inspired by his American experience, Baťa builds a modern three-storey factory of red brick. The business is crippled by a strike lasting several months. Baťa refuses to link economic and political demands, and bans trade unions at the company.

**1908** After the death of his elder brother, Tomáš Baťa becomes the sole owner of the company.

**1910** By now, six shoe factories are in operation in Zlín, four of which have been established in the years 1906-10. The city, with a population of 3,557, becomes a centre of industry. The largest business is the Baťa factory. A kitchen and dining hall for employees are built on its premises.

**1912** Tomáš Baťa builds a family home based on plans by the Prague architect Jan Kotěra (1871-1923). Next to the factory, flats in little plastered houses with mansard roofs are beginning to be built, intended for Baťa employees. By 1944, the company will have built 2,210 small residential houses in Zlín.

**1913** Baťa's shoes are now being sold abroad, beginning with the German market.

**1914-8** Together with the other Zlín shoe factories, the Baťa factory supplies footwear to the Austro-Hungarian army. It becomes the largest supplier, production increases, and the number of employees grows from about 400 in 1914 to 4,006 in 1918. After the war, the number of employees decreases, to 2,056 in 1920 and to 1,802 in 1923.

**1915** The company business expands to include a tannery.

**1917** The company business now includes an electric power plant and farms for the supply of food. A network of Baťa shoe shops is established in Austria-Hungary. The Baťa branch factory in Pardubice begins manufacturing shoes, remaining in operation until 1923. To provide employees with food, a grocery store is established in the Baťa factory in Zlín.

**1918** Manufacturing operations expand to include a brickworks and sawmill. The company buys a forest to ensure a supply of wood. The company starts to publish the factory newspaper *Sdělení* (Message), printed in its own printing house. A kindergarten and factory library are set up for employees, and a five-storey factory building is completed on the factory grounds. In July 1918, Kotěra presents a land-use plan for building in areas south of the factory, comprising a residential quarter as well as a commercial and social centre. The construction of a residential garden city, called Letná, begins according to this plan towards the end of the year. The journalist František Obrtel (1873-1962) publishes an essay about the Baťa factory entitled 'Amerika ve Zlíně [America in Zlín]' (in Obrtel, F. 1919. *Pojďte s námi: hrst kulturních črt*. Prague: Zemědělské knihkupectví A. Neubert, 194-208).

**1919** The network of Baťa shops expands abroad. Tomáš Baťa travels to the United States, paying visits to the Ford Motor Company and the Endicott-Johnson Shoe Company. A Baťa shoe factory is established in Lynn, Massachusetts, operating until 1921. In the Zlín factory, educational courses oriented towards technical fields and languages as well as self-education are held for employees.

**1921-4** In an attempt to penetrate foreign markets, the Baťa company sets up subsidiaries in the Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Poland, Denmark, and England.

**1921** The Baťa factory is opened up to visiting excursions. A factory orchestra is established and begins to perform. The company ensures its employees free admission to the cinema.

**1922** As effective demand is continuously falling and stocks of unsold goods are accumulating in warehouses, Tomáš Baťa cuts the prices of his shoes by half. With this huge price reduction he astonishes the public, attracts customers, and sells out stocks. With new investment he can resume production, which increases in the following years.

**1922-7** The Baťa economic miracle: with low prices, Baťa attracts customers and gains control of the footwear market in Czechoslovakia. The company increases production largely by introducing state-of-the-art technology, rationalizing labour along the lines of Henry Ford and F.W. Taylor, and motivating employees with self-management of workshops and profit-and-loss sharing. In 1923, Baťa announces that he wants to make the factory in Zlín comparable to American businesses. The Zlín factory is expanded with the addition of new buildings. The number of employees rises from 1,802 in 1923 to 8,300 in 1927. Production increases from 1,750,000 pairs of shoes in 1922 to 15,200,000 pairs in 1927. Baťa supplies the Czechoslovak market with a full third of all footwear bought in 1927, and controls 55 per cent of the Czechoslovak export of shoes in 1928.

**1923** The company business is expanded to include shoe-repair shops. A rubber factory for the manufacture of heels is added to the manufacturing facilities. Two new factory buildings are erected.

**1923-32** In the local elections of September 1923, a group of Baťa employees wins, and Tomáš Baťa becomes mayor of Zlín, holding office until 1932. The population of the town grows from 5,300 in 1923 to 26,400 in 1932.

**1924** The company establishes a building department for construction work in the factory and town, as well as a research department. By becoming its majority shareholder, Baťa takes over the Otrokovice-Zlín-Vizovice railway and plans to expand transportation operations. By purchasing aircraft and by building an airport on the eastern outskirts of Zlín, the Baťa company sets up its own air-transport division. The manufacture of shoes is improved by rationalization with assembly-line manufacturing using conveyor belts. The company sets

up a health department and social-welfare department, as well as the Baťa Sports Club. Tomáš Baťa is the first to organize public May Day celebrations in Zlín with a parade through the city; these are then held annually. Three new factories are built. For the expansion of the factory grounds, the architect František Lydie Gahura (1891-1958) presents plans called a 'factory in gardens'. By 1933, 52 standard factory buildings will have been erected. As mayor, Baťa opens a new school building in the Zlínské Paseky district based on plans by Gahura, thereby initiating the construction of modern school buildings in Zlín of which twelve will have been erected by 1941.

**1925** The company establishes a planning department for construction projects. A factory school of shoemaking is established, called the Baťa School of Work (Baťova škola práce). Baťa proposes carrying out a reform of public education in Zlín, to bring instruction more in line with actual practice and to motivate teachers with financial rewards.

**1925-32** With the building of a dormitory for girls (Dívčí domov, 1926), the commercial and social centre of Zlín, Labour Square (náměstí Práce), develops. Construction work is gradually completed here, with the dormitory and Market Hall (Tržnice) beginning operations in 1926. Later, the ten-storey Department Store (Obchodní dům, designed by Gahura, 1931), the Grand Cinema (Velké kino, by Gahura, 1932), and the twelve-storey hotel called the Community House (Společenský dům, designed by Miroslav Lorenc and Vladimír Karfík, 1932) followed.

**1926** Business expands to include the manufacture of rubber footwear, as well as a publishing house, called Tisk (Print), for periodicals and books. Blind people are employed in great numbers at the company. The Baťa Sports Club stadium is built near the factory. Work on little red-brick houses, typical for Baťa architecture, begins at Letná for employee flats. A plan is presented for a Baťa skyscraper in Brno, which is never built. Baťa publicly presents his proposal to turn Zlín into a garden city of 50,000 people.

**1927** The company expands its operations to include film production – newsreels, reporting, documentaries, commercials, and short educational films. A cinema is opened. The manufacture of shoes develops to its highest level with the introduction of new technology and rationalization with assembly-line production using conveyor belts. The Baťa Hospital is built in two stages, 1927-36 and 1939-41. Gahura presents a land-use plan for Zlín with a garden city as envisaged by himself and Tomáš Baťa.

**1927-35** With the beginning of the construction of the Masaryk Schools in 1927, the Zlín school district begins to be built. Five school buildings will gradually be erected according to plans by Gahura, Lorenc, and Karfík, as well as a swimming pool (1931), auditorium (1932), and gymnasium (1934).

**1928** Manufacture in chemical plants begins, for example, shoe polish. The company sets up the Baťa Relief Fund, offering health-care and social support. The first dormitory for young boys is established. Other, similar buildings then follow: from 1928 to 1937, a large complex of girls' and boys' dormitories are built on each side of a long strip of green public parkland above the city. A worker from the Baťa factory, Ladislav Vácha (1899-1943), wins a gold medal and two silver medals in men's gymnastics at the Amsterdam Olympics. Tomáš Baťa puts forth a proposal for improving rail transport in central and eastern Moravia.

**1929** Baťa shops begin to offer customers pedicures. Instruction is offered at Zlín schools based on a reformed curriculum entailing experimental education.

**1929-32** The company expands operations abroad, opening 666 new Baťa shops in 37 countries and setting up subsidiaries in 23 countries including Leader A.G. in St Moritz, Switzerland, which will later play a key role in organizing Baťa enterprises worldwide.

**1930** Business is expanded to include the Atlas Insurance Company and the manufacture of bicycle tyres. Construction work begins on Baťa factories in Otrokovice, Moravia. A five-day working week is introduced at the company. A Baťa shoe museum is opened. Tomáš Baťa presents his proposal for the modification of water management on the Morava River.

**1930-9** The company management and the City of Zlín provide funding to publish the professional and educational periodicals *Tvořivá škola* (Creative Schooling, 1930), *Zpravodaj prodavačů* (Shop Assistants' Bulletin, 1931), *Obuv-Kůže-Guma* (Footwear, Leather, Rubber, 1933), *Výběr/Weltblick/Izbor* (Digest, 1934), *Průkopník úspěšného podnikání* (A Pioneer of Successful Business, 1935), *Objektiv* (Lens, 1936), *Aranžér Baťa* (The Baťa Window Dresser, 1938), and *Technický rádce* (Technical Adviser, 1939).

**1931** The business is expanded to include the manufacture of flooring, toys, car tyres, socks, and stockings. A gasworks is established. The company begins to operate its own lorry transport. Baťa factories are established in Třebíč and Krasice, Moravia, and in Velké Bošany and Nové Zámky, Slovakia. Gahura presents a new land-use plan for the city of Zlín, now with a population of 100,000. Tomáš Baťa presents his proposal for the economic and administrative organization of the Zlín region and central Moravia to the Czechoslovak prime minister. In 1931, the Baťa company manufactures 35,124,000 pairs of shoes, of which 13,655,000 pairs are rubber-soled footwear. The Zlín operation controls almost three-quarters of the Czechoslovak footwear exports. In Czechoslovakia, the company employs 29,500 people in manufacturing and sales. According to the accounts for 1931, the assets of the Zlín company amount to 920 million Czechoslovak crowns, with the Baťa companies abroad representing further assets. In May 1931, Tomáš Baťa turns the firm into a joint-stock company, with capital of 175,400,000 crowns in late 1931.

**1931-4** In order to survive the Great Depression, the company establishes factories abroad, together with housing estates for employees in the style of Zlín architecture. It also publishes company periodicals for its employees: in 1931, *Bata-Bericht* (Bata Report, in Ottmuth, Germany); in 1932, *Borovo* (in Borovo, Yugoslavia), *Echo Chelmka* (Chelmek Echo, Chelmek, Poland), *Anzeiger* (Gazette, Möhlin, Switzerland), and *Bataville* (in Hellocourt, France). Also in 1932, business begins in Konagar/Batanagar, India, and the periodical *Batanagar News* is launched. In 1933, *Bata Record* (East Tilbury, England) is launched, as well as a publication in Beirut, Syria, while 1934 saw the launch of *Bata Koerier* (Bata Courier, Best, the Netherlands) and a publication in Bagdad, Iraq.

**1932** Business is expanded to include maritime transport and the mining of lignite. Courses in basic and continuing education are provided at the newly established Tomáš Baťa Public College (Vyšší lidová škola Tomáše Bati). After the death of Tomáš Baťa on 12 July 1932, a group led by Jan A. Baťa with directors Dominik Čipera and Hugo Vavrečka, take over the management of the company. Čipera is elected mayor of Zlín that year, and remains in office until 1945.

**1932-7** The company supports higher levels of secondary schools: a business academy (1937) and a technical school (1937), which follow on from basic courses in economics (1930) and engineering (1933).

**1933-8** On a hill above Zlín, the glass Tomáš Baťa Memorial (Památník Tomáše Bati) is built according to plans by Gahura in 1933. This is soon joined by the two large buildings of the Study Institute (Studijní ústav), designed by Gahura in 1936 and 1938, and then the Tomášov College in 1938. This group of buildings serves cultural and educational functions.

**1934** Business expands with the production of aircraft in Otrokovice, near Zlín. A 40-hour working week is introduced at the company. Gahura presents a land-use plan for the Zlín-Otrokovice area.

**1934-40** The Baťa company builds a 50 km canal for the transport of coal (1934-8) and the Vizovice-Horní Lideč railway line. The work, begun in 1934, is stopped in 1939. Čipera, as mayor of Zlín, announces plans in 1936 to build a motorway between Moravia and Slovakia along the Brno-Zlín-Žilina route. From 1935, Vavrečka promotes the aim of building a motorway across Czechoslovakia from Cheb in the west to the eastern frontier. Čipera, as minister of public works, manages in 1939 to get approval for the construction of the Bohemian-Moravian motorway, and work begins without delay: a section across the Chřiby mountain range in January 1939 and the Prague-Jihlava segment in May 1939. Work is halted in 1940.

**1935** The Baťa business expands to include the production of synthetic fibre in Batizovce and gas masks in Napajedla. The Study Institute is established in Zlín to develop higher levels of education and research. At the invitation of

Gahura and Čipera, Le Corbusier visits Zlín to sit on the jury of the Baťa architectural competition to design new flats for Baťa employees. The towns of Zlín, Otrokovice, and Napajedla, interconnected economically by Baťa businesses, form an extensive industrial agglomeration.

**1936** The first Zlín Salon is held, establishing this annual art exhibition. A competition is held for the Baťa Prize for Literature.

**1937** Baťa factories are established in the Dutch East Indies (Batavia) and British Malaya (Singapore). A competition for the Baťa Prize for Journalism is held in Zlín.

**1938** Baťa factories are established in the Slovak town of Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš and in Egypt. The Baťa company employs 65,000 people (42,000 in Czechoslovakia and 23,000 abroad). The Tomášov College for educating top managers is opened in Zlín. The population of Zlín is 36,200. Two Baťa directors are appointed ministers in the Czechoslovak government: Vavrečka, minister without portfolio, in 1938, and Čipera, minister of public works, in 1938-9, a post he continues to hold in the government of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia until 1942.

**1935–1939** Baťa factories are built in Batovany (Slovakia), Zruč nad Sázavou and Sezimovo Ústí (Bohemia), Batawa (Ontario, Canada), and Belcamp (Maryland, USA). The company's School of Arts is established in Zlín, offering courses in several of the fine arts. The administrative building called the skyscraper or Building No 21 (designed by Karfík) is completed in Zlín. In March, Hitler's army occupies Bohemia and Moravia. Shortly before the invasion, Tomáš Baťa Jr goes into exile, settling in Canada. In the summer, Jan A. Baťa emigrates to the United States.

**1939-45** Baťa factories are opened in Belgium (Tubize), Hungary (Martfű), Bulgaria (Ihtiman), Italy (Ferrara), and other countries, including Chile, Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, Kenya, and Southern Rhodesia. At the Zlín Salon of 1940, a model of a machine by sculptor and industrial designer Vincenc Makovský (1900-66) (see Scholtz, this volume) is shown. The Film Harvest (Filmové žně) festival is held in Zlín in 1940 and 1941, showing new Czech work in film. In 1941, the Baťa management introduces a plan to establish post-secondary education in Zlín in shoemaking technology. The Zlín management of the company (Čipera, Vavrečka, and Marie Baťová – the late Tomáš Baťa's widow) clandestinely provide support to the resistance. From Canada, Tomáš Baťa Jr works with the Czechoslovak government in exile in London. A total of 213 Baťa employees fight with the Allied forces in Europe, Africa, and Asia. During his stay in the United States, Jan A. Baťa becomes involved in the 1940 presidential election campaign and after Roosevelt's victory, he is denied permission to extend his stay. In 1941, he is forced to leave the country and settles in Brazil. He is also entered on the British (1940) and American (1941) blacklists as a collaborator whose enterprise works for the Germans. He finds himself

in isolation and loses the ability to influence the management of the Baťa enterprises. In the final years of the war, Tomáš Baťa Jr attempts to maintain control of them from Canada. The Canadian and Brazilian branches of the family becomes more distant from one another during the war.

- 1945** All the business enterprises of the Baťa company in Czechoslovakia are nationalized after the war. The management of the factories and shops that remain Baťa property in other countries is assumed by Tomáš Baťa Jr in August 1945. Bata Development Limited is established, with head offices in London. It will become the core of the Baťa organization in the West.
- 1946** With funds provided from the nationalized Baťa factories, a theatre and symphony orchestra are established in Zlín. In the West, the Baťa organization managed by Tomáš Baťa Jr owns 38 factories and 2,168 shops. It employs 34,000 people, and manufactures 34 million pairs of shoes annually.
- 1947** Under the influence of Communist agitation against capitalism and the Baťa system, a politically-influenced trial is held in Prague in spring 1947 in which Jan A. Baťa, now a Brazilian citizen, is sentenced *in absentia* to prison and to the confiscation of his property. Tomáš Baťa Jr later manages to get this unjust verdict invalidated in 2007. Jan A. Baťa remains in Brazil until his death in 1965, becoming involved in agrarian colonization and the establishment of towns (Batatuba, Batayporã and others). In a series of family court disputes (1947-62), Jan A. Baťa's claims do not prevail, thereby consolidating Tomáš Baťa Jr's position as head of the Baťa organization in the West.
- 1947-58** Construction of flats and public buildings in Zlín is carried out according to plans by former Baťa architects Karfík, Jiří Voženílek, and Miroslav Drofa. In their appearance and design, these buildings develop the ideas of the Baťa 'Zlín architecture'.
- 1948-9** After taking power in February 1948, the Communist government led by Klement Gottwald, as part of its fight against capitalism, seeks to get rid of everything that has been connected with Tomáš Baťa and the Baťa company. The Tomáš Baťa Memorial in Zlín is renamed the House of Arts (Dům umění, 1948), the Baťa industrial complex is renamed Svit and the city of Zlín is renamed Gottwaldov, both in 1949. In a politically-influenced trial in 1948, Čipera and Vavrečka are sentenced to prison and confiscation of property.
- 1950-3** In carrying out the aims of the centrally-planned Socialist economy, the Zlín industrial operations are divided up into separate enterprises according to production area: Svit (footwear) and Závody přesného strojírenství (Precision Machine-Tool Works, machinery) in 1950, Stavosvit/Průmyslové stavby (Svit Industrial Construction) in 1952, and Rudý říjen (Red October, rubber manufacturing) in 1953.
- 1959-60** Post-secondary education begins in Zlín in 1959 with design (at a branch of

1939-1959

the Academy of Arts, Architecture, and Design, Prague), and in 1960 with engineering (linked with local industry at a branch of the Slovak Polytechnic, Bratislava).

**1962** In the West, the Baťa company expands its shoe manufacturing business, now operating in 79 countries around the world. Its head offices in London oversee a decentralized system of 75 enterprises, including 4,100 shops and 66 factories manufacturing 175 million pairs of shoes annually.

**1963-80** The flats being built in Zlín are reminiscent of the original Baťa 'Zlín architecture': the apartment building in the Zálešná district of Zlín (designed by Drofa, 1963) and the first stage of the Jižní svahy (Southern Slopes) housing estate (designed by Šebestián Zelina, 1972-80).

**1964** The Baťa head offices move from London to Toronto.

**1968** During the attempted reform of the Communist regime from within, led by Alexander Dubček, a group of concerned citizens demand that Gottwaldov should be called Zlín again. Like the rest of the reform attempt, this comes to naught following the Soviet-led military intervention in late August 1968.

**1969** The Faculty of Technology is established in Zlín, further developing instruction in technological fields begun in 1960.

**1975** The Baťa organization led by Tomáš Baťa Jr is now operating in 89 countries around the world. It owns 98 companies, 90 factories, and 5,000 shops, employing 90,000 people, and manufacturing 250 million pairs of shoes a year.

**1989** Tomáš Baťa Jr visits Zlín on 16 December, during the Velvet Revolution led by Václav Havel, which brings about the end of the Communist regime. It is the first time Baťa has returned to his native country since going into exile fifty years before.

**1990** The city is once again officially called Zlín.

**1991** The Baťa organization establishes the Baťa Československo company in Zlín, with a shoe factory in the village of Dolní Němčí, Moravia, and with 47 shops throughout the country.

**1993** The Svit shoe factory, Zlín, is privatized. In the industrial park, other enterprises once belonging to Baťa are also privatized, for example, the machine-tool works Závody přesného strojírenství and the Mitas tyre company.

**1994-5** When designing the School of Nursing with its attached home for the elderly and the physically disabled (1994-5) and the Employment Office (Úřad práce, 1995), the architects, Ivan Bergmann and Jiří Gebrian respectively, implement certain ideas of the Baťa architecture of interwar Zlín.

1959–1995

- 2001** Tomáš Baťa University is founded in Zlín, following on from the Faculty of Technology and other faculties.
- 2002** The Svit shoe factory, Zlín, lays off its employees and shuts down completely. Footwear continues to be manufactured on the Zlín factory grounds by two smaller companies, Novesta (1992) and Moleda (2002).
- 2003-4** The Baťa skyscraper in Zlín is renovated, and becomes the headquarters of the Zlín Regional Government.
- 2008** Tomáš Baťa Jr dies at age 93. The company has been headed by his son, Thomas George Bata (b. 1948), since 2002. Part of the organization is Baťa, a.s., with head offices in Zlín. It manages 93 shops in the Czech Republic, 25 in Slovakia, 43 in Poland, and a factory in the village of Dolní Němčí, Moravia.
- 2009** The evaluation of an architectural competition by the Zlín Regional Council in September 2009 has opened the doors to the renovation of Building Nos 14-15 in the Zlín factory grounds for use by cultural institutions of the Zlín Region (library, museum, gallery).

# 2001–2009