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The Historical Beat of Europe's Heart

During the post-medieval era, an allegorical illustration of the noble "Maiden of Europe" spread across the Old Continent. The organs and jewels of this maiden represented individual European states. The Czech kingdom - Bohemia - enclosed within its bordering mountain ranges, appears here as the heart of the whole and yet in conflict with this turbulent hemisphere. It appears as the organ which itself provides for the existence of the whole European organism with its beat, but yet which is at the mercy of the others; the organ which both defends the whole and suffers the invasions of the better adapted organs. What in fact was the role of the Czechs and the territory which has been associated with them over the past one and a half millennia, where the Slavs settled following the departure of the Celts and Germans for lands further west?

From the very beginning, the historical beat of the heart of Europe was determined by two states: Bohemia and Moravia. It was in fact Moravia which became the center of the first important central European Slavic state in the ninth century; a state known as Great Moravia. It was in this state that two fundamental spheres of civilization, i.e. eastern and western Christianity met and it was here that political and religious foundations were laid on which the Czech state would be built, and which would also serve as the foundations of the Polish and Hungarian states. However, in the tenth century, the crystallizing core of Czech statehood shifted to the west and became permanently associated with its capital city of Prague. On the eastern border of the Holy Roman Empire, a distinctive state was developing. The medieval pinnacle of this state was the reign of the emperor and Czech king, Charles IV (1346-1378). In spite of the fact that the Crown of the Czech Kingdom, an association of five countries, headed by Bohemia and Moravia, did not engage in aggressive wars, it was nonetheless able to maintain a firm place among the leading powers of Europe. Thanks to the university in Prague, which was the first north of the Alps and east of Paris, established in 1348, there was a strong influence on European education emanating from this kingdom.

It was also from this university in the fifteenth century, that the impulse for Christian reform associated with John Huss and his followers - the Hussites - emanated. This movement resulted in a struggle which was to drain the Czech lands for generations to come. It, however, also became the basis for the ideas which the Swiss and German Reformation successfully followed and from which the Czech king George of Poděbrady developed his peace projects between 1462 and 1464, making George one of the intellectual forefathers of the modern United Nations. As a part of the process of integration which was taking place in central Europe during the post-medieval era, the Czech lands entered into a union with the Habsburg Monarchy

in 1526. The Czech nation would share a common fate with this monarchy through to the end of World War I. The internal struggle over the character of this confederation resulted in a great portion of the Czech population being forced to convert to Catholicism or flee into exile. But even there, intellectual impulses, Bohemian and Moravian in origin and of general benefit, were created. The highest point was reached in the philosophical and pedagogical works of John Amos Comenius (1592-1670). His work *General Consultation about the Improvement of Human Affairs* will still be a source inspirational ideas in the next millennium.

The marked economic and cultural development of the Czech nation during the Industrial Revolution resulted in the renewal of national independence. The Czechoslovak Republic, at the birth of which stood that great humanist Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, developed into a model democratic state in the twenty years between 1918 and 1938. This nation gradually found solutions to its ethnic and social problems and was even able to provide refuge to German anti-fascists. However, the rise of Nazism and the catastrophe of World War II dramatically interrupted these promising developments. The occupation of the Czech state and the threat to the very existence of the Czech people, the Holocaust, the ethnic transformation of Central Europe and the coming of communist totalitarian regimes mark one of history's most dismal chapters. For a period of more than four decades, the heart of Europe was gripped by anxiety.

But even this period was not only ruled over by shadows. The creative efforts of artists and scientists was not stopped and some of them received the highest of international honors, e.g. the inventor of polarography Jaroslav Heyrovský and the poet Jaroslav Seifert. Hope also shined through in everyday affairs. The Prague Spring of 1968 was one of the attempts to humanize life and the "Velvet Revolution" in 1989 became the promise of a return to democracy. The peaceful division of Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia which took place in late 1992 and early 1993 demonstrated that new nation-states may come into existence without armed struggle. Hope alternated with disappointment, but the historical beat has again picked up speed. The heart of Europe, one of humanity's artistic and natural treasures, has once again flung itself open to the world on this, the threshold of the third millennium.

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FROM THE TWILIGHT OF ANCIENT TIMES: THE EVIDENCE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

1.

"...the people then were simple and surprisingly noble..."

Kosmas

One of the earliest pieces of evidence documenting the existence of the human race in Central Europe comes from finds made in Beroun, about thirty kilometers west of Prague. During the construction of a freeway overpass in the 1980s, about 100 stone tools in association with animal bones and dating from the period prior to 1.8 million year ago were found. These tools were manufactured by *Homo erectus*, who lived our region before the beginning of the Middle Paleolithic. The next evolutionary stage was Neanderthal man (*Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*) who lived primarily during the Middle Paleolithic. Partial skeletons of Neanderthals have been found in the Moravian caves of Šipka near Štramberk and Švédův stůl [Swede's Table] in the Moravian Karst. The oldest skeletal remains of modern humans come from the Koněprusy Caves in the Bohemian Karst (40,000 B.C.).

2.

The biological, social and cultural evolution of human beings in the Old Stone Age (the Paleolithic) was influenced by the marked climatic changes over the course of the Pleistocene (the first Quaternary epoch). For approximately 100,000 years, glacial and interglacial periods alternated. During the glacial periods, the environment of Central Europe was reminiscent of northern tundra, taiga or arctic regions, with the mammoth, woolly rhinoceros, reindeer, arctic fox and arctic hare living here. During the interglacial periods, our country had a subtropical or tropical character, with the elephant, rhinoceros, aurochs, horse living here. During the Lower Pleistocene, the tapir, zebra or hippopotamus would also have been found here. People obtained food by hunting these animals and collecting wildy growing plants. They lived in camps under the open sky, using caves only exceptionally, often as sacred sites. The earliest habitation with a campfire is known from Přezletice near Prague (700,000 B.C.). While the possibility that the reindeer and horse were bred during the Upper Paleolithic (the last Ice Age) cannot be ruled out, the dog was already humanity's faithful companion at that time.

3.

Our knowledge of the culture of Paleolithic societies is negatively influenced by the fact that very few artifacts from this period have been preserved. Most of those that have been preserved are made from non-organic materials. Evidence for the development of technology is provided by stone and bone tools and weapons. A small stone sculpture of a human head dating from the Middle Paleolithic was found in Bečov, near Most. The hunting and gathering civilization reached its peak during the Upper Paleolithic. Southern Moravia (Dolní Věstonice, Pavlov) was clearly the

most important center of European civilization 25,000 years ago. The fact that these hunters were not simply hairy, dirty primitives is witnessed by evidence of a refined aesthetic sense (ceramic sculptures, engravings on bone and stone) as well as evidence of developed textile production.

5.

It is probable that hunter-gather societies began to change into agricultural societies during the Mesolithic. Of course, archaeological evidence for sedentary, village-based agricultural societies in this region dates only from the Neolithic. Both the monoculture planting of cultivated plants and the breeding of domesticated animals unable to survive without human assistance resulted in a fundamental assault on the natural development of the environment. These intensive attacks on the natural environment in this region resulted a widespread and long term ecological crisis at the end of the second and the beginning of the first millennia B.C. Associated with this sedentary lifestyle was a sharp rise in population and with this a competitive struggle for foodstuffs and natural resources.

6.

People obtained their basic sources of sustenance from the cultivation of domesticated plants (grains and legumes) and the breeding of domesticated animals (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and later the horse and poultry). This food was supplemented by hunting and the gathering of wild plants. While the technological level of stone tool production had declined since the Paleolithic, the level of other areas of technology markedly improved, e.g. the production of ceramic vessels, the production of textiles, woodcarving and architecture. Based on the presence of a wide range of individual raw materials (Baltic amber, Baltic and Bavarian flint, Mediterranean marine shells), we may infer that this region was integrated into a developed system of long-distance trade. From the Eneolithic period, we have the first evidence of the working of copper and gold.

7.

In comparison with earlier development, the first thousand years of agricultural civilization is marked by a marked cultural decline. It is only in the Early Bronze Age that culture in this region reached a level which was comparable with the developed civilization of those earlier Upper Paleolithic hunters. At the end of the Eneolithic, the Únětice culture (2000-1500 B.C.) arose in Bohemia. This culture can be characterized as a powerful central European empire based on the working of and trading in copper from the Alps. During the Late Bronze Age, cultures in Bohemia and Moravia are a part of the widespread western European complex of Urnfield cultures. The tradition of burying bodies in a flexed position, which had lasted for hundreds of thousands of years, was replaced by cremation. People turned their faith away from a belief in the magical power of the earth towards the gods of the sky. We can also observe a marked association of this region with the classical cultures of the Mediterranean.

THE FIRST WRITTEN RECORDS

1.

“... and now we want to sharpen our quill, though dull yet devout, so that we might record these memorable events ...”

Kosmas

In the fifth century B.C., the Greek historian Herodotus mentions that the land of the Celts is at the source of the Danube River. We know, based on archaeological finds, that at that time Bohemia was a part of a large western European complex of cultures which we call the La Tène culture and which we associate with the Celts. The Latin term for Bohemia (Boeiohaemum) is in fact based on the name of the Celtic “Boii” tribe. Celtic domination was replaced by German rule around 2000 years ago. At the beginning of the first century A.D., this region was a part (perhaps even the center) of the realm of the Marcomanni king Maroboduus. From the end of the first century through the close of the second century, this region was marked by wars between Teutonic peoples and the Roman Empire (a majority of the military operations here took place in southern Moravia). A period of prolonged military conflicts and the displacement of entire tribes under pressure from the Huns - a migratory people from the east Asian steppes - which began at the end of the fourth century, was ended at the beginning of the sixth century with the arrival of the eastern European Slavs. In the seventh century, the Slavonic empire of Samo came into existence on the boundaries of the Frankish kingdom and the Avar kaganate. The fabled Great Moravian Empire arose in the ninth century on the ruins of Samo’s realm. Towards the end of the ninth century, the newly forming Czech state, under the Přemyslids, began to draw on the cultural and political inheritance of Great Moravia.

2.

During the third and fourth centuries B.C., Celtic expeditions to the classical Mediterranean world brought a large amount of useful cultural and economic knowledge along with their booty. It was during the La Tène period that the pottery wheel, the rotating mill for grain and the reaper began to be used in this region. A system of powerfully fortified Celtic oppida (hill forts) were established as an attempt to create social centers in western and central Europe with a more urban character. Celts paid for goods and services in the oppida using coins minted along classical models. While the invasion of Teutonic peoples from northern Europe resulted in a long term visible decline in civilization, large quantities of Roman goods began to reach this region during the first century A.D. as a result of intensive contacts, both peaceful and military. Thanks to the frequent military conflicts, one of the basic items of commerce was slaves. This region only reached a social and economic level

equivalent with that of the La Tène era during the Great Moravian Empire. The basis of the economy remained agriculture and the breeding of domesticated animals.

3.

The characteristics of social and economic development described above are in large measure also applicable to cultural development. From its very beginnings, the La Tène cultural showed clear evidence of influence of the classical world, especially Greek and Etruscan influences. This is not only visible in the production of ceramics and the working of iron and bronze. Without a doubt, monumental architecture (the sanctuary in the hill fort of Závist near Prague, dating from the sixth century B.C.) was also built using classical models. The subsequent Roman period presents a clear cultural decline. Attempts to raise the cultural level can be seen in the many items of Roman provenance (ceramics, glass, jewelry, coins), which the Teutonic peoples integrated into their own culture. Following the fall of the Roman Empire, this region found itself for a long time on the boundary between the Frankish kingdom and the realms of migratory Asian peoples. The very simple material culture of the migratory Slavs gradually developed a remarkable level of wealth and variety. This is especially clear in the production of jewelry, which derived from Roman traditions and was enriched by western European (Frankish) influences on the one side and Asian (Avar, Hun, and Magyar) and Byzantine influences on the other. The monumental sacred architecture of the Great Moravian Empire reflects the struggle of Frankish and Byzantine missionaries over the central European region.

The First Saints, First Kings, An Independent Czech State

Chronology

935 - The murder of Prince Wenceslas

973 - The establishment of the first see (Prague) in Bohemia

995 - The murder of the members of the House of Slavník

1085 - Vratislav II, the first Czech king

1189 - The Statute of Prince Conrad Oto

1212 - The Golden Bull of Sicily

1278 - The Battle of Marchfeld

1300 - Wenceslas II, king of Poland

1301 - Wenceslas III, king of Hungary

1306 - The extinction of the Přemyslid dynasty

Politics

“The city of Prague is built of stone and lime and is the largest city as to commerce. Russians and Slavs from the city of Krakow arrive here with goods. And from the land of the Turk, Muslims, Jews and Turks also with goods and the coin of commerce. They take away from them slaves, tin and various furs. Their land is the best in the north.”

Ibrahim ibn Jacob, report on Prague from the years 965-966.

In the turbulent heart of Europe and with uncomfortably close, strong German neighbors, the Czech state defended its place in the sun. In this defense, while helped by the possible threat of disintegration (a real threat for many states), the Czechs were significantly aided by the cult of the prince-martyr Wenceslas [Václav] who became the patron saint of the Czech lands and significantly contributed to their anchoring within Christian Europe.

During the reign of Wenceslas, which had a strong Christian accent, he attempted to resist conflicts even at the price of concessions (the German king Henry I took away tribute in the form of 500 talents of silver and 120 oxen). Wenceslas' brother Boleslav rejected his moderate and sometimes concessionary style of governing and had Wenceslas murdered.

The emancipation of the Czech state was supported by the establishment of the first Czech bishopric. The growing self-confidence of the Czech nobility was also confirmed by the victorious battle of Chlumce (1126), where the attempts of Lothar III to decide on the occupant of the Czech throne were finally thwarted.

In 1212, Emperor Frederick II issued the Golden Bull of Sicily, which confirmed the inheritability of the title of the Czech kings and the formal role of the emperor in the approval of the Czech ruler. The relationship of the Czechs to the empire was a purely honorary one, not one of subjects. The Czech king was accorded a vote during the election of the emperor.

The second half of the thirteenth century was the era of the reigns of Přemysl Otakar II and his son Wenceslas II. In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante wrote of them: "*The other, who in look doth comfort him, / Governed the region where the water springs, / The Moldau bears the Elbe, and Elbe the sea. / His name was Otakar; and in swaddling-clothes / Far better he than bearded Wenceslas / His son, who feeds in luxury and ease.*"

The poet is unfair to Wenceslas. Přemysl had a grand foreign policy, but did not always judge the development of particular situations correctly. This led to his tragic end at the Battle of Marchfeld and created a serious threat to the whole state. The young Wenceslas was not yet able to take up the reigns of power and the country was shaken by a struggle for power.

It was only after some time that Wenceslas was able to follow on from his father's policies. In the year 1300, he became the king of Poland and acquired the Hungarian crown for his son Wenceslas III. Shortly thereafter, however, he was struck down suddenly. This, together with the subsequent murder of Wenceslas III (1306), meant the extinction of the Přemyslids.

Culture

"*Blessed man and prince, who from the gods wert born to us. Hail unto thee, Prince, be thou hale, thou art worth praise above others, unyoke thine oxen from the plow, change thy garment and mount thy steed.*" Thus was the mythical founder of the Přemyslid dynasty, Přemysl Otáček [the Plowman] called to the princely throne, as described by the early Czech

chronicler Kosmas (1045-1125) in his work *Chronica Boemorum*. In this chronicle, he created for the first time a picture of the history of the Czech state from its mythical beginnings through the third decade of the twelfth century.

His work is the supreme period creation of Czech literature and was followed by a number of successors who continued in the description of the fate of the Czech state and so maintained a conscious continuity in Czech history. The end of the Přemyslid dynasty is captured at the beginning of the fourteenth century by another monumental chronicle, the *Chronicon Aulae Regiae*. It was also at this time that the first chronicle written in Czech, the *Dalimilova kronika* [the Dalimil Chronicle] was created. It, however, belongs to the Luxembourg era.

Even in an era when "*weapons spoke and men were silent,*" the ambitions of the last Přemyslids led to a greater openness of the Czech region. An integrating tendency led to the intermixing of cultures. Czech, German, Italian and Latin cultural influences all met at the court of King Wenceslas II. Here they found fertile soil for their own development and at the same time they significantly influenced the Czech environment.

Interest in education led the steps of many Czech students abroad to French and Italian universities. But even at home, schools with a very solid level of quality were being established. Capitular and parish schools not only taught reading, writing and mathematics, but the fundamentals of the liberal arts as well. At the Prague capitular school they were studying Aristotle's writings on the natural sciences in the second half of the thirteenth century. The attempt by Wenceslas II to found a university, although unsuccessful, is also evidence of the significant changes in the Czech cultural environment.

Wenceslas II was not simply a passive supporter of culture. He was himself the author of several love poems which were written under the influence of German chivalrous lyric poetry. A Czech version of the medieval epic about Alexander the Great, the *Alexandreida*, spread the literature of chivalry of this period.

The strength of thought and word were joined together with the beauty of artistic expression in a large number of manuscripts. Richly decorated codices, amongst which *The Passional of the Abbess Cunegundes* stands out, are important evidence for the level of the creative arts in Bohemia. The passional is not simply a beautiful artifact, at the same time it represents the deeply symbolic and metaphorical philosophy of the day.

Society

In the year 1189, Czech society received its first written legal code. The *Statute of Prince Conrad Oto* set out the relationship between the sovereign and the nobility (it limited the ruler's right to escheat) ensured the holding of honorably acquired estates and granted greater independence to judges, where representatives of the nobility had to be represented.

The Přemyslid rulers reinforced their power using a variety of methods. It is possible to observe the use of brutal methods (the murder of the Slavníks) and it is

possible to see political efforts focused both within and outside of this formative state.

An important role was played by the strengthening of the state's economy. The basic principle was the appropriation and use of conquered territory. During the first period of internal colonization in the twelfth century, practically the entire Czech basin, with the exception of mountainous terrain, was settled.

Colonization significantly changed the character of the Czech landscape, where new residences for the nobility, monasteries and villages began to gradually appear.

A second, external, wave of colonization took place in the thirteenth century. Colonists were invited to Bohemia from abroad. They were predominately Germans, although there were also Flemings and Walloons.

The importance of cities as centers of craft and commerce increased. A rise in the self-confidence of the nobility is supported by the construction of numerous massive Gothic castles.

An important element in the colonization effort was prospecting and the exploitation of mineral deposits. Deposits of silver, first discovered in the Czech-Moravian Highlands, were of special importance. When a rich source of silver was discovered in Kutná Hora towards the end of the thirteenth century, these deposits were the most significant in Europe.

An ample supply of silver enabled the Czech kings to carry out ambitious policies and at the same time strengthen the country's economy. In the year 1300, the silver Prague groschen began to be minted. Because of its high and stable silver content, the groschen became a sought after tender abroad as well. In Bohemian kingdom, the groschen lasted until 1547.

The Romanesque style, typical for religious structures (e.g. the Church of St. George in Prague, the Doksany monastery, the rotunda in Znojmo) as well as for city residences in Prague, was gradually replaced by the Gothic style.

The Gothic influenced the appearance of new or reconstructed churches, monasteries (e.g. Zlatá Koruna [Golden Crown], Vyšší Brod [Upper Ford]) and castles (e.g. Bezděz, Křivoklát). The Gothic also broke into urban architecture. Cities established at that time (e.g. České Budějovice, Hradec Králové) were built according to precise plans, in which the square is the center around which the surrounding streets wind in a precise geometric pattern.

At the Center of European Events

Chronology

1310 - Accession of the Luxembourg dynasty to the Czech throne

1344 - The first Prague archbishopric

1344 - The Battle of Crécy. The death of John of Luxembourg

1346 - Charles IV becomes Czech king

1348 - Establishment of the University of Prague

1355 - Charles IV becomes Holy Roman Emperor

1360s-1370s - Translation of the Bible into Czech

1378 - Death of Charles IV

Politics

"This realm was found by us so plundered, that we were unable to find one single baronial castle which had not been pawned along with all the royal estates, so we had nowhere to dwell but in the houses of burghers like townspeople. The Prague Castle had been plundered, devastated and desolated in as much as since the times of King Otakar II, that it had collapsed to the ground."

Autobiography of Emperor Charles IV

The four years of instability which followed the murder of the last of the Přemyslids were ended with the accession of the Luxembourg dynasty to the Czech throne. The first representative of this dynasty, John, did meet expectations and was neither a level-headed master nor did he have the desire to become involved in the complex Czech political situation.

The reign of John did, however, open up new horizons to the Czech world, for the Luxembourg was actively involved in European political events. While his ambitious and adventurous policies had an unfavorable influence on the country's economic situation, these policies did nevertheless result in territorial gains (Upper Lusatia, the Cheb region and Wrocław) and incorporated the Bohemian kingdom more within the European context.

In Europe, they said of John that, *"without the Czech king, no one is able to tend to his own affairs."* Yet John was also taken as the model of a true knight, a reputation which he confirmed in the last moments of his life, when he, although blind, entered into combat at the Battle of Crécy, and heroically fell.

During the reign of John, the first archbishopric was established in Prague, with which the emancipation of the church in the Czech lands was completed (extricating the church from subordination to the archbishops of Mainz). At the same time, the independence of the Czech state was strengthened, as was the political position of the Luxembourgs who were preparing to enter into a struggle for the imperial crown. The first archbishop in Prague was Arnošt [Ernest] of Pardubice.

John was unable to avoid bitter confrontation with the Czech nobility, who criticized him for a lack of interest in the affairs of the kingdom. Charles IV, in contrast to his father, built up the Kingdom of Bohemia as the center of his power and interest, his activities resulting in him later being titled "Father of the Nation." Even while Charles skillfully managed imperial policies, he nonetheless lavished upon the kingdom the *"preferential love of mine heart above all other titles and estates."* This became the target of Petrarch's criticism: *"That country, which thou callest thy homeland, thy homeland was, but it ceased to be from that moment when thou becamest emperor."*

Charles was able to internally consolidate the state even though he was unable to push through a new royal code, in fact a sort of constitution, the *Maiestas Carolina*. The country experienced an unusually long period of peace and quiet.

The building of the Czech state stood on firm foundations and could even boast an attractive facade. In the depths of the interior, however, a nervous trembling could be sensed.

Culture

Over the course of the fourteenth century, the civilizing process in the Bohemian kingdom sharply accelerated, which amongst other things was the result of Charles's well thought-out cultural policies.

The country quickly approached the cultural milieu found in France and Italy. This, together with German impulses, led to a blossoming of Czech culture, which was also able to rest on its solid Přemyslid foundations.

Charles's cultural policies had an integrative and universal character, into which the establishment of the University of Prague fit well.

In the university's founding charter, Charles emphasized that he was establishing the university so that *"our loyal subjects in this kingdom, who have ceaselessly hungered for the fruits of knowledge, should not have to beg for alms in foreign lands."* At the same time he provided foreign teachers and students all possible privileges *"which all doctors and students at the universities in both Paris and Bologna enjoy."*

The University of Prague was the first university in central Europe and became the site of an intensive mixing of cultural influences. The truly international character of the university was confirmed by the dividing of teachers and students into four "nations" (which were in fact regional groupings), each of which had one vote when deciding on university affairs.

Charles also attempted to use historiography in the service of his political concepts. He thought about a work which would encompass the Přemyslid tradition, with which he had clearly associated himself, and at the same time which would place emphasis on a universalistic concept of government. His expectations were not completely met, however. Only the chronicle of Přebek Pulkava, the birth of which he was in part responsible for, somewhat fulfilled his conception.

Charles himself was the author of an historical treatise, actually recording his own circumstances during the period when his father John was still alive.

The creative arts also benefited from inclusion within the European milieu. Charles's political and ideological conceptions suited mural painting, primarily in that form which can be seen in the interior decoration of Karlštejn. The works of Master Theodoric, the leading representative of Czech painting on wood panels and equal to Europe's best, can be seen at the castle. Master Theodoric is more than adequately seconded by the Master of the Třeboň Altar and the Master of the Vyšší Brod Altar.

The artist was becoming a self-conscious creator, no longer simply an anonymous glorifier of the Lord. Under the influence of humanism, tearful valleys slowly begin to change in places of human activity not bound only to higher spheres. The new, increasing rhythm of life was captured very succinctly by the university master, and later archbishop of Prague, Albinus of Učínov: *"The one good beverage is wine, the one good repast is meat and the one joy a woman."*

Society

Following a clearly slow start, the university began, over the course of the second half of the fourteenth century, to repay its founder with interesting scientific research results. A high level was reached in the field of mathematics in the works of Christian [Křisl'an] of Prachatice. The astronomic observations of John Andrew [Jan Ondřej] (at the beginning of the fifteenth century) were accepted with approval by Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler in the sixteenth century.

The development of scientific research in the Czech lands is convincingly evidenced in the first technical dictionary, in which its author, Bartholomew of Chlumce attempted to create Czech equivalents for technical terms in Latin.

The emphasis placed on the Kingdom of Bohemia as the center of the Holy Roman Empire significantly altered the face of Prague, Charles's residence. The Prague New Town [Nové Město] was established, Hradčany was restored, the Cathedral of St. Vitus grew and the Vltava [Moldau] River was spanned by a stone bridge. The Gothic appearance of Prague was improved by a number of masters, amongst whom the leading figure was Petr Parléř of Gmünd, who continued in the work of another important builder Matthais of Arras.

It was not only Prague that could boast of lofty Gothic structures. The evidence of Parléř's workshop can be seen in the Church of St. Bartholomew in Kolín or in Kutná Hora, where he began to build the Church of St. Barbara.

Another symbol of Charles's era was built not far from Prague: the castle of Karlštejn, which became a site for the emperor's contemplations and at the same time a safe sanctuary for the new crown jewels.

Czechs were experiencing a period of economic prosperity. At the same time social differentiation increased, as did tensions between the emancipating burghers and the nobility. Society was also electrified by the state of the Church, which was certainly quite grim. Charles considered the Church to be an important pillar of his power. This notwithstanding, the substantial sums which he provided to the Church aided its moral decline.

The reaction to this state of affairs was the emergence of reform movements, which found their expression in the activities of the first pro-reform preachers. The Augustinian, Konrád Waldhauser was active in the Czech lands. At the same time, John Milíč, Matthias of Genoa and Thomas of Štítňý were inveighing against the disorder in the Church. Their voices fit the growing dissatisfaction and prepared the ground for the appearance of John Huss [Jan Hus].

In 1380, the growing tension, which could be felt even during the life of Charles, was raised further by the plague. The plague ravaged the cities and towns, threatened the country's economic system and gave rise to a strong stimulus for contemplating the end of the world and the subsequent judgment of God.

Hussitism - An Attempt to Reform the Church and Society

Chronology

1409 - Culmination of the papal schism (Election of a third pope)

1414-1418 - The Council of Constance

1415 - Master John Huss burned at the stake

1419 - The Defenestration of Prague

1420-1431 - Five unsuccessful crusades against the Czechs

1433 - Hussites negotiate at the Council of Basel

1434 - Battle of Lipany

1436 - Proclamation of the Compacts of Basel, Emperor Sigismund accepted as the Czech king

In 1430, Joan of Arc, influenced by anti-Hussite propaganda, wrote to Bohemia: *“Shall I not hear that you have repented, I shall perhaps forsake even the English and assault you in order to annihilate with the sword ... your false and ferocious superstition and thus rid you of either your heresy or your life.”*

One year later, she was herself burned at the stake as a heretic.

Politics

The decline in the spiritual values in the Church during the second half of the fourteenth century and the conflict between its original ideals and the current state of the Church (the pursuit of property, papal schisms, the selling of indulgences) aroused criticism from a whole series of theologians and university educators. One of these critics was John Huss of the University of Prague. Amongst other things, he ideologically followed on from the work of the Oxford theologian John Wycliffe.

The preaching of Huss, in which he demanded the reform of Church and society was met with a tremendous response in the Czech lands. Church officials declared a ban on him. However, when his influence continued to strengthen even after the ban, Huss was invited to defend his ideals at the church Council of Constance. The Roman king, Sigismund, personally guaranteed him a safe journey and return.

Despite the warnings of friends, Huss accepted the invitation of the church fathers. However, once he arrived in Constance he was imprisoned and instead of a free and open discussion, the Council offered him only one choice: recant his opinions. Huss, convinced on the rightness of his views, refused to do so. As a confirmed heretic, he was burned at the stake and his ashes thrown into the Rhine.

The treachery of Sigismund and the church council aroused great outrage in the Czech lands. A radicalization of Huss's supporters took place, instigated in part by violence on the part of Catholics. In the summer of 1419, following earlier

provocations, a crowd of Prague's inhabitants attacked the New Town Hall and threw their Catholic town councilors out the window. The “Hussite Revolution” had begun.

King Sigismund, who had become heir to the Czech throne following the death of Wenceslas IV, declared a crusade against the “*Czech heretics.*” This external threat unified the various ideological groupings among Huss's followers. The unified Hussite army, made up of burghers, peasants and the lesser nobility and under the leadership of the legendary commander Jan Žižka [Ziska], administered a crushing defeat to 30,000 armed crusaders. At virtually the same time, the joint program of all the Hussites was being formulated, known as the Four Articles of Prague. The articles demanded the freedom of preaching, the administration of communion in both kinds (i.e., not only the “body of the Lord,” the Host, but the “blood of the Lord,” wine, as well - the symbol of the Hussites therefore being the chalice), the punishment of notorious sinners in all estates and the end of the secular dominion of the Church.

An anti-Hussite hysteria swept over Europe, but further crusades to Bohemia were also unsuccessful, with the Hussite armies, led by their now blind commander Jan Žižka (and following his death in 1424, by the priest Prokop Holý [the Bald]) always defeating the crusaders. As a result, Hussite representatives were equal partners of the Catholic Church in the discussions held at the Council of Basel in 1433. These discussions dealt with the four articles, the main theses in the Hussite conception of faith and church.

The possibility of reconciliation with the Catholic Church resulted in a split in Hussite ranks. At the Battle of Lipany, the radical troops were defeated by their more moderate co-religionists, who had allied themselves with that part of the Catholic Church willing to compromise.

Two years later, the moderate bloc of the Hussites pushed through acceptance of a compromise peace agreement with the Catholics, the “Compacts of Basel.” Of the four original articles, only one remained, communion in both kinds. From that point on, the people of the Czech lands were divided into two large groups: Catholics and Protestants. In the rest of Europe, a similar division in confessions took place about a century later.

Society

Over the course of the two decades of the Hussite wars, there was a marked redistribution of property which benefited not only the Hussite nobility but also many Catholics, who had taken church property “*under their protection.*” The devastation of the country during the war only deepened the long-term poor economic situation which had existed since the end of the fourteenth century. There was also a pronounced shift in the traditional society of the Estates (nobility).

The military activities of King Sigismund against the Czechs sharply reduced the prestige of the rule. In contrast, there was a sharp rise in the political influence of the burghers. For example, an assembly met in Čáslav in 1421, where they raised their own authority above that of the hereditary monarch. They elected a twenty member

government, which was to rule the country. A large number of this government's members were in fact burghers (reportedly eight of the members). Even Catholic representatives participated in this provisional government.

The international spiritual and economic isolation of the Czech lands resulted in a progressive shift from defensive actions to a policy of offense. Hussites explained their opinions in dozens of manifests sent to all the main religious centers of Europe. The economic and financial problems of this war-devastated country were supposed to be solved by military "expeditions" beyond the Czech borders. During one of these expeditions, called "chivalrous excursions," [*spanilá jízda*] one Hussite division reached the shores of the Baltic .

The shocking and surprising victories of the Hussites were the result of an entirely new way of fighting battles. The Hussite armies were dominated by serfs and the poor, the majority of whom did not know how to wield proper weapons. Žižka, therefore, armed his troops with weapons (or rather, tools) which were well-known and trusted by these social classes in their everyday work: metal-tipped flails, straightened scythes, axes, reinforced farming carts.

A part of their battles was the heretofore unusual use of small, mobile cannons, the shot of which, in addition to direct casualties, frightened off the enemies horses. The Hussites called these cannons "*pšit'aly*" [flutes] and this term for firearms has made its way into most European languages as the word "pistol." An important element in Hussite military strategy was the war cart. This allowed the rapid redeployment of infantry, during battle it provided protection from cavalry and at the same time raised the infantry up to the level of the rider. Over the course of time, this element was incorporated into the majority of European armies.

Culture

John Huss gave his sermons in the Bethlehem Chapel in Prague which was rebuilt in its original appearance was reconstructed in this century.

The domination of the University of Prague by supporters of Huss was accompanied by the mass exodus of Catholic educators from Prague. Thus the Hussite reformers (somewhat paradoxically) strengthened the much newer and at that time rather provincial universities in Heidelberg, Leipzig, Vienna and Krakow, to name but a few.

The Hussite movement also meant the blossoming of literature, especially polemical literature, everything from theological tracts to handbills. For example, in the binding of another book, the words of a song criticizing the church-ordered burning of the books of John Wycliffe have been preserved. In this song, they sang: "*Zhyněk*" (i.e. the archbishop of Prague) "*burned the books, causing harm to the Czechs, woe be to all papists.*"

Hussites laid emphasis on a simplistic church and rejected the fanciful Catholic churches. However, the applying of these ideals often resulted in the deliberate destruction of a great number of works of art (iconoclasm), e.g. pictures, sculptures

and even entire monastery buildings. This was especially true in the movement's early days.

On the other hand, the Hussites placed a great emphasis on choral singing. The military chorale "*You, who are warriors of God and his Lam,*" in which is sung: "*flee not from your foe, heed not their number,*" helped the Hussites in battles against superior numbers. This sound of this song alone reportedly sent crusader armies fleeing even before battles had begun.

Proverbial was the universal erudition of the Hussites, with, understandably, a knowledge of the Holy Word being primary. This was, however, not only the privilege of men, in large measure it also applied to women. Even such an enemy of the Hussites as Pope Pius II praised the fact that virtually every ordinary Hussite woman was able to fluently speak to any theme in both the Old and New Testaments.

In spite of the original radical nature of the Hussite movement, it did result in a certain form of religious toleration in the Czech lands. The movement foreshadowed the European Reformation which took place a century later. It also resulted in a high degree of sensitivity on the part of Czechs in their views of moral criteria, be they in politics or other spheres of life. This feature, which has been reanimated at various stages, remains in Czech thinking today.

The Elected King of Two Peoples

Chronology

- 1437 - Albert Habsburg elected Czech king
- 1453 - Ladislav Posthumous crowned Czech king
- 1457 - Establishment of the Unitas Fratrum
- 1458 - George of Poděbrady elected Czech king
- 1466 - Pope Paul II declares a crusade against the Czechs
- 1469 - The Czech Assembly acknowledges the succession of the Jagiellon dynasty to the Czech throne
- 1471 - Vladislav Jagiellon becomes Czech king
- 1516 - Louis Jagiellon becomes Czech king
- 1526 - The Battle of Mohács

"To the honor of the true Catholic faith and by our royal and princely word, we swear that from this hour and this day forward we shall profess and maintain a pure, right and honest brotherhood, that no complaint or feud shall cause us to take up arms against one and other... In order to deal with particular affairs as they should be, we have decided to establish a sort of General Consistory that would, in the name of us all and of our entire congress, be sitting in the very place where the congress proper would take its seat at that time and from which the streams of justice would flow out in all directions as if from a fountain."

George of Poděbrady, Treaty on the Establishment of Peace in All Christendom

Politics

Following the brief reign of Albert of Austria (who died in 1439), the Czech throne passed to his minor son Ladislav Posthumous in 1444. The country was administered until 1453 by military-political leagues, called *Landfrieds*, bringing together both nobility and burghers. The congresses of these leagues replaced the central government and they succeeded in preventing larger conflicts, which could have been caused by either the interregnum or by the continuing division of the country into two confessions.

The reign of King Ladislav lasted a mere four years and the Bohemian kingdom once again found itself without a king. For the first time in the history of the country, the new king was elected from the ranks of the Czech nobility, George of Poděbrady [Jiří z Poděbrad].

George had been elected by both Catholic and Utraquist nobility and thus became the king of “two peoples.” Even though he was a follower of the Utraquist and was therefore known as the “Hussite king,” he subordinated questions of faith to the maintenance of the unity of the country, which came under strong international pressure soon after his election. The pressure was based on the accusation of heresy in Bohemia. Even that well-known hothead François Villon wrote, “*I know Bobemia, in heresy deluded.*”

Pope Pius II placed great pressure on the re-catholicizing of the Czech lands. Following the failure of negotiations, the pope declared a crusade against the Czechs. The Czech forces were, however, able to fend off the attacks, primarily under the leadership of the Hungarian king, Matthias Corvinus.

George did not only resist his enemies with the sword, but also used diplomatic activities. It was through these activities that the proposed *Treaty on the Establishment of Peace in All Christendom* came about, which proposed solving disagreements through negotiation and bound the parties to mutual assistance in the case of attack. George also made an agreement with the Polish king Casimir IV, that in the event of George’s death a Jagiellon would ascend to the Czech throne.

Vladislav [Vladislas] Jagiellon, who had taken up the role of sovereign, was forced to deal with a difficult foreign policy situation, when the pope recognized Matthais Corvinus as the legitimate Czech king. What is more, a bitter confrontation between the Catholic and Utraquist camps was taking place in the country.

The Jagiellons were able to reach an agreement with Matthais and following his death, even gained the crown of Hungary. They were nevertheless unable to prevent strife in the country. The country was moving towards a tragic internal conflict, which was only held off by another calamity - the death of King Louis at the Battle of Mohács.

Culture

The development of top quality education was aided neither by the Hussite wars nor by later social tensions. The University of Prague languished in confessional rigidity, which transformed it into a provincial school primarily preparing town clerks and officials. In spite of this, the overall level of education in the Czech lands was at

a good level. This is witnessed to by the comments of Pope Pius II, who, however unwillingly, observed of the Czechs “*ignoble are that people, whose one good is a love of learning.*”

A knowledge of reading, writing and mercantile calculations was characteristic of the nobility, but at the same time of burghers and craftsmen. The general level of education aided in the rapid spread of book printing. Books may be found in the inventories of townspeople just as they were found in the libraries of the nobility. One of the first books published was the *Trojan Chronicle* in 1463.

In the beginning, the influence of humanism primarily manifested itself in the form of translations. One group of translators quickly introduced the Czech reader to a number of the works by leading representatives of European humanism. As early as 1512, a Czech translation of *Moriae encomium* or *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus of Rotterdam was published. One representative of original humanistic poetry was the son of King George, Hynek of Poděbrady.

The iconoclasm of the Hussites resulted in a stagnation of the creative arts and resulted in incalculable damage to religious architecture. The Jagiellonian period successfully rectified this state of affairs. Painting was inspired by foreign models and reached a European level, especially in the works of the Master of the Litoměřice Altar, working on the boundary between the late Gothic and early Renaissance.

The Utraquist church gradually abandoned its negative attitude to the sculptural decoration of its churches. Gradually, works began to appear, the majority by anonymous wood carvers. These works are marked by a very strong naturalism.

The Hussite ideal of creating a just society did not end on the battlefield of Lipany. The ideal of a more just organized society was further developed by Petr Chelčický, who criticized the doctrine of three estates, dividing society into the servants of God, the nobility and working people. Chelčický compared social groupings to human organs and said, “*when one organ suffereth, all the organs suffered with him.*”

His ideas did not gain wide currency in the Czech lands, but nonetheless became an inspiration for the founding of small sects, e.g. the *Unitas Fratrum* [Unity of Brethren], which weathered heavy persecution and exists today in the form of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren.

Society

The 1518 Claudian Map of the Kingdom of Bohemia depicts 120 castles, 89 royal and subject cities and 59 towns. The country was gradually recovering from the serious economic and social crises, which may be seen as a tax paid by the Czech people for their heroic uprising during the Hussite revolutionary era.

The economic development of the country influenced the enterprises of the nobility, creating favorable conditions for the further development of crafts and commerce. The great estates of the nobility also showed expansion. On these estates, in addition to the growing of grains and the breeding of livestock, other economic activities began to develop. The face of the Czech countryside was strongly marked by a boom in the number of fish ponds.

During the course of the sixteenth century, a system of fish ponds began to develop, especially in southern Bohemia, where many of this ponds still decorate this colorful countryside. The fame of south Bohemia fish farming was spread by figures such as Štěpánek Netolický and Jakub Krčín of Jelčany.

Štěpánek joined existing and newly constructed fish ponds with a 45 mile long canal called the *Zlatá stoka* [Golden Ditch]. This canal was able to bring and divert water from the ponds as necessary and at the same time supplied water to eighteen mills. Krčín followed up on Štěpánek's work and under his direction the largest south Bohemian fish ponds, *Růžmberk* [Rosenberg] and *Svět* [World], were created.

The mining of silver began to regain its lost glory. The second half of the fifteenth century was the peak period of mining in Kutná Hora. When this traditional center began to decline in importance, it was replaced by mining in Jáchymov [Joachimsthal in German]. Rich deposits of silver allowed the House of Šlik [Schlik] to mint the *tolar* [Joachimstaler], which was in very high demand in central Europe and from which the term *dollar* is derived.

Urban elements, which had gained in importance during the Hussite wars, expressed their self-confidence in both attempts to gain a fixed place in the political life of the country, but also in urban architecture. In some cities (e.g. Kutná Hora, Louny, Most and Plzeň [Pilsen]), lofty cathedrals were built and new fortifications confirmed the significance of these towns.

The architecture of the Jagiellonian period is primarily associated with Benedict Ried, who placed Renaissance elements in his structures, as can be seen in the Prague Castle's Vladislav Hall. The interior of this hall captivates with its vastness, but primarily with its masterful cross vaults. The hall remains to this day the site of important political and cultural events.

The seats of the nobility also subordinated themselves to the new requirements of the age. The castles of Czech magnates were reconstructed based on the latest demands in the field of the military arts. Some were changed by their owners into true fortresses, counting on the intensive use of artillery (e.g. Rábí, Mount Kunětica)

The Beginnings of an Uneasy Coexistence

Chronology

- 1526 - Ferdinand I Habsburg elected Czech king
- 1547 - Conflict between the Czech nobility and burghers and Ferdinand I
- 1547 - The Czech congregations of Unitas Fratrum are closed
- 1556 - The arrival of the Jesuit Order in the Czech lands
- 1564 - Maximilian Habsburg becomes Czech king
- 1575 - The Bohemian Confession
- 1576 - Rudolf II becomes Czech king
- 1579-1593 - The Kralice Bible is published
- 1583 - Prague becomes the capital city of Emperor Rudolf II
- 1609 - Imperial Charter on religious freedom

"We are all Czechs, the blood of one and other; one Lord, one king, one Czech law have we; let us Czechs suffer one and other rather than later have to suffer other foreign and distant peoples, who would not wish to suffer us in their midst, but who would rather strive to vex us and even thereafter drive us out from our land"

From a memorandum by Petr Vok of Rožmberk, exhorting the Czech Estates to show mutual understanding and solidarity.

Politics

As the Czech Estates were selecting from among the several candidates for the Czech throne, they could not have imagined in their wildest dreams that their choice would affect the fate of the country for nearly four hundred years. It was that long that the descendants of Ferdinand I Habsburg, who was elected, would occupy the Czech throne.

The Estates, convinced of their own strength, did also not expect that some sort of restriction of their rights or faith could come about. Rather, the new sovereign satisfied them with the promise of the payment of half of the royal debts.

With the addition of the Czech lands, the Habsburgs became the most powerful dynasty in Europe. And Ferdinand, a very able ruler, began to gradually dismantle the foundations of the monarchy of the Estates.

In 1547, open conflict broke out between the sovereign, the nobility and the towns. Ferdinand repressed the resistance without a great deal of difficulty and as a warning for the future, he intimidated his opponents with executions and the confiscation of property. At the same time, the power of the Estates' institutions was broken systematically.

Ferdinand treated questions in the area of religion guardedly, but nevertheless very resolutely. In this area, he obviously sided with the Catholics. The struggle for religious freedom continued during the reign of his successors. The gradual re-catholicizing of the country was aided by the arrival of the Jesuit Order in the Czech lands and the reoccupation of archbishoprics.

Ferdinand's successor Maximilian awoke hope that Habsburg centralism and favoring of Catholicism were not necessarily eternal. The Czech Estates even managed to present the *Bohemian Confession* to Maximilian. This document confirmed the freedom of religious affiliation, even for serfs, which was a major step forward in comparison with the principle "*he who rules, his faith*" which predominated in other countries. The sovereign supported the confession, but nevertheless did not sign it. It was only under pressure that the confession was confirmed by Rudolf's *Letter of Majesty* [Majestát].

The governments of Maximilian and Rudolf did not attack the privileges of the Estates very strongly. Even so, the country remained strongly polarized. Two ideologically irreconcilable camps began to gradually form and conflict was inevitable.

Culture

The competition between religious creeds typical for the period encompassing the reigns of the first Habsburgs on the Czech throne did not inhibit the development of thought and culture in the Czech lands in any significant way. Knowledge during the era of Rudolf was allowed to flower in all directions without regard to ideology. The emperor's fondness for the arts and science was stronger than his ideological mooring, which created of Prague at the end of the sixteenth century a place where true intellectual freedom reigned.

The influences of humanism and the Renaissance were strongly manifested in both noble and urban circles. One of the most important side-effects was an increase in the general level of learning. There was also an increase in the number of personal schools, which provided urban people with a satisfactory education, be it for everyday life or for further development. Travel was quite popular, opening up entirely new horizons to the nobility and townspeople. A number of Czech travelers later reworked their experiences in literature and in the field of Czech Renaissance literature, travel literature occupies an important place.

Although prose and poetry may not have been of the highest quality, interesting theoretical works were being produced. The political treatises of Karel the Elder of Bohemia drew attention as did the stimulating considerations on the acquisition of knowledge and education written by Jan Blahoslav.

Work in the area of translation continued. The greatest achievement of this period is the Kralice Bible, which was translated with devotion by the Unitas Fratrum and which became the treasury of the Czech language for many long years to come.

Attempts to equal their foreign models and acquit themselves honorably led to blossoming of patronized activities and it was not only fake alchemists and astrologers who profited. Serious scientists and artists were also to take advantage. The model of Czech patronage was the emperor himself, who was able to attract leading artists to Prague.

Among the artists active in Prague were Hans von Aachen, Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Bartholomaeus Spragner and the sculptors Adrian de Vries and Alessandro Abondio. Artistic achievement reached world-class parameters.

The emperor had a rival in his cultural, as well as political, activities in the person of William of Rožmberk. In an attempt to represent his house, he created favorable conditions for the development of Renaissance culture in the broadest sense of the word. He did not limit himself to supporting cultural and scientific projects, nor with the construction of a spectacular family seat. All of this did however serve him as a part of plans for fulfilling his political goals, where an understanding of European contexts was bound up with the espousal of family and national interests.

Society

The Rudolfian era favored the development of science. It is true that Rudolf is primarily associated with alchemists and astrologers, more than a few of whom did in fact move through Rudolf's court. Nevertheless, science of the highest level blossomed here. Among those who worked in Prague were the exceptional

astronomers Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler, one of the inventors of logarithms Joost Bürgi, the polymath Thaddeus Hájek of Hájek, and the doctor Jan Jessenius who carried out the first public autopsy in Prague. The mechanic Erasmus Habermehl became famous for the manufacture of scientific equipment.

The boom in economic activities by the nobility and townspeople, along with the development in theoretical thought, led to the writing of a whole series of important technological treatises, which explained activities in a series of branches based on both theory and practice.

Fish farming would base itself on the book of Jan Dubravius *On Fish Ponds and the Fish Which Live in Them* (1547), while miners and metallurgists found their bible in the works of Georgio Agricola, *De re metallica libri XII* (1556) and Lazarus Ercker, *Beschreibung: Allerfürnemsten Mineralischen Erz- und Berckwercksarten etc.* (1574). These texts retained their validity for several centuries and continue to amaze with both their precise technological descriptions and their excellent illustrations.

The developing Czech industry of brewing beer was provided with an interesting manual by Thaddeus Hájek of Hájek. In his treatise on the manufacturing of beer *De cervisia* (1585), he not only follows the foamy beverage's production process, but attempts to provide a theoretical explanation of some of the chemical processes involved. He also presents a definition of beer: "*Beer is a beverage of water, grains of corn and the blossom of the willow hops, made by skillful brewing and thorough fermenting.*"

With the ascension of the Habsburgs to the Czech throne, the Czech lands once again became involved in the context of European affairs, which manifested itself both in the presence of foreign politicians, scientists and artists in the country as well as in the more rapid assimilation of cultural, in this case Renaissance, influences. The summer palace of Queen Anne, which Ferdinand I had constructed, was unquestionably the leading example of Renaissance architecture during the reign of Rudolf. Nonetheless, the imperial capital city began to rapidly accumulate Renaissance features. This was thanks to both the palaces of the nobility (e.g. the Rožmberk and Lobkowitz palaces) and the houses of city burghers.

A Renaissance wave swept over the whole country. While it is true that the construction of religious structures practically disappeared, this wave nevertheless resulted in the reconstruction of a large number of the nobility's residences (e.g. Český Krumlov and Pernštejn) and the creation of urban architectonic entities (e.g. Telč and Slavonice).

The Spark Which Started a Fire

Chronology

1617 - Ferdinand II becomes Czech king
1618-1620 - Uprising of the Czech Estates
1618-1640 - Thirty Years War
1620 - Battle of White Mountain
1621 - Execution of 27 Czech nobles
1627 - Renewal of provincial government
1657 - Leopold I becomes Czech king
1711 - Charles VI becomes Czech king

"You, dear folk, Czech and Moravian, homeland dear, I cannot forget in my final leave taking, but unto you before all others I turn and make you the suitor and heir of all my treasures which the Lord has lent me. And I trust in God, when the gales of wrath (through our own sins sent onto our heads) are spent, government over Thine affairs shall return unto Thee, O Czech people!"

John Amos Comenius, *Testament of the Dying Mother, the Unitas Fratrum*

Politics

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Europe was moving towards a confrontation between Catholic and Protestant camps. The first direct conflict, the spark that set off the fire which would consume Europe for all of thirty years, took place in the Czech lands. An uncompromising and categorical "no" to any further coexistence was more than clearly expressed by the defenestration of imperial officials at the Prague Castle. The road to the Thirty Years War was open.

On November 8, 1620, a battle between the armies of the emperor and the Estates took place not far from Prague, on White Mountain [Bílá Hora]. The undisciplined and poorly motivated army of the Estates was defeated to a man. The lost battle broke the resistance of the Estates and their destruction was completed with the execution of 27 nobles and subsequent persecution.

The physical liquidation of some of the leaders of the Estate's resistance, the flight of opposition leaders from the country and extensive property restrictions impacted the Czech Estates in an unprecedented manner. The country was confined within a shell of absolutism which it had never known. It was the scrupulously protected freedom of belief that was primarily affected.

The renewal of provincial government restricted the rights of the Estate's assembly, reduced the rights of provincial offices and degraded the rights of cities and towns. Primarily, though, it carried out a radical new policy in the area of religious freedom when it established the Catholic faith as the one legal religion.

The subsequent mandate of Ferdinand ordered the non-Catholic nobility to either leave the country or convert to the Catholic faith. Neighboring lands, primarily Poland and Saxony began to accept Czech emigrants.

The recourse of the elites was gradually taken up by other levels of society. As a result of the repression, the role of the city in the life of the country markedly declined and various forms of repression were thoroughly applied to ordinary people. In the Czech lands, this firm "second serfdom" was accompanied by a never ending series of peasant uprisings and their uncompromising repression. Even though not one uprising achieved any fundamental success, their number and intensity led to fundamental changes in the system during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Culture

The period after White Mountain was called the "age of darkness." The symbol of this era was the Jesuit priest Koniáš burning mounds of banned books. The unfortunate sobriquet "age of darkness" primarily refers to the state of intellectual persecution, the imposition of one creed and the decline in the Czech-language culture. In spite of this, cultural life was far from disappearing and a number of outstanding achievements were made, although some of them beyond the borders of the country.

Without a doubt, the greatest intellectual achievement by a member of the Czech intelligentsia in the post-White Mountain era is the work of John Amos Comenius [Komenský]. In his scholarly treatises, encompassing extensive explorations in the fields of pedagogy, the natural sciences, philosophy, philology and others, Comenius aspired to synthesize and harmonize human knowledge. His achievements in the field of pedagogy in particular were only recognized after a number of centuries. His achievements are all the more remarkable for having occurred in a very unsettled period, a period which had strong impact on Comenius's personal life, with the loss of his entire family and his forced emigration.

The spiritual and national repression is associated in the Czech consciousness with the Jesuit Order. In spite of this, it is precisely in this order that a number of patriotic academics can be found. These researchers attempted to map Czech history and also came to the defense of the Czech language. The leading representative of these attempts was Bohuslav Balbín. Opinions opposing the official Czech historiography were expressed in the works of Pavel Stránský and Pavel Skála of Zhoř.

The Baroque, which was presaged in the mannerism of Rudolf's court, reached its peak in the works of Jan Petr Brandl, Jan Kupecký and Wenzel Lorenz Reiner. Prior to these artists, there were noteworthy works of Wenzel Hollar and Karel Škréta.

The sculptors Ferdinand Brokoff, who contributed in part to the sculptural decoration of Charles Bridge in Prague, and Matyáš Braun bring out in their works sweeping gestures and dramatic expressions, as if they had captured the nervously volatile nature of the era. Braun captured both the vice and grace of this era in his stone allegories carved for the seat of the Baroque nobleman Ferdinand Sporck in Kuks.

Czech music blossomed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Its development is closely associated with church music, even though some composers, e.g. Pavel Vejvanovský also composed secular works. The leading representative of high Baroque music was Jan Zelenka, who was the composer of the melodrama performed during the coronation of Charles VI as Czech king.

The first original Czech operatic work dates from 1730. Composed by František Míča, it is entitled *On the Origin of the Town of Jaroměřice*.

Society

The structure of Czech society was significantly affected by the effects of the uprising of the Estates and the subsequent Thirty Years War. The importance of royal towns and cities significantly declined and large feudal estates became the key unit of production.

A major shift in the composition of the key property owners' group was brought about by a number of factors. There was the bankruptcy of the state in 1623, caused by the minting of a debased coin (the so-called "long coin"), which was minted under an exclusive government charter by a group of profiteers headed by Karel von Liechtenstein and Albrecht von Wallenstein (sometimes Waldstein or in Czech, Valdštejn) as well as two waves of post-White Mountain property confiscation. The old Czech houses either went extinct or went into exile and new houses of nobility came into the country. At the end of the Thirty Years War, these new houses held half of the baronial estates.

Even though the 1680 corvée patent of the Emperor Leopold I set the maximum length of corvée (unpaid labor) at three days per week and banned any increase in this amount, this assessment was frequently violated, which became the cause of many peasant uprisings. Unlike the peasant uprisings immediately following White Mountain, which had a religious nature, these uprisings were motivated by economic oppression.

Not even the use of repressive, non-economic measures was enough to guarantee the prosperity of the great feudal estates and so even here changes in production gradually came about under the influence of new economic theories and scientific and technical achievements. The representative form of this new means of production was the manufactory. In their concentrated form, they began to be crucial in the Czech lands at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries.

Fundamental changes took place in university education. The Jesuits took control of the University of Prague in 1622, which meant an end to the rivalry between the Utraquist university and the Jesuit college in the Clementinum. A decree by Ferdinand III in 1654 joined the two institutions together in one and Charles-Ferdinand University with four faculties came into existence.

In the post-White Mountain period, the leading representative of science at the university was Jan Marek Marci, whose research in the fields of mechanics and optics

anticipated that of Sir Isaac Newton. In fact, the possibility that Newton was aware of Marci's research cannot be ruled out.

The relative calm which followed the Thirty Years War also opened up space for development in new styles in architecture. Even though the Baroque is generally associated with monumental sacred structures (the Church of St. Nicholas in Prague), equally worthwhile secular buildings were constructed (the chateau of Vranov nad Dyjí). The expansion of construction resulted in a number of leading builders (e.g. Giovanni Santini and Christoph Dietzenhofer) coming to the Czech lands. Their new Baroque structures and numerous examples of reconstruction permanently altered the appearance of towns and noble residences.

The Dilemma of Reason and Power - The Foundations of the Modern State

Chronology

1740-1780 - Reign of Maria Theresa

1741-1748 - The War of the Austrian Succession

1756-1763 - The Seven Years' War

1780-1790 - Joseph II

1781 - Toleration Patent and the abolishment of serfdom

1792-1835 - Francis II

1792-1814 - Wars with France and Napoleon I

1814-1815 - The Congress of Vienna

1848 - Revolutionary uprisings, the abolishment of servitude

1849 - The first constitution is announced

The Czech educator František Martin Pelcl commented on the voiding of Austrian censorship by Joseph II at the time with the words:

"If earlier a scholar wished to publish a treatise, the censors searched through it and not only did they cross out everything good, but also through various insults frightened the author away from any further continuation. All good books were banned and thus progress in the sciences was held back, so that we, Czechs, were considered by our neighbors to be utter ignoramuses and idiots. ... Thanks be given to the wise professions of Joseph II, sent by God, that these oppressors of the spirit have been removed and expunged. Hail to him!"

Politics

The beginning of the Maria Theresa's reign was heavily affected by the fact that a number of neighboring monarchs refused to acknowledge her claim to the throne. Even though her father had made diplomatic efforts for many years, trying to ensure the right of succession to the empire through the female line (the Pragmatic Sanction), the young empress was forced to fight for her rights through a series of wars. It was during these wars that the Bohemian kingdom definitively lost an ancient part of its realm, the wealthy province of Silesia.

The need for an effectively functioning state and the attempt to equal the most developed European countries through the use of force, compelled the rulers into making a whole series of interventions in the petrified conditions found in the empire. Comprehensive and multilateral reforms, justified with Enlightenment ideologies, shook up the most backward institutions of state and society. In this effort, the Czech nobleman, Václav Antonín Kounic [Wenzel Anton von Kaunitz] was a major aide to Maria Theresa. In spite of this fact, the Czech lands lost a great part of their autonomy as a result of this centralization.

The reform effort reached a peak during the reign of Joseph II, the eldest son of Maria Theresa's sixteen children (his sister Marie Antoinette, the wife of Louis XVI, died on the guillotine in 1793). Religious tolerance was pronounced, serfdom and censorship were ended, a civil code and an improved criminal code were introduced as were a whole range of other changes. Enlightened absolutism thus resulted in systematic attention to most of the questions of everyday life. The directing role was taken over by the state, specifically, a professional bureaucratic apparatus.

However, Joseph's successors, his brother Leopold II and especially his nephew Francis II (one of "only" thirteen children), did not continue his reform efforts and in fact, they partially revoked some reforms. The state and its institutions, which had originally derived from the need for reason and understanding, became used more and more as tools of power. They also contributed to the two-decade long war with France. Enlightened absolutism was gradually replaced with a policed absolutism.

Although the Napoleonic Wars did not directly touch the Czech lands very much, one of the largest the wars' largest battles took place within its borders. In southern Moravia, near the small town of Austerlitz (in Czech, Slavkov), Napoleon fought the "Battle of Three Emperors," one of his most famous victories, in 1805.

In that same year, the Czech nobleman Jan Joseph Václav Radecký [Johann Joseph Wenzel Radetzky] was made a general. He later became field marshal and was the mainstay of the Austrian armies for the next half century.

Dissatisfaction with the police state of Chancellor Metternich and at the same time in response to a restlessness in the rest of Europe, meant that the revolutionary storm of 1848 broke out in the Czech lands as well. An armed uprising in Prague in the summer of 1848 was broken by General Windischgrätz following his bombarding of the city with artillery.

In spite of the defeat of the military uprisings, important results were achieved in Austria as the result of the revolutionary events: Metternich fell, the feeble-minded Ferdinand V was replaced on the throne by the eighteen year-old Francis Joseph I and corvée was abolished. The imperial parliament met in constitutional session in the south Moravian city of Kroměříž and at the beginning 1849, a constitution was proclaimed.

Society

Attempts by the state to get the greatest possible revenue from taxation led to an number of crackdowns in agrarian regions. The results, however, were not always clear cut and there was a peasant uprising in Bohemia in 1775.

The late mercantilist views of the state led to the foundation of textile manufactures. The husband of Maria Theresa, Emperor Francis I of Lorraine, was himself known as the "the monarchy's largest factory owner." Medieval weights and measures were unified, as were tariffs, and the first paper money was issued.

It was not possible to deal with the difficult transportation situation in the kingdom other than through the usual methods. Therefore, instead of the unrealistic project for a canal between the Elbe and Danube, a horse-drawn railway was constructed between České Budějovice and Linz. It was the first railway of its kind in continental Europe.

The mountainous border regions of the Czech lands provided Europe with linen for sail canvas as well as for household purposes. Czech glass and porcelain were also renowned across the globe. In addition to the manufacturing of linen, wool manufacturing also became widespread. The largest city of Moravia, Brno, even became known as the Austrian Manchester.

On the occasion of Leopold II's coronation in 1791, an exhibition was held in Prague at which the branches of manufacturing from across the whole of the country were spontaneously presented. This event is sometimes referred to as the first industrial exhibition on the entire continent.

The greenhouse effect caused by continental blockades during the Napoleonic Wars, led to the development of new branches of industry, some of which, e.g. the refining of sugar from sugar beets, became a permanent feature of the Czech economy.

An emphasis on understanding and scientific knowledge also led to the establishment of scientific organizations. In 1784, various private associations established the Royal Bohemian Society of Science in Prague. Various Masonic lodges were also of great importance. Important representatives of the sciences in the Czech lands at this time include the mathematician Joseph Stepling, the naturalist Ignác Born and the little known constructor of a lightning rod, Prokop Diviš.

From the following generation, the mathematician and social thinker Bernard Bolzano is worthy of special mention. In the field of technology, important figures include Josef Ressel, the inventor of the screw propeller and another Czech inventor, Josef Brožek, who constructed and presented a steam-driven, self-propelled vehicle (automobile) in Prague in 1815. Only thirty years after this event, in 1845, was the first true train welcomed to Prague.

Culture

Among the arts at this time, it was music which occupied the leading role. Outstanding representatives of Czech music were active throughout Europe: in Germany (Jan Václav Stamic, followed by František and Jiří Antonín Benda), in Italy

(e.g. Josef Mysliveček), in France (e.g. Jan Ladislav Dusík and Antonín Rejcha) and of course in Vienna (e.g. Jan Křtitel Vaňhal or František Adam Míča).

On the other hand, Prague was one of the favorite places of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. In 1787, he presented the premiere of his opera *Don Giovanni* at what was then the Nostic Theater. His comment “*my Praguers understand me*” has also become famous.

The narrowly pragmatic approach of Enlightenment monarchs towards society as a whole manifested itself in their relation to the “unnecessary” creative arts. A large number of valuable works of art were destroyed when dozens of monasteries and convents were closed during the reign of Joseph II. The limitations of state officials were shown in the sale of the Prague Castle art collection. A painting depicting the well-known mythical scene where Leda meets Zeus, who is disguised as a swan, had the following comment written on it: “*woman, naked, being bitten by a wicked goose.*”

In architecture, the late Baroque was transformed into the fanciful Rococo and later into Classicism. Representative is the chateau of Kynžvart in western Bohemia, which was the seat of Chancellor Metternich, the leading organizer of the Congress of Vienna and the most important Austrian political figure in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Jewish culture was developing fairly independently. During the reign of Maria Theresa, Jews in the Czech lands were still subject to heavy persecution. Joseph II, however, significantly changed the position of the Jewish population with his decrees. He rescinded most of the earlier discriminatory measures (e.g. the wearing of a special symbol on the clothing, living only in ghettos, the charging of higher fees in government offices, the closing of some types of employment and all levels of the nobility to Jews, a ban on the ownership of real estate, etc.). On the other hand, some civil obligations were expanded to include Jews (compulsory military service) and Jews were required en masse to take German names. This led to the mass Germanizing of the majority of the Czech-speaking Jewish population of the Czech lands.

The Modern Czech People - The Fruit of Intellect, Defiance and Diligence

Chronology

End of the 18th century - The linguistic treatises of Josef Dobrovský

1835-1839 - Josef Jungmann publishes his multi-volume *Czech-German Dictionary*

1846 - Karel Havlíček's article “Slav and Czech”

1850-1859 - The neoabsolutism of Alexander, Baron von Bach

1866 - The Austro-Prussian War

1867 - The Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich*

1868-1883 - Construction of the National Theater

1879 - Czechs end their “passive resistance” and participate in the Imperial Parliament

1880s - Czechs gain ascendancy in the Chambers of Commerce and Trade

1891 - Electoral victory of the Young Czechs, Jubilee Economic Exhibition in Prague

“As well as being Czechs, we are also Austrians, i.e. members of an association, with whose continuation rests our existence. Austria is not a German state, its six million Germans cannot make decisions over the will of the clear majority of the rest of the population. ...eighteen million Slavs, of whom seven million speak Czech, a literary language. Austria must incline towards a Slavic tendency, provided it does want to place its own future existence at risk.”

This argument, in the spirit of Austro-Slavism, was written at mid-century by the Czech author Jakub Malý.

Politics

From the end of the eighteenth century, and throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, a process was taking place in the Czech lands, one called by the older generation, under the influence of Romanticism, the “Czech national renaissance” [české národní obrození]. Basically, this was a process of emancipation from the Habsburg monarchy for the *non sui juris* Czech nation and its transformation into a modern national group.

Even though it seemed to enthusiastic Czech patriots that this “rebirth” of the nation was totally unique and exceptional, elsewhere in Europe a similar process of formation was (and is still) taking place among other “small” or “dependent” nations, be it with varying intensity and varying results. Among the successful efforts are those of the Irish, Norwegians, Finns, Bulgarians and the Baltic nations as well as the recent successes of the Slovaks, Slovenes and Croats. Among the less successful have been the nationalist movements of the Flemings, Bretons, the Basque, the Welsh and the Scots.

The process of forming a modern Czech nation encompasses three interrelated stages: a) a period of linguo-cultural endeavors, b) political struggle, and c) economic emancipation. In spite of the clear succession of these stages, there is a certain chronological overlap between them.

The introduction of German as the state language at the end of the eighteenth century and the necessity of using German during any official or upper-class social contact led to the assimilation of part of the Czech ethnic population. The language boundary between Czech and German was no longer only ethnic or geographic, but was to a large degree social. On the part of the Czech intelligentsia, this fact led to attempts at revitalizing the use of the Czech language, or as the case was later, establishing its legal equality.

The first step was the codification of the Czech language, credit for which is mainly due to Josef Dobrovský and Josef Jungmann. The second step was the conscious spreading of its use. Work here was taken up mainly by the lower priesthood, the lower educated classes and the urban bourgeoisie. This fact, together

with the ethnic assimilation of higher social classes, resulted in the fact that the newly-formed Czech nation always had a strongly democratic nature.

From the beginning, the formulation of political goals was dominated by Romantic efforts to fall back on one, great Slavic nation. It was only shortly after mid-century that Karel Havlíček, influenced by the experience of a visit to Russia, rejected the identification of Czechs with the other Slavic nations and staked out the need for a separate Czech way. As a critic of absolutism and political spokesman of the Czechs, Havlíček was later interned by the Austrian state.

The description of the so-called “Austro-Slavism” by Havlíček was expanded upon by the historian František Palacký. With the political party of the “Old Czechs,” he argued for the federalization of the monarch in such a way that the strong interest of the Slavs, especially the Czechs would be respected.

These efforts were cruelly disappointed with the creation of Austria-Hungary in 1867. Dualism weakened the relatively conciliatory Old Czechs and the confidence of the Czech people was more and more given to a newly established political party, the “Young Czechs.” Their fierce, nationalistic drive brought success in the 1891 elections, when they went to the top of the Czech political scene.

At the very end of the century, a number of other political groupings came into existence. With this, the process of creating political parties typical in modern parliamentary democracies was completed.

Society

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the focus of the Czech economy began gradually to change. The earlier textile and glass manufactories concentrated in border regions, most of which were inhabited by a German-speaking population, began to stagnate and were more and more frequently replaced by new lines of production. Among these were the food processing industry, but it was engineering works which were of primary importance.

A large proportion of these newly developing industries were located in Czech-speaking regions found in the interior of the Czech lands. This allowed the Czech-speaking population to gradually gain a level of economic equality with their German-speaking fellow citizens.

Czechs had decisive role in the food processing industry. This was a result of their close relationship to agricultural production. From the beginning, this decisive role may be seen in the milling business and later in sugar refining, malting and, understandably, beer brewing.

It is precisely during this period that many breweries were established in Bohemia, breweries which would influence world-wide development. Beer from Plzeň (in German, *Pilsner Beer*) became the most widely distributed type of light-colored lager in the world. On the other hand, the brand name of the beer from České Budějovice (“*Budweiser*”) was unjustly taken over by one of the largest beer brewers in the world (the American “*Bud*”).

A national industrial exhibition was held in Prague in 1891. While a number of German entrepreneurs boycotted the exhibition, it nonetheless demonstrated the economically developed nature of the country and the dominant role of Czechs in particular. This exhibition was evidence of the increasing economic emancipation of the Czech nation.

The Czech offensive into the economic life of the country and German embitterment at the gradual loss of their position found expression in some expressions of economic nationalism. The motto of this economic nationalism, “*each to his own*,” was rather simply a slogan and affected only a small part of business and consumer consumption. The majority of production was directed by its own economic rules.

The growing national consciousness of Czechs manifested itself in the position of a great number of scientists whose fields of study did not directly deal with questions of nationality, language, history or culture. As representatives of all of these scientists, those who might be mentioned include the biologist Jan Svatopluk Presl, the discoverer of the cell Jan Evangelista Purkyně and the “Czech Edison” František Křižík.

Culture

The typical settings for Czechs at the beginning of the process of emancipation were small cities and towns in the interior of the Czech lands. It was here, and in Czech villages, that an eclectic mix of earlier architectonic styles found expression in the form of buildings using the so-called “folk Baroque.” In many areas, where the process of industrialization in the following decades had only a very limited impact, these charming structures have survived and today form an inherent part of the Czech countryside.

The assimilated nobility once again built or reconstructed spectacular chateaux on their estates, the majority of them in either a Romantic style or using one of the historicizing styles. One of the most popular of these styles was the neo-Gothic.

In the larger cities, the vast majority of the population was German-speaking. Cultural life in these cities was subordinated to this fact. The symbol of the revitalization of the Czech nation was therefore to be the building of a Czech national theater in Prague. Funds for the construction of this theater were collected for many years across the whole of the country. The laying of the theater’s cornerstone was a great political manifestation by the Czech people. A whole generation of artists participated in the project. The National Theater building, located on an embankment of the Vltava, is one of the dominant landmarks of modern Prague (as is the neo-Renaissance building of the National Museum on Wenceslas Square).

A wide variety of cultural associations were of great support in the emancipation of the Czech nation. The most important group was probably the physical culture and gymnastic society “*Sokol*” [Falcon]. This association was founded in 1862 by Miroslav Tyrš in the spirit of the classical Greek principle of *kalokagathia*. Within a few years this society grew into a mass movement with a strong patriotic and

nationalistic focus. Members of the society were very active in strengthening the national self-consciousness of the Czechs and their public appearances became an integral part of all types of national celebrations.

Accommodating the World During the “Belle Époque”

Chronology

1866 - Austro-Prussian War

1873 - Crash of the Vienna Stock Exchange and the onset of an economic crisis

1892 - Introduction of crown currency

1879 - Count Badeni's language decree

1905-1907 - General strike and the introduction of universal, equal and direct suffrage

1914 - Assassination of the heir to the throne Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo

Reports of ethnic hatred in the Czech lands were often exaggerated, as is documented by the English author Jerome K. Jerome with his typical humorous hyperbole: In Germany, *“they advised us not to talk German in Prague....and to be mistaken for a German in certain streets of Prague is inconvenient to a man whose staying powers in a race are not what once they were. However, we did talk German in certain streets in Prague; it was a case of talking German or nothing. The Czech dialect is said to be of great antiquity and of highly scientific cultivation. Its alphabet contains forty-two letters, suggestive to a stranger Chinese. It is not a language to be picked up in a hurry. We decided that on the whole there would be less risk to our constitution in keeping to German, and as a matter of fact no harm came to us.”*

Politics

The long reign of Emperor Francis Joseph I (who ruled from 1848 to 1916, and along with the Japanese emperor, Hirohito, is the longest reigning monarch in history) was an era of gradual and more or less peaceful change. The Austro-Prussian War was followed by an almost half century of peace. This era of calm passed apparently without major upheavals, urban society stabilized and experienced a life full of social hustle and bustle. In spite of appearances, significant political, social and ethnic shifts did occur in this period.

Austria changed into Austria-Hungary and a new constitution was written. Attempts at “trialism” (i.e. a triple monarch) and a “Czech-Austrian” compromise (or *Ausgleich*) at the beginning of the 1870s collapsed. At the end of the 1870s, the government of Count Taaf took office in Cisleithia (i.e. the lands west of the Leitha River, with the official name for the western part of Austria-Hungary being “The Kingdoms and Lands Represented in the Imperial Parliament”). This government

lasted through the first half of the 1890s. After this, governments alternated at fairly brief intervals.

The problem with the parliamentary system was limited suffrage. In spite of several reforms, suffrage at the end of the nineteenth century was restricted by the amount of tax paid and social standing. It was only in 1907, following the 1905 general strike organized by the Social Democrats, that there was a change.

An attempt to equalize the status of the Czech language was also made at the end of the century. However, the language ordinance of Count Badeni in 1897, resulted in a wave of nationalist unrest (Germans felt threatened by the ordinance and Czechs were not happy with the compromises in the end result) and it was in time withdrawn.

There were, however, realistic voices which resonated in this nationalistically inflamed atmosphere. One of those voices was Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, a professor of philosophy and sociology at the university in Prague. He had stepped forward at the end of the 1880s with criticism of the so-called “Manuscripts,” where he questioned (correctly) the authenticity of these “ancient Slavonic” documents, going against Czech public opinion. Towards the end of the century, he stood up against primitive anti-Semitism just as fearlessly. As his friends congratulated him on his sixtieth birthday in 1910, it seemed that the work of this contemplator of ultimate truth was at an end. In fact, his life's chief accomplishment would wait until after World War I.

Culture

It was in May of 1873, just during the world exhibition being held in Vienna at that time, that the Vienna stock market crashed. This was followed by a lengthy economic crisis, which to one degree or another was experienced throughout the world. The path out of this depression was the gradual limiting of economic liberalism on the one hand and the introduction of new technology, the second industrial revolution, on the other.

The Czech lands continued to strengthen their reputation as the workshop of the Habsburg empire. The main railway lines were completed and towards the end of the century, the construction of local railway spurs was expanded. Heavy industry and engineering also continued their expansion as did mining and the new chemicals industry. A major share of production was concentrated in the areas around the cities of Ostrava, Plzeň and Kladno.

Traditional “family” businesses were increasingly converted into joint-stock corporations. Banks played an important role in this process. The Czech banking sector initially suffered from a lack of funds because they had developed from self-help loan cooperatives. However, after the turn of the century, Czech banks had already turned Prague into the second most important financial center in the monarchy. The splendid palaces of these financial institutions dating from this period provide evidence of this.

Entirely new products, e.g. the first automobiles, began to appear. The Škoda Works in Plzeň became the largest engineering firm, not only in the Czech lands, but in the whole of the monarchy. A wide range of products (e.g. heavy steam engines, equipment for factories and major parts for ships) were sold throughout Europe. In spite of his Czech name, Emil Škoda, the founder of the firm, was a German-speaking businessman. His uncle, Dr. Josef Škoda, was a well-known Viennese doctor (for example, he treated the Empress Elizabeth, i.e. Sissi) and scientist and one of the founders of the Austrian school of medicine.

The German and German-Jewish communities in the Czech lands were known for their sophisticated culture and intellectual capacity. The full development of this capacity, however often took place beyond the boundaries of the Czech lands, either in Vienna or even outside of Austria. For example, the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud comes from a Moravian Jewish family and the well-known economist and political scientist Joseph A. Schumpeter was born in the Bohemian-Moravian border region.

On the other hand, many German-speaking scientists were active in the Czech lands for long periods of time. They included the founder of genetics Gregor Johann Mendel, who lived for many years in the Augustinian monastery in Brno, the physicists Ernst Mach (who taught at the German university in Prague) and Albert Einstein (he worked here in the years shortly before the war). Bohemia also occupies a place in the history of science because the pitchblende, from which Marie Curie first obtained the element radium, came from Jáchymov.

Society

The close of the nineteenth century is marked by a turning away from historicizing styles and the dominance of Art Nouveau. This fancy, decorative style filled the interiors of new, palatial buildings, be they public (e.g. the *Obeční dům* [Municipal House] in Prague) or private (e.g. the offices of various financial institutions) in Prague and the other larger cities of the Czech lands.

A whole series of Czech artists applied this new style in everyday life. One of these artists, it was Alphonse [Alfons] Mucha whose work influenced the entirety of the European Art Nouveau.

In the period shortly before World War I, cubism generated a strong response in the Czech lands. It not only affected painting, but architecture, sculpture and the arts and crafts. This was one of the few countries where cubism took one the form of a comprehensive artistic style. The works of Czech cubism represent one of the pinnacles of this style in Europe.

One of the traditional areas through which Czechs addressed the world was music. The composer Antonín Dvořák achieved fame, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. In the 1890s, he was even the director of the National Conservatory in New York City. The Czech soprano Emmy Destinn [Emma Destinová] was a frequent partner of Enrico Caruso at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. She also appeared for many years at Covent Garden in London.

There can be no doubt that Gustav Mahler is one of the greats of world music. Born in Humpolec, he spent many active years in Olomouc and Prague. Another person who falls into this category is the composer Leoš Janáček, who worked in Brno and whose greatest success would come after World War I.

German-language culture also developed in Prague, which was a multi-ethnic cultural center. In addition to the German Theater, whose repertory was among the best in central Europe, this culture primarily took the form of German-language literature. A great number of authors, many of them of Jewish origin, achieved world fame. Among those with a greater or lesser relationship to Prague at the turn of the century were Rainer Marie Rilke, Gustav Meyrink, Max Brod and Franz Werfel. Egon Erwin Kisch began his journalistic career here. The founder of world pacifism and the first woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize, Bertha von Suttner (née Kinská) was also born in the Czech lands. But without a doubt, the most famous Prague author was Franz Kafka. With his works, Kafka has left a deep mark, not only on literature, but on all the creative arts in the twentieth century.

The Establishment of Czechoslovakia (1914-1918)

Chronology

- 1914 - The outbreak of war
- 1915 - Establishment of a domestic resistance movement
- Establishment of an international resistance movement
- 1916 - Formation of the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris
- 1917 - The Writers' Manifesto
- The Battle of Zborov
- 1918 - The Twelfth Night Agreement
- France acknowledges the right of the Czechoslovak nation to independence
- Formation of the National Committee
- A provisional Czechoslovak government is proclaimed in Paris
- An independent Czechoslovak state is proclaimed in Prague

"Czechoslovak people! Your eternal dream has become reality. On this day the Czechoslovak state has joined the ranks of the world's independent, cultured states. ...All that you do, you are doing from this moment forward as a new, free member of the great family of independent, free nations. You will not disappoint the expectations of the whole of the cultured world."

Proclamation of the Czechoslovak National Council, October 28, 1918.

Society

"And so they've killed our Ferdinand," announces the charwoman to Mr. Švejk in the first sentence of the most famous novel of Czech war literature: *The Good Soldier Švejk and his Fortunes in the World War* by Jaroslav Hašek. The assassination of the heir to the throne in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo quickly set off one of the greatest

military conflicts in history - the Great War, later World War I. Within a few days at the end of July and the beginning of August in 1914, the world found itself buffeted within the flames of war.

Czechs did not really want to join the tumult of war. The satire of Hašek's novel was on the spot. In comparison with the empire's other nations, the uniform of the imperial army was viewed with displeasure by Czech soldiers.

It was not long before this opinion was expressed by soldiers on the front line. At the beginning of April 1915, the entire 28th Prague regiment deserted to the Russians. In June, they were followed by the 36th Mladá Boleslav regiment. Further groups and individual soldiers went into captivity with both fear and relief.

A totally different approach was taken by those Czechs living abroad, especially those in Russia and France. As early as August 1914, they created their own volunteer military units, Czechs in Kiev formed the "Czech Cohort" and Czechs in France formed the "Nazdar" [Hurrah] platoon. This platoon was destroyed virtually to the last man at the Battle of Arras in May 1915.

It was primarily in Russia that Czech and Slovak prisoners of war began to join with these volunteer units and together they created an army - the Czechoslovak Legion. The legion's task as its primary aim fighting on the side of the Allies in the name of a state which did not yet exist, in the name of Czechoslovakia. In the spring of 1918, legionnaire units were also created in Italy and France. By the end of the war 90,000 Czech and Slovak soldiers had fought in the ranks of the Czechoslovak Legion.

The first appearance of the legion on the battlefield was at the Battle of Zborov in the Ukraine. Not only were the legionnaires victorious in this battle, but they displayed such a martial spirit that they at once won respect across the world. They also became a compelling argument for the leaders of the Czechoslovak resistance abroad in their attempts to promote the idea of an independent Czechoslovak state. Victories at Doss' Alto in Italy and Vouziers in France towards the end of the war only confirmed the fighting prowess of the legionnaires.

Politics

In the summer of 1914, the Czech political parties were surprised the war and could only manage professing their loyalty to the emperor. The only people prepared for a similar situation with any kind of a political program were the current leader of official Czech politics, Karel Kramář and the Prague university professor Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. But while Kramář dreamt, unrealistically, of a great "Slavic" empire headed by the Russian czar, Masaryk had turned his attention to the democratic powers of Western Europe, i.e. Britain and France and later, the United States.

In the autumn of 1914, these two figures began together to build up a domestic resistance movement directed against Austria-Hungary, the "Mafia." But Masaryk was soon forced to go into exile. It was while in exile, in Geneva and on the anniversary of the burning at the stake of Master John Huss, July 6, 1915, that he

began his international program. At that time, the majority of leading Czech political figures, who were unprepared to take similar steps (i.e. exile), had already been arrested and some, in particular Kramář, had been sentenced to death for treason.

Masaryk found support abroad from Czech and Slovaks compatriots, especially those living in the United States of America. His closest colleagues, Edvard Beneš and Milan Rastislav Štefánik, a Slovak in the service of the French air forces, were of great help to him. In November 1915, they presented a manifesto in which they openly proclaimed "*We are struggling for an independent Czechoslovak state.*" In the following year, 1916, they set up an organizational center, the Czechoslovak National Council and tried to bring leading Allied representatives over to their cause.

The domestic Czech political scene only became energized in 1918. In the "Twelfth Night Declaration", in which the ideal of an independent Czech state joined together in one unit with Slovakia is supported. Over the course of that year, Czech politicians built up their organizational institutions, primarily the National Committee.

A supportive position by the West was quickened in part by changes on the military front but especially by the initially accidental (but all the more decisive for that) intervention of the Czechoslovak legions against the Bolsheviks in Russia in May 1918. France was the first to acknowledge the right of the Czechoslovak nation to independence in June 1918. They were quickly followed by other countries, including Great Britain, the United States, Italy and Japan.

It was only in October of 1918 that Edvard Beneš proclaimed a provisional Czechoslovak government in Paris. Masaryk, following on from this step, issued the "Declaration of the Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation" on October 18. Of course, the main events began to happen at home.

On October 28, 1918, the citizens of Prague read that Austria-Hungary had unconditionally accepted the terms of the American president, Woodrow Wilson, for negotiating a truce. The news was interpreted as the capitulation of the Habsburg monarchy. The squares and streets filled with crowds of people celebrating the end of the war...and independence. That evening, the National Committee issued a proclamation in which it publicly declared the establishment of a new, independent Czechoslovak state. Two days later in the Slovak town of Martin, the political representatives of the Slovak people entered the Czechoslovak state.

Culture

During the more or less fifty years when the population of the Czech lands did not experience war, they became used to a rising standard of living. Economically speaking, the Czech lands were the workhorse of the whole Habsburg monarchy. Czech entrepreneurs, and not only industrialists and merchants, but craftsmen as well, acquired an abundance of self-confidence. A large number of factories, especially in the area of engineering, including Škoda, ČKD and Křižík, were among the leading suppliers of industrial goods in the Austro-Hungarian state. Their primary area of manufacturing was weapons.

Of course, the outbreak of war affected the lives of all inhabitants. All production was directed towards the war and military goals. Thanks to the interruption of imports, shortages of raw materials soon manifested themselves. Rationing of foodstuffs, coal and textiles was begun in the spring of 1915. Given Czech standards, it was quite remarkable that in the area of culture, the motto “*inter arma silent musae*” [In times of war silent are the Muses] did not seem particularly valid.

The *Jan Hus* [John Huss] monument was installed on Old Town Square in Prague in 1915. The monument’s creator, Ladislav Šaloun, considered it to be an homage to the tradition of Czech Protestantism and in defiance of official Catholicism. For those same reasons, the plague column also located on the square was torn down in October of 1918.

A large number of Czech artists donned the blue-gray military uniform and many of them fell in battle. But those who remained behind engaged in a number of activities which are significant in the history of Czech art. In the fields of creative arts there was the sculpture *Raněný* [Wounded] by Jan Štursa and the founding of a society of graphic artists, called Hollar. Then there was an exhibition in the spring of 1918 by a group of young painters, *Tvrdošijní* [Tenacious], whose members included Josef Čapek, Vlastislav Hofman, Rudolf Kremlíčka, Václav Špála and Jan Zrzavý.

In the area of literature, there was on the one hand a wave of civilism, which reacted to new technological discoveries and changes in life style. On the other hand, there were outstanding works of classic authors such as Alois Jirásek, Viktor Dyk and Jakub Dymel as well as the first fruits of the “prospective classics” Karel Čapek and Bohuslav Reynek. Jaroslav Hašek subsequently began to conceive of his *Good Soldier Švejk* based on experiences accumulated during the war while he was in uniform.

The National Theater held a celebration of Shakespeare during which they performed a great many of the plays of this great English playwright. The Leoš Janáček opera *Jenufa* premiered here in 1916; it was this opera which guaranteed Janáček’s fame across the globe.

In spite of all this, the most significant act of Czech culture was the May 1917 manifesto of Czech authors, in which the Czech intelligentsia takes up its position as the “conscience of the nation” for the first time in the twentieth century. The manifesto was a call to Czech members of the parliament in Vienna to honorably and manfully lead the Czech nation into “*a democratic Europe, a Europe of nations free and independent.*”

Inter-war Czechoslovakia - “Island of Democracy”

Chronology

1918 - Establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk becomes president

1919 - The peace treaties of Versailles and Saint-Germain

1920 - Constitution ratified

1926 - Germans enter the governing coalition

1927 - The Exhibition of Contemporary Culture in Brno

1933 - Nadir of the economic crisis in Czechoslovakia

1934 - Electoral success of the Sudeten-German parties

1938 - Increasing territorial demands of the Germans and Slovaks

- The Munich Agreement

“Each of us is capable of comparing the English constitution with an English park, and praise the slow deliberation with which it has come into being. Of course, the Czechoslovak constitution rather resembles a park which has sprung up overnight on a previously empty lot; it is necessary to plant trees and grass and wait to see if the roots take hold.”

Ferdinand Peroutka, *Building the State*

Politics

The Czechoslovak state was declared on October 28, 1918. The parliament, named the National Assembly on the model of the French Revolution, first met in mid-November. The new state was proclaimed a republic; Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was elected its first president and the first government, with Karel Kramář at its head, was named.

The first task was to set the borders of the new state. By the end of 1918, the Czechoslovak state was able to assert its power in the historical lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia and in Slovakia. In May 1919, Subcarpathian Rus, in the east of the republic, was included. International legal status was subsequently conferred on the country’s borders at the 1919-1920 Paris Peace Conference.

The most immediate task for parliament was the creation of a constitution, which would determine the form of the Czechoslovak political system. The basic unit of this system were political parties who would struggle for power within the framework of a parliamentary democracy. The most important parties were the Agrarian Party, the People’s Party, the National Democrats, National Socialists and Social Democrats. Communists soon split off from the latter party. Specific to Czechoslovakia was the further division of Communists into parties based on the individual nationalities of the country and that there existed a power center above the parties called “the Castle,” which was focused on President Masaryk and was named after his official seat.

Czechoslovakia was established as the state of the “Czechoslovak people,” which grouped Czechs and Slovaks, who together made up more than two-thirds of the populations. The rights of national minorities - Germans, Hungarians, Poles and Ruthenians - were also guaranteed. In spite of an initial period of cooperation within the new state, there were attempts to secede or establish autonomy, especially among the Germans and Slovaks. These attempts acquired greater intensity following the economic crisis at the beginning of the thirties and following the rise of Adolf Hitler to power in Germany. By the mid-thirties, the German minority was dominated by Konrad Henlein’s Sudeten-German movement, whose motto was the irredentist “*Heims ins Reich*” [“Home in the Reich”].

Czechoslovakia was a confirmed supporter of the Versailles system. In foreign policy, they focused on cooperation with France and on their own alliance, the Little Entente (with Yugoslavia and Romania). During the 1930s, Czechoslovakia was also one of the main supporters of collective security guaranteed by the League of Nations. Of course, in September 1938 Czechoslovakia succumbed to international pressure exerted by the Great Powers in Europe when they acceded to the agreement on withdrawal from the Czechoslovak border regions in favor of Nazi Germany. This was the agreement signed in Munich by Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany.

Society

While in many areas, society in the new Czechoslovak state was connected with the former Habsburg monarchy, there was at the same time attempts by society to rupture these former bonds.

In February 1919, a new Czechoslovak monetary system was created, followed quickly by land reform which confiscated the property of the large landholders, primarily the nobility, thus satisfying the hunger of peasants for land.

The Czech lands remained a region with developed industrial production, among the world leaders and more and more focused on the export market. New rationalized business methods were introduced. The strongest supporter of these methods was Tomáš Baťa, the founder of the shoe manufacturing industry in Zlín.

The economic depression at the beginning of the thirties struck Czechoslovakia somewhat later, but all the more intensely. Initially the depression manifested itself in agriculture, but from the summer of 1931 onwards, there was a sharp decline in industrial production which only bottomed out at the beginning of 1933. At that point, the level of production was only sixty percent of what it had been in 1929.

Government intervention in the economy were not effective enough to prevent rising unemployment. Together with a rise in unemployment was an increase in protests and strikes. Border regions, where the population was predominately “German,” were particularly badly hit, as were Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus. The populations of the these regions reacted to the increasing poverty and increasing prices with nationalistic and fascist tendencies.

At the same time, the 1930s were a period where an unusual degree of solidarity with persecuted democrats from across Europe was characteristic. Volunteers left to defend democratic Spain with weapons in their hands; Czechoslovakia became an important center of German exiles and provided asylum to a large number of Germans who fought against Hitler and Nazism (e.g. the brothers Thomas and Heinrich Mann and the philosopher Theodor Lessing). This period followed on from a tradition established at the beginning of Czechoslovakia’s existence, when the country became a refuge for refugees fleeing Bolshevik Russia.

Czechoslovakia faced the threats from Nazi Germany with more than simply political means. The state also strengthened the army and built a system of fortifications along the border, using the French Maginot Line as a model. While these concrete and iron fortresses full of modern weaponry were already out of step with modern strategies of offensive warfare, they were able to withstand forces three times superior in numbers. At the same time, an air force and anti-aircraft defense system were built up. The latter used the megatron, which was invented by the Czech physicist Augustin Žáček in 1925 and which formed the basis for the construction of radar. But the greatest discovery by Czech scientists in the inter-war period was by far the polarographic analytic method in 1922. Its discoverer, Jaroslav Heyrovský, would later be awarded the Noble Prize for Chemistry of 1959.

Culture

The establishment of the Czechoslovak state meant fundamental changes for the development of Czech culture. This was not simply because the Czechs and Slovaks now had their own nation-state. Political democracy ensured easier access to education both for them and for other ethnic groups and at the same time allowed the free expression of a wide variety of ideas and opinions, different in their artistic testimony and in their ideological or national focus.

Changes in schooling and education were quite obvious. Charles University was reestablished and new universities were created in Brno and Bratislava, institutions of higher education with a technical focus also grew. The German-language Charles-Ferdinand University continued to function and universities for Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish emigrants from the USSR were also established. Each ethnic group, not only Czechs and Slovaks, had a legally ensured right to basic education in their own language and to secondary schooling.

Both the literary and creative arts were influenced by contemporary modernist trends which primarily came from France. Cubism (e.g. Otto Gutfreund), surrealism (e.g. Jindřich Štýrský and Toyen) and abstract painting (e.g. František (or François) Kupka) generated the greatest responses. Contemporary European modernism could also be heard in music, especially in the works of Bohuslav Martinů.

Some specifically Czech trends did form alongside these foreign influences. Leoš Janáček remained loyal to folk music; in the field of literature the most significant contribution was poetism (e.g. Vítězslav Nezval and Jaroslav Seifert). In the field of arts and crafts, the most important was Art Deco, which primarily made its way into the decorative arts. The field of architecture was marked by a struggle between decorativism and functionalism (Josef Gočár and Josef Chochol) and the tenets of urbanism were applied more and more (for example in Hradec Králové and in Zlín). New phenomena such as film and radio also impacted society.

German cultural life continued to create ideas of European-wide significance, as can be seen in the works of Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke and Franz Werf. “German Prague” remains a term acknowledged across Europe.

Physical education, physical culture and sport continued to acquire an ever more significant role. In addition to the Czechoslovak Sokol organization, the Czech Olympic movement played an important international role. The 8th Olympic Congress was held in Prague in May of 1925 and one of the important Olympic officials was Jiří Stanislav Guth-Javorský. In terms of individual sports, soccer and ice hockey in particular gained in popularity. In football, Czechoslovakia finished second in the 1934 World Cup held in Italy and the club teams AC Sparta and SK Slavia were victorious in the Central European Cup. Czechoslovakia was European ice hockey champion a number of times and a level of international respect was achieved by the team of LTC Prague.

The Road From Subjugation to Subjugation

Chronology

1938 - Formation of the "Second Republic"
1939 - Nazi occupation, creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia
- Closing of Czech colleges and universities
1940 - The formation of a Czechoslovak government in-exile in London
1942 - Assassination of Richard Heydrich, the destruction of Lidice
1943 - Treaty between Czechoslovakia and the USSR
1945 - The government's Košice Plan for the renewal of Czechoslovakia
- Prague Uprising, liberation of Czechoslovakia
- Nationalization of banks and large factories
1948 - Communist putsch

"The proper division of this space, seen from the German side, is only one of the means and methods of definitively controlling and taking this space.... This space must one day become German and in the end, the Czech has no business here."

Reinhard Heydrich, speech given on his accession as *Reichsprotektor* in October 1941

Politics

The Germany army quickly began to occupy Czechoslovak border regions following the Munich Agreement at the end of September 1938. By mid-October, Czechoslovakia had lost territory amounting to 30,000 km², more than three million inhabitants, its frontier fortresses and important industrial factories. Poland and Hungary speedily put forward their own territorial claims against Czechoslovakia, the former in the Těšín region and the latter in southern Slovakia.

Czechoslovakia was not only attacked by its neighbors, but an internal process of disintegration also took place. The autonomous statuses of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus were acknowledged. Following the resignation of President

Edvard Beneš, Emil Hácha was elected president. The new right-wing government introduced totalitarian principles into Czech politics and society.

When the Slovaks declared an independent state in mid-March 1939, President Hácha, under pressure from the Nazis, went to Berlin, where he placed "*the fate of the Czech lands in the hands of the Führer.*" Germany occupied the Czech lands on March 15, 1939 and Adolf Hitler established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The German occupation, which lasted for six years, took the form of a colonial administration. Czech autonomy was formally maintained, with an administration headed by a protectorate government and a state president (Hácha). However, with the increasing level of resistance by the people, Czech autonomy was increasingly truncated.

Following the outbreak of World War II, a resistance center began to form during the summer of 1940 in London around Edvard Beneš and Jan Masaryk. This center established a government-in-exile and attempted to direct domestic resistance to the Nazis as well. A similar center was formed by Communists in Moscow during the summer of 1941.

Beneš, based on his experiences from Munich, was more and more turning towards cooperation with the Soviet Union and in December 1943, Beneš concluded a treaty on cooperation with Soviet officials.

The growing influence of Stalin's Soviet Union on Czechoslovak politics became evident when the administrative organs of the future state were being formed in the spring of 1945. Communists took up a strong position in these organs. A program for the post-war renewal of Czechoslovakia was announced at the beginning of April, 1945. The Slovaks in August 1944 once again declared their support for the tradition of Czechoslovakia with an uprising against the Fascists. Based on an agreement reached between the United States and the Soviet Union and following a spontaneous uprising by the people of Prague against their occupiers in May of 1945, the city was liberated by the Soviet Army.

Once Communists were in government, they began to fulfill a number of their promises, the most important of which were the nationalization of banks and large factories. Following the elections of May 1946, Communists occupied more than one-third of the seats in parliament and stood at the head of a coalition government.

In contrast with other countries in central and eastern Europe, however, a plurality of political parties was maintained in Czechoslovakia. The Communists began to lose influence following the rejection of the American Marshall Plan in the summer of 1947. As a result of this weakened position, they were forced to take advantage of a conflict within the governing coalition in February 1948 and seize power, in part using their own armed militia.

Society

The main goal of the occupying Nazis was to use the economic potential of the Czech lands to the maximum in their preparations for war. As a result, significant structural changes occurred in the management of the economy and industrial

production. Czech capital passed over into German hands through a variety means and Jewish property was expropriated on the basis of the Aryan Laws. An entirely new element was the management of both the economy and the workforce. "Slave laborers" were relocated based on the needs of the Reich, either within the territory of the Protectorate or in Germany itself, which increasingly became the case. While this managed economy did bring an end to unemployment, the population's standard of living did not really improve because many goods were rationed.

A number of businessmen, who were involved in production for the German war machine, began to cooperate with the occupying regime. Many ordinary Czechs also resorted to "petty collaboration." Notably, several journalists openly supported the occupying regime. They wrote articles on the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy and promoted the necessity of including the Czech nation with the Great German Reich (e.g. Emanuel Moravec and Emanuel Vajtauer).

For the majority of Czech society, who had already had a difficult time coming to terms with the loss of border regions and the forced departure of the Czech-speaking inhabitants from these regions in the autumn of 1938, the occupation was a shock from which they were not easily able to recover. An initial period of passive resistance gradually changed into active resistance. Many in the army, especially pilots, went abroad where they joined Czechoslovak foreign units and participated in many battles. The most famous was the participation of Czechoslovak pilots in the Battle of Britain during the summer of 1940.

From the very beginning, the domestic resistance movement was divided into communist and non-communist movements. These movements were made up of members of the army, functionaries of various political parties and from the ranks of the intelligentsia. Their main activities were sabotage and spying. Parachute units were dropped into the Protectorate from abroad. The tasks of these units were armed resistance against the occupiers and the creation of partisan units.

The greatest achievement of the parachutists was the assassination of the *Reichsprotektor* Reinhard Heydrich in May 1942. It was Heydrich with his draconian methods which had broken down domestic resistance. The reprisals for his death by the occupiers were even more severe. Hundreds of executions were climaxed with the burning to the ground of the villages of Lidice and Ležáky in June 1942.

A feeling of hatred towards all Germans was created in Czechs by the violent methods of the Nazi occupying powers, by frequent arrests and executions, and by the concentrating of the Jewish population in the ghetto of Terezín (Theresienstadt) and their subsequent liquidation in the concentration camps. The need for revenge manifested itself after the war when the German population was forced to emigrate from Czechoslovakia.

Culture

The general feature of Czech culture during the years of Nazi occupation was patriotism, an appeal to the Czech national consciousness joined together with a return to the past and the glorious traditions and heroic figures of Czech history.

In 1939, the general public pointedly participated in the entombing of the remains of the poet Karel Hynek Mácha in the Vyšehrad Cemetery. The National Theater staged Bedřich Smetana's opera *Libuše* about the mythical princess of that name, earlier historical novels were reissued as was the history of the Czech nation written by that founder of Czech history, František Palacký. New works of history celebrating the Czech past were also written (e.g. by Kamil Krofta and Vladislav Vančura). The figure of Božena Němcová from the era of the "national renaissance" attracted the poets František Halas and Jaroslav Seifert and the journalist Julius Fučík. The most significant feat of editing was clearly the publication *Co daly naše země Evropě a lidstvu* [*What Our Country Has Given Europe and Humanity*], edited by the well-known philologist Vilém Mathesius.

During this period, music had an exceptionally emotive effect. The favoring of Czech nationalist classics, especially the operas of Smetana and his symphonic poem cycle *Má vlast* [*My Country*], was typical. Original pieces reacting to the current situation were also written. Concerts of symphonic, folk and dance music enjoyed unprecedented popularity and modern jazz became a form of protest for the young.

The role of film grew vastly. Film versions of the classic works of Czech literature (e.g. Němcová's *Babička* [*Grandmother*]) broke all attendance records. Despite the production of some art films (e.g. *Turbína* [*The Turbine*] and *Noční motýl* [*The Night Butterfly*]), production focused mainly on comedies, which were supposed to provide relief to the populace from their difficult fate.

Many artists gave their lives on the scaffold or died in concentration camps, still others were forced to flee into exile.

Czech science suffered heavily during the Nazi occupation. Perhaps the most serious blow was the closing of all Czech colleges and universities in November 1939. This was the reaction of the occupying powers to a mass student demonstration. For several years, the training of young Czech minds was stopped and the foundations of scientific research were leveled to the ground.

In spite of these difficult conditions, several remarkable discoveries were made. For example, the first Czech penicillin, *Mykoin BF-510*, was developed towards the end of the war.

Even after liberation, Czech culture was struck by some collectivizing tendencies, e.g. the Czech film industry was nationalized as early as 1945. Generally speaking, however, cultural life returned to its prewar plurality, from historicism and psychology to modernist artistic styles. Changes were soon brought about by the February 1948 putsch.

The "Wholehearted" Building of Communism (1948 - 1969)

Chronology

1948 - Establishment of the communist regime.

1949 - The collectivization of agriculture is begun.

- 1949-1955 - Political trials
- 1952 - The triple triumph of Emil Zátopek at the Olympic Games
- 1955 - Formation of the Warsaw Pact military block
 - The first spartakiáda
- 1960 - The proclamation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic
- 1968 - Prague Spring
 - Occupation by soldiers of the Warsaw Pact

“The Communist Party has the voluntary support of the people; the party does not carry out its leading role by ruling over society, but by most devotedly serving the free, progressive and socialistic development of society. The party cannot enforce its authority, but must rather it must continuously win its authority through its actions.”

Platform of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, April 1968

Politics

In early 1948, disagreements were growing within the government between communist ministers and ministers from non-communist parties, which had reestablished their position within Czech society. The Communists dealt with this growing tension by organizing street protests. In protest against this approach, twelve non-communist ministers submitted their resignations. President Beneš, under Communist pressure and afraid of civil war, accepted the resignations on February 25. The path of the Communists to unlimited power was now open.

The putsch was followed by the persecution of opponents, with a number non-socialist party leaders fleeing into exile. Jan Masaryk apparently committed suicide. In the May parliamentary elections, the Communists received a majority of the votes and the communist leader Klement Gottwald replaced Beneš as head of state. Czechoslovakia quickly changed from a people’s democracy into a “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

After ten years, a totalitarian political system had once again formed. Czechoslovakia speedily borrowed the principles prevailing in Stalin’s USSR. The main feature was the persecution of “reaction.” Attention was primarily focused on the non-communist resistance movements from World War II and on the Catholic Church. Forced labor camps were set up, and political trials begun. More than 200,000 citizens became the victims of these trials. Many were sentenced to death, including General Heliodor Píka and a member of parliament, Milada Horáková. In the end, Communist even found “traitors” in their own ranks; the party’s general secretary Rudolf Slánský was also executed.

As a result of the February coup, Czechoslovakia found itself on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain and became the Soviet Union’s loyal fellow-traveler. An outward manifestation of this position was its participation in the Warsaw Pact military alliance, which was established in May 1945.

Following the criticism of Stalin in the USSR, there was also period of relaxation in sixties Czechoslovakia. The reasons behind the reform included economic problems. Following a long period of disinterest in “public affairs,” civil society began to be

more active and voices began to be heard stating the need for a plurality of ideas at the very least (e.g. the Congress of Authors, 1967).

At the beginning of January 1968, the criticism struck directly at the leadership of the Communist Party. Alexander Dubček was elected the Party’s leader and he was able to quickly gain the support of the vast majority of the people for the reforming of society. The principles of democratic plurality began to be slowly renewed in Czechoslovakia. However, the reformers’ efforts ran into opposition on the part of the USSR and other states in the Eastern bloc. On August 21, 1968, Warsaw Pact armies occupied Czechoslovakia, justifying this action with slogan “the joint defense of socialism.”

Society

The February coup brought changes to the economy as well as to politics. Beginning in April 1948, the parliament adopted a series of nationalizing acts, so that by the end of the year more than 95 percent of the workers in industry were working in the state sector. Forced collectivization took place in the countryside and using the Soviet model, fields were joined together to form large tracts. At the beginning of the fifties, even small businesses and craftsmen were nationalized.

All the rules of the market economy were declared invalid in a political decision and the basic principle of managing the economy became central state planning. The broad-based restructuring of manufacturing was begun. This meant that in an ideological divided world, Czechoslovakia, as an industrial giant, should become the “armory” of the whole Soviet bloc.

The Communists were initially able to gain the support of the workers for the “wholehearted” building of a new social order, in which the “worker will be his own master.” Various “socialistic competitions” were organized and “shock-worker movements” were spontaneously created.

The monetary reform of May 1953, which deprived many people of their savings, resulted in dissatisfaction among the people. As a result of this reform, however, and the introduction of a unified system of wages, the communist regime was able to “unify” Czechoslovak society and in a practical way carry out its proclaimed goal of ensuring that all people are equal in terms of “wealth,” or rather, in terms of poverty.

Among the negative consequences of this policy was a high rate of unemployment among women, the loss of a sense for honest work and quality craftsmanship, and growing thievery. The uniformity in wages was accompanied by the uniformity of consumption: everyone dressed virtually the same, from their shoes to their hats. It was only at the end of the fifties that there was a change and people were able to buy electronic goods or automobiles.

The beginning of the sixties was marked by a rapid collapse in the opinion that it was possible to maintain centralized control over the economy in the long term. A discussion therefore began in 1963 on the role of the market in socialism. However,

the reform of the economy brought with it ideological reform and was abandoned following the August 1968 occupation.

From the year 1948, the communist regime attempted to isolate the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia from the rest of the world; however, this effort was in many cases futile. For example, the explorers Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund became famous. In the late forties and again in the early sixties, they drove a Tatra automobile across Africa, Latin America and Asia. The discoverer of polarography, Jaroslav Heyrovský was awarded the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1959. The invention of the contact lens by the Czech chemist Ota Wichterle and the spacio-electrocardiograph of Vilém Laufberger also impacted the global scientific community.

Culture

The communist putsch of February 1948 brought a tragic end to the existing development of Czech culture and the loss of contact with contemporary developments in the arts. The only acceptable style was socialist realism, and that in its most dogmatic form. At the same time, thanks to Minister Zdeněk Nejedlý, culture returned to renaissance models and under the motto “*Communists heirs to the great traditions of the Czech nation,*” placed emphasis on historicism, pan-Slavic ideals and folklore. For example, modern dance music and jazz were rejected as the “products of imperialism” and instead pseudo-folk songs were promoted.

Previously independent artistic and cultural associations were replaced by centralized institutions along the lines of Soviet models (for example, the Union of Czechoslovak Writers). The task of official art was “the engaged celebration of socialism.” Monstrous works were inspired by the totalitarian regime and the clearest evidence of this can be found in architecture (for example the Hotel Internacionál in Prague) and in sculpture (clearly, the height of bad taste was the monument to Stalin erected on the Letná Plain in Prague in 1955).

Contact with modern art in Czechoslovakia was maintained by the “underground” culture. An irreplaceable role was also played by Czech intellectuals living in exile and who were mainly active on the domestic scene in the media and on the radio station Radio Free Europe (e.g. Egon Hostovský, Ferdinand Peroutka and Pavel Tigrid).

It was only in the more ideologically open sixties that Czech art once again came into contact with the rest of the world. Among those artists who attracted attention around the world were Jiří Kolář and Stanislav Kolíbal and the dramatists Ivan Vyskočil and Václav Havel. But it was film directors such as Vojtěch Jasný, Miloš Forman and Ivan Passer, representing the Czech “New Wave” who made the greatest impact. The films *Obchod na korze* [*The Shop on Main Street*], directed by Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos, and *Ostrře sledované vlaky* [*Closely Watched Trains*], directed by Jiří Menzel, won Oscars for best foreign film in 1966 and 1967, respectively.

In contrast with culture in the fifties and sixties, physical culture and sport flourished. While Communists did stop the activities of the Sokol organization, they continued in the tradition of that group to hold mass gymnastic and physical culture performances, now known as “*Spartakiáds.*” The tremendous success of the runner Emil Zátopek at the 1952 Olympic Games in Helsinki, where he won the three longest races (5000 and 10,000 meters and marathon) convinced the regime of the significance that success in sport can have for the promotion of communism in the world. In the sixties, the gymnast Věra Čáslavská, following up on Zátopek’s success, won a total of seven Olympic gold medals.

Going Downhill (The Years of Normalization 1969 -1989)

Chronology

- 1968 - The Moscow Protocol
- Law establishing the Czechoslovak federation
- 1969 - The self-immolation of Jan Palach
- The beginning of “normalization.”
- 1975 - The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe is held in Helsinki.
- 1977 - Charter 77
- 1984 - Jaroslav Seifert awarded the Noble Prize for Literature.
- 1989 - The canonization of Agnes of Bohemia.
- “Několik vět” [“A Few Lines”]
- The “Velvet Revolution”

“The first step to any meaningful changes, starting with a new Constitution and ending with economic reform, must be a fundamental change in the social climate of the country, which has to regain a spirit of freedom, trust, tolerance and plurality.”

Několik vět [A Few Lines], June 1989

Politics

On the night of August 20-21, 1968, around 600,000 soldiers from five Warsaw Pact countries occupied Czechoslovakia with the aim of suppressing the “right-wing counter-revolution.” Alexander Dubček and other leading figures in the government and Communist Party were taken into custody and flown to the Soviet Union. On August 26, 1968, after lengthy negotiations with Leonid Brezhnev, they signed the “Moscow Protocol,” which bound its Czechoslovak signatories to put an end to the Prague Spring and authorized the “temporary stationing” of Soviet military units in

Czechoslovakia. This was accompanied by measures ushering in strict control of the media. Though people of Czechoslovakia fell in line, they did not accept the occupation. In November, university students went on strike, but this did not lead to any changes; in January 1969, Jan Palach's immolation was an act of desperation.

In April 1969 Alexander Dubček was replaced as head of the Communist Party by Gustav Husák, who set in motion a return to totalitarian forms of governance; the contemporary jargon referred to this process as the "consolidation" of the political system and the "normalization" of conditions in the society. Central planning of the economy was reinstated and the people's freedom was once again suppressed. These measures led to Czechoslovakia becoming a model Communist state, a loyal fellow-traveler in the company of Brezhnev's Soviet Union.

However, following the signature of the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe held in Helsinki in 1975, organized opposition to the Communist regime began to take shape in Czechoslovakia. A citizens' initiative calling itself Charter 77 was established, its legitimacy based on an appeal to the Helsinki discussions on human and civic rights. The Charter itself had soon been signed by many leading figures in intellectual and religious circles, as well as by ordinary workers. Immediately the secret police arrested and imprisoned leading figures in the Charter 77 movement - Václav Havel, the philosopher Jan Patočka, Jiří Dienstbier, Václav Benda and others - and launched a major persecution of the opposition.

In the mid-1980s, however, fundamental changes came to the Soviet Union with the beginning of the process of *perestroika*. In Czechoslovakia, Gustav Husák was replaced in 1987 by Miloš Jakeš, who, however, was not in favor of initiating any kind of reform.

On the contrary, with the growing crisis of the regime, the Communists began to step up their repression. This first peaked following the demonstrations held in January 1989 in memory of Jan Palach's sacrifice. But the brutal police attack on the student demonstration held on November 17, 1989 evoked mass opposition on the part of the populace and launched the "Velvet Revolution." The Communist Party was forced to enter into negotiations with the Civic Forum, which was headed by Václav Havel, and in short order its monopoly on power had come to an end.

Society

With the advent of "normalization," all efforts to move towards a market economy came to naught. In 1971, the state returned officially to the system of central planning.

After 1968, the leadership of the Communist Party realized that the maintenance of living standards was a key factor in keeping the public pacified. This led to the announcement of a program of "building real socialism," which was supposed to improve the range of consumer goods available on the shelves.

In fact, however, the main emphasis continued to be on heavy industry, in particular the armaments industry. But because in the meantime Czechoslovakia had

lost many markets in the Eastern bloc as well as in Third World countries, production was carried out for its own sake. Putting off the structural transformation of the Czechoslovak economy and continuing to focus on the machine industry brought with it a heavy demand for energy. This was to be met through imports of oil from the USSR and the construction of nuclear power plants (at Jaslovské Bohunice, Dukovany and Temelín). In addition to new pipelines, other major construction projects included the freeway linking Prague and Bratislava and the Prague metro.

The people of Czechoslovakia did not welcome the "normalization" of the society proclaimed by Husák and the Communist Party. In the 1970s and 1980s many responded by emigrating; estimates place their numbers at more than 700,000. Within the country, very few became engaged in any systematic form of opposition. Most people soon reconciled themselves to "real socialism," which in fact brought to the country certain aspects of the consumer society, though this was strongly criticized officially as an expression of the capitalist way of life.

People withdrew into their private lives - their homes and their weekend cottages and cabins, if they had them - spent most of their time with their families, and took no interest in social problems. A double standard was in force, with people behaving differently in public and in private.

The passivity and lack of political interest on the part of the public at large suited the Communist regime. In fact its leading members increasingly cut themselves off from the society, trying to give the impression that they were all-powerful and wishing people to develop a sense of obligation to the Party and the system. As a result, economic crimes grew, and many goods not available freely in stores were supplied by the "shadow economy." Along with this, bureaucrats and the police became increasingly open to bribery, and corruption also flourished in other areas.

People learned to live as consumers, employing double standards. Nevertheless, in November 1989 the dissatisfaction that had built up within them exploded.

Culture

In contrast to the previous period, Czech culture became much more differentiated. This followed from the political changes and the introduction of the "normalization" process. As part of it, the media and all forms of publishing were once again brought under control, and in addition to censorship there was an increased amount of self-censorship.

At the official level, the state once again returned to the model of having separate associations for each kind of cultural activity, the leaders of which were often mediocre figures in their fields. Once again, the main task of art was considered to be that of celebrating the Communist Party. In addition to numerous statues of leaders of the "world and Czech proletariat" and a few architectural disasters (in particular the concrete Palace of Culture in Prague), official art was most evident in ideologically slanted television serials.

Many leading people in the arts emigrated, thus strengthening Czech culture abroad, among them the fiction writers Milan Kundera, Arnošt Lustig and Josef

Škvorecký, the poet Ivan Diviš, the artist Jiří Kolář, the playwright Pavel Kohout and the film directors Miloš Forman, Ivan Passer, Pavel Juráček, Jan Němec and Vojtěch Jasný.

Within Czechoslovakia, however, an alternative culture continued to exist. Some of its representatives were involved in Charter 77 (in particular Václav Havel and Jan Patočka), but most found refuge in the “grey zone” and managed to survive on the periphery of the public cultural sphere. Their literary works appeared in samizdat editions. Sculptors such as Kurt Gebauer, Karel Nepraš and Stanislav Kolíbal reacted to contemporary trends in modern art by holding private exhibitions. The greatest numbers of fans, especially among young people, were attracted to musicians, which made them the most visible group of creative people; among them the most prominent were those who wrote their own songs (Jaroslav Hutka, Vladimír Merta, Vladimír Mišík, Vlastimil Třešňák) and representatives of the musical underground (the Plastic People of the Universe, Prague Choice). In 1984, the poet Jaroslav Seifert came to international notice when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Sport and physical education remained an important area of interest for Czechs in the period of “normalization.” The Communist regime viewed it as a suitable way of gaining publicity. For this reason it revived the mass gymnastics displays known as the “Spartakiads,” and for the same reason it did all that it could to promote top-level sport. This provided a means of escape from the grayness of everyday life, and for some could even mean the possibility of traveling abroad. So the world came to acknowledge the achievements of the tennis players Martina Navrátilová and Ivan Lendl and those of the country’s soccer players (European champions in 1976) and hockey players - but was also aware of the shameful absence of Czechoslovakia at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

A New Beginning, A New Chance

Chronology

- 1990 - Czechoslovakia once again a member of the IMF and BERD
 - Law reducing the consequences of some property injustices passed
 - Small-scale Privatization Act passed
- 1991 - Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms adopted
 - The Visegrad Group is formed
 - Law concerning extrajudicial rehabilitation is agreed to
 - The withdrawal of the Soviet army from the territory of the ČSFR is completed
 - Coupon privatization is begun
- 1992 - Václav Havel resigns as president of the ČSFR
 - Deputies of the Federal Parliament adopt a constitutional amendment on the termination of the federation on 31 December 1992
- 1993 - The Czech Republic is created
 - Václav Havel is elected president of the Czech Republic
 - The Czech Republic becomes a member of the Council of Europe

1994 - The Czech Republic becomes one of the rotating, two-year members of the Security Council

- The Central European Free Trade Agreement is signed
 - The Czech Republic joins the NATO “Partnership for Peace” program
- 1995 - The Czech Republic signs an agreement on the accession of the CR to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- The agreement on the affiliation of the Czech Republic with the European Union comes into force
- 1996 - The Czech Republic submits its application to join the European Union.
- The first parliamentary elections in the independent Czech Republic take place.
 - The second chamber of the Czech parliament, the Senate, begins to function.
- 1997 - The joint Czech-German declaration on mutual relations and their future development is signed.
- The government of Premier Václav Klaus submits its resignation.
- 1998 - Václav Havel is reelected president of the Czech Republic.
- Early parliamentary elections are held.
 - Miloš Zeman is named premier and Václav Klaus becomes the speaker of the Chamber of Deputies.
- 1999 - The Czech Republic joins NATO.
- The division of property, which belonged to the former federation, between the Czech Republic and Slovakia is completed.

“We are living in extraordinary times. The human face of the world is changing so rapidly that none of the familiar political speedometers are adequate. We playwrights, who have to cram a whole human life or an entire historical era into a two-hour play, can scarcely understand this rapidity ourselves. And if it gives us trouble, think of the trouble it must give to political scientists, who spend their whole lives studying the realm of the probable and have even less experience with the realm of the improbable than playwrights.”

From the speech given by Václav Havel to the American Congress on February 21, 1990

Politics

After 1989 Czechoslovakia set out on the difficult path of “returning to Europe.” Geographically speaking, it had of course always been there, but postwar developments had put a great distance between it and the values defended and developed by the Euro-Atlantic democracies.

Hungary and Poland, which had shared a fate similar to that of Czechoslovakia following World War II, were also moving in the same direction. Their efforts to sustain and continue to develop the radical reforms they had instituted, together with their determination to become integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures, led to the establishment of the Visegrad group as a means of helping to attain these goals.

The changed political climate in Central Europe also meant a return to some very painful questions relating to the relationship between the Czechs and their German

neighbors. The signing of the Czech-German Declaration reflected the conviction that the primary need is to focus on the future and that the assessment of the past should be left to historians.

After the initial euphoria following the overthrow of the Communist regime had cooled down, it became necessary to deal with the principles underlying the further cooperation of the Czechs and Slovaks within a single state.

In Slovakia the movement in favor of the creation of an independent Slovak state began to gather increasing momentum, and differences arose between the two parts of the country on the question of economic reform. The parliamentary elections in 1992 served as a catalyst reinforcing these two trends. The new political leaders opened negotiations on the division of Czechoslovakia into two independent states. Speedy and civilized negotiations led to an agreement acceptable to both sides that provided for the division of the state on December 31, 1992. On January 1, 1993, two new states came into existence, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

Czechoslovakia and later the Czech Republic became full members of many international organizations. On March 12, 1999, the Czech Republic became a member of NATO; this marked a further important step in its integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures and, in addition, a significant increase in its security. Admission to NATO is “*a guarantee that my country will never again be the victim of foreign aggression,*” said Foreign Minister Jan Kavan, clearly alluding to Czechoslovakia’s two previous attempts in the twentieth century to ensure its security, both of which ended in failure.

Culture

The collapse of the Communist regime gave a major boost to the development of culture, which till then had been firmly bound within the straight-jacket of the “only true and scientific” Communist ideology. But a wide range of different art forms, freedom of thought and means of expression and the absence of censorship are the necessary conditions for the development of an independent culture.

Today cultural activities are sometimes hindered by insufficient funding, but nevertheless the situation today is certainly better than it was in the past, when culture was trapped in a gilded cage.

The film industry has undergone major structural changes. Certainly fewer films are now being made, but every year brings outstanding new works and Czech films are very popular with the public. In 1997 Jan Svěrák’s *Kolya* was awarded the Oscar for the best foreign film, and many other films have won awards at international film festivals.

Drama has a stable base in the traditional theaters, which are complemented by smaller, often more experimental, theaters as well as by amateur companies. Among the great theatrical events of the 1990s were the productions mounted at Prague’s Divadlo Na zábradlí by Petr Léb, whose recent tragic death has been so keenly felt by the theatrical community.

The modern musical is more or less a completely new genre on the Czech stage. Imported classics compete robustly with Czech works, in which leading pop music stars often appear.

In Communist Czechoslovakia, new books appeared in the bookstores every Thursday. In the case of an interesting title, long lines of customers eager for good literature used to queue up patiently outside the bookstores early in the morning. Older generations cannot help recalling this period whenever they see the open shelves in bookstores overflowing with all kinds of books by authors from an amazing variety of nations and all generations. These are published by dozens of publishing houses, both new and long established.

Despite limited financial resources, some very ambitious cultural projects are still being carried out. State support makes possible important events such as the Prague Spring music festival and the film festival in Karlovy Vary. The most important cultural and social event in 1997 was an extensive exhibition focusing on the era of Emperor Rudolph II.

An equally ambitious event is taking place throughout the whole course of this year, when Prague is celebrating its status as a European city of culture in the year 2000. This offers another interesting opportunity to present the many artistic genres that are developing today. Czech photography, art glass, graphics, sculpture and other well-established fields of Czech culture have also retained their traditional high standards.

Society

At first sight, public opinion polls undertaken to ascertain people’s evaluation of the ten years that have passed since the “Velvet Revolution” do not offer great cause for optimism. A large proportion of respondents claim to be disappointed by developments and speak of wasted chances and unfulfilled hopes.

But this dissatisfaction is very specific. The achievements of the past ten years - freedom of movement, freedom of speech, unrestricted political activity, and so on - are taken for granted and the critical mood focuses on problems that inevitably accompany the complicated process of reform. This dissatisfaction arose from a mixture of impatience, a kind of skepticism typical of Czechs, the impact of the mistakes that have been made and finally a certain disorientation in the midst of a rapidly changing society.

The effect of the changes in the past decade on people’s thinking is in fact immense. People have had to deal with the change from the Warsaw Pact to NATO, the shift from COMECON to the European Union, the move to a genuine plurality of clearly presented and fiercely debated views and the need to put behind, however unwillingly, state paternalism and to take on more responsibility for their own lives. All this may, and indeed does, cause problems. But they are certainly not of a nature to bring into question the direction we have embarked on.

The greatest problems have been created as a result of the impact of the economic reform. They are in fact less serious than in most of the other economies now

undergoing the same transformation process, but nevertheless they do lead to a certain degree of social tension.

After 1989 the government rejected any search for a third path full of compromises, and opted instead for a radical economic reform. The key theme was denationalization, carried out through voucher privatization, direct sales and the restitution of property. Despite various checks and blind alleys, most of the property that formerly belonged to the state has been privatized.

A Czech business sector has been created, foreign capital has flowed into the country, joint firms have been set up. The economy is beginning to function on the basis of standard market rules.

Czech cities have undergone a remarkable transformation. It is as though they have emerged from their former somnolence and begun a new life, one that has changed their appearance radically. Massive rebuilding of historical centers, the construction of new satellite towns, and the design of new buildings in the latest international architectural styles are further proof of the rapidly changing life of Czech society at the beginning of the twenty-first century.