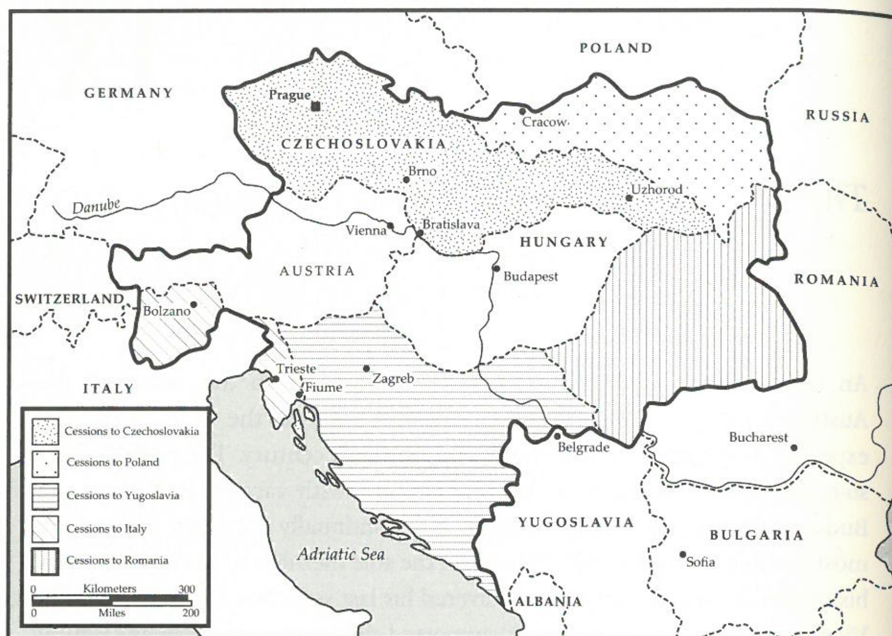
IX

The First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938)

An independent Czechoslovakian state emerged from the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the First World War, but the roots of this unexpected development lay deep in the nineteenth century. The policy of the so-called Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, with capitals in Vienna and Budapest, was outspokenly centralist. This continually provoked the Czechs, most notably Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, the sole member of parliament from his miniscule Realist Party, who delivered his last speech to the parliament in Vienna on May 16, 1913. Masaryk supported the Bohemian Germans'refusal of Badeni's law equalizing the Czech and German languages in Bohemia, but he also leveled heavy criticism against the pro-German policy of the Austrian government in Vienna. However, instead of providing conciliatory reforms, three months after Masaryk's speech the emperor dismissed the unruly Bohemian parliament. Soon all Czech politicians had to conclude that the ultimate aim of Austrian politics was to suppress the Czechs, paralleling the ongoing suppression of Slovak culture in the Hungarian kingdom.

On June 28, 1914, the heir to the Austrian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia, by a Serbian assassin working closely with Bosnian dissidents. A month later, Emperor Franz Josef declared war on Serbia. However, the First World War did not develop well for either Austria-Hungary or Germany. While most of the Czech political representation remained loyal to the Austrian throne, the Czechs were shocked by the Austro-Hungarian attacks on the Slav nations of Serbia and Russia. Their life was soon seriously affected by shortages of goods and, most important, by the abolition of political rights and reduced civic freedom. In 1915, disgruntled Czech soldiers serving in the Austrian army began en masse to side openly with its enemies.

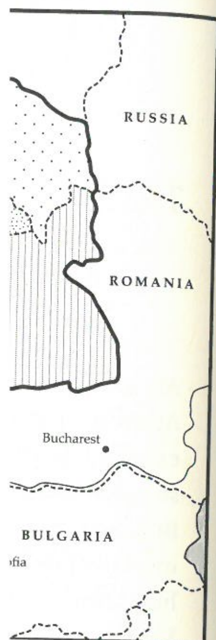
The initial military successes of Russia, allied with Serbia against Austria-Hungary, revived Bohemian dreams of a great Slav empire. Already before the onset of the world war, Karel Kramář, leader of the Young Czech Party supported by the Czech urban bourgeoisie, envisioned an immense Slav em-



The disintegrated Habsburg Empire, circa 1918

pire stretching from the Pacific Ocean to Bohemia.[1] In this empire, Czechs would have only limited autonomy and the country would be ruled directly by the Russian czar. This loss would be offset through generous territorial gains; the Czech "czardom" would embrace not only historical Czech lands and Slovakia, but also extensive portions of Germany, Lusatia, and Silesia. Motivating Kramář's pro-Russian stance was his hatred of Germans; in this he prefigured the attitude of President Beneš after the Second World War. But the influence of Kramář's Russian wife, Nadezhda Nikolajevna Abrikosova, was considerable; the couple owned property in Russia, including a sumptuous neoclassical villa in the Crimea, where they spent summers.

Much more realistic was Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, who created—immediately after the outbreak of war—a secret committee, the "Czech mafia." Masaryk soon left the country and in December 1914 began, as a lone Czech politician, to advocate the case for an independent Czechoslovak state.[2] At first Masaryk respected Czech public opinion and spoke of a monarchy. He also stressed that the area known as Sudetenland, the Czech lands farthest to the north and west, must be part of the future state, although the Czechs were an insignificant minority there. Without this region, Masaryk argued, the state would not survive economically. German industrialists in Bohemia



and Moravia, in their turn, were also very aware of the economic importance of these Czech lands. Moreover, for them there was no real alternative to the Czech state, because the Sudetenland factories would not be likely to survive in the much more competitive environment of the German state.

In Paris in 1916 the Czech National Council (renamed in 1918 as the Czechoslovak National Council) was established. Its founders were Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, his colleague from Charles University, and Rostislav Štefánik, a Slovak astronomer with French citizenship who had a brilliant career as an aviator in the French army. For years, the Czechoslovak National Council was supported on the international level only by Czech patriotic associations abroad, about two million Czech and Slovak emigrants living mainly in the United States. Before 1918, notwithstanding the Czech and Slovak legionnaires fighting alongside the Entente powers (France, Great Britain, and Russia), the Czechoslovak National Council received no international recognition.

Masaryk's foreign activities were wholly supported by the *Manifesto of Czech Writers* of May 17, 1917. It was signed by 222 Czech intellectuals and addressed to the Czech Union, composed of the Czech members of the Austrian parliament, as a reaction to that group's shameless declaration of loyalty to the Habsburg monarchy. The manifesto confirms the traditionally important role accorded to writers and scientists in Czech political life. Czech intellectuals were alarmed by the radicalization of German nationalists in Berlin and Vienna. Whatever the result of the war might be, they were sure that the Germans would use it as a pretext to finish off the Czechs once and for all. The Czechs had, as a matter of fact, no other option but to create their own state.

The Entente diplomats had nothing against the continuation of the Danube superpower, under the condition, of course, that it would not support German ambitions. But in spring 1918, when the German nationalists got the upper hand in the Habsburg Empire, France and Britain began to withhold even tacit support. Simultaneously, Czech and Slovak legionnaires, sixty or seventy thousand men returning home after the war via Vladivostok, took control of the entire Trans-Siberian railway. The Entente allies hoped in vain to employ the Legion in the Russian civil war, against the newly established Bolshevik army. Although the plan went astray, the Czech legionnaires (who comprised a large majority in the Legion) had made a mark in world politics.

In the summer of the same year, German and Austrian armies suffered decisive defeats. Under these favorable conditions, the Czechoslovak National Council intensified its diplomatic activity. On October 18, 1918, the independent Czechoslovakia was proclaimed by the Washington Declaration, not as

a monarchy, but as a democratic republic explicitly modeled on the United States. The document is dated in Paris, seat of the Czechoslovak National Council, but it was composed by Masaryk in Washington, where it was officially handed over to the U.S. government. The document is believed to have influenced the diplomatic note from the U.S. government of the same date, rejecting the peace proposal of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In it, the Czechs were offered autonomy—but this proved no longer sufficient incentive.

Two days later another very important document was signed in Martin, Slovakia (Turčianský Svätý Martin), the traditional center of Slovak patriots; in 1863, the Slovak Matica, a predecessor of the Slovak academy of sciences, and in 1909 the first Slovak museum, were both founded there. In the Martin Declaration, delegates from Slovak political parties founded the Slovak National Council as the only representative of the Slovak nation. This council declared its support of Czecho-Slovak unity; the term "Czecho-Slovak nation" was used here to denote a supranational, political entity.

A new republic was proclaimed by the Czechoslovak National Council in Prague on October 28, 1918—still today the most important national holiday in the Czech Republic. In January 1919, the Paris Peace Conference approved the establishment of an independent state encompassing the historic Czech lands and Slovakia, with the addition of Slav-populated Carpathian Ruthenia (the area on the southern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains bordered by Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and Ukraine). This provided a common frontier with Romania, which was very important from a geopolitical point of view. In 1921 an alliance of Czechoslovakia with Romania and Yugoslavia (the "Little Entente") was formed to counter Hungarian revanchism and attempts at Habsburg restoration.

The ethnic constitution of the Czechoslovakian republic was not reflected in its name, which implies a Slav state. In Czechoslovakia in 1921 there were 13 million inhabitants, of which 50 percent were Czechs, 15 percent Slovaks, 3 percent Ruthenians, and 0.6 percent Poles. The sizable non-Slav population comprised 5 percent Hungarians, 1.3 percent Jews, and 23 percent Germans, who formed almost a quarter of the new republic's population.[3] Moreover, Germans, considered a minority in Czechoslovakia, nonetheless formed almost the entire population in some regions. Czech leaders did not want to create a second partitioned Switzerland, and thus a second Austrian empire came into being in which Czechs replaced Austrians. The problem of nationalities—most notably of the large German minority—has never been effectively addressed.

The Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, approved on February 29,

1920, was a compromise between the two most powerful political parties of that time, the Czech Agrarian Party and Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party. The new constitution was adapted for local conditions from foreign constitutions: the preamble and legal system from the American constitution of 1787; the respective status of parliament and president from the constitution of the French republic of 1875; a strong parliament restricting presidential power like the Swiss constitution; and civic rights from the Austro-Hungarian constitution of 1867. Any constitutional amendments required a three-fifths majority vote by parliament. The constitution granted considerable rights to national minorities in the new state, as already declared in the St. Germain peace pacts with Germany and Austria, as well as in agreement with the United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan (all on February 29, 1920). Together with the constitution, the Language Statute was approved. Czechoslovak was declared the state, official, and administrative language of the new republic, with two official variants, Czech and Slovak.

Czechoslovakia was then among the world's ten most industrialized countries, because almost 80 percent of the industry of the Austro-Hungarian Empire remained in Czechoslovak territory. The economy recovered from war damages and soon surpassed its prewar industrial output. Czech currency was exceptionally strong, daily work was limited to eight hours, and health insurance and unemployment compensation were among the best in Europe. Technological leadership was demonstrated as well, when Czechoslovakia became the first European country to launch a regular radio broadcast, in May 18, 1923, from a tent at Kbely, Prague. In 1926 Slovak radio began to broadcast. The most famous Czechoslovak industrial company was Baťa Shoes, founded in 1894 in Zlín, Moravia, by Tomáš Baťa, from a family of cobblers. During the First World War his plant prospered due to army commissions. Baťa overcame the postwar economic crisis by a daring move; in September 1922 he lowered the price of his products by one half.

In 1919, during Baťa's third journey to the United States, he observed Henry Ford's mass production methods, and in 1927 he introduced assembly line production in his factories. The "Henry Ford of Eastern Europe," as he was called, specialized in new technologies that allowed him to produce great quantities of shoes very cheaply. In 1932 Tomáš Baťa died in a plane crash at the Zlín airport, leaving his half brother, Jan Antonín Baťa, to take over the company. He expanded not only in Europe but also to Asia, Africa, and North and South America, and began to produce other articles beside shoes, such as tires and toys. In spite of the worldwide depression, Baťa expanded rapidly, and at the outbreak of the Second World War the organization had more than 100,000 employees. They turned sleepy provincial Zlín into a futuristic city, in

Panorama of Zlín in 1939. This industrial garden city is a fine example of architectural and urban functionalism. All of its architectural elements and building materials (red brick, glass, reinforced concrete) are derived from factory buildings in order to emphasize that industrial production is the center of life for all inhabitants of the city of Baťa Shoe Company. The skyline is dominated by company headquarters, a skyscraper by Vladimír Karfík built in 1938—at seventy-five meters the tallest building in Czechoslovakia at that time. A technical curiosity was the office elevator of the chief, a six-by-six-meter air-conditioned room, complete with wash basin. Used by permission of Radek Klimeš, Ateliér Regulus, Zlín.

which, incidentally, the playwright Tom Stoppard was born in 1937. His father, Evžen Straussler, worked for Baťa as factory physician.

Tomáš and Jan Antonín Baťa were the first Czechs to create a global company which turned out to be remarkably viable. Zlín weathered not only economic recessions, but also Nazi occupation and communist experiments. Which is not as surprising as it might seem—the Baťa's were not so much modern industrialists, as feudal lords making the full use of the high-tech and free market economy. At Zlín and its clones all over the world, they personally controlled everything. To declare this openly, they gave the foreign replicas of Zlín such names as Bataville (in France), Batawa (in Canada), Batanagar (in India), and so on. They were, it must be said, enlightened masters. Baťa Shoes was famous for its generous social programs; it established comfortable housing, schools, theaters, and cinemas. The cinema in Zlín was the largest in Europe and was used to reinforce corporate enthusiasm. There were, however, no kindergartens, because the Baťa's were convinced that woman's place was at home; they also, therefore, did not employ married women. Tomáš and Jan Antonín Baťa called their employees "coworkers," but they never discussed anything with them. They did not listen to what their pilots were telling them; it is little wonder that they both died in airplane crashes.

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Apartment blocks (by the architect Otakar Novotný, 1920–21) for the Domovina cooperative in Znojmo, located at 18–26 Generál Jaroš Avenue). After the creation of the first Czechoslovak republic, many Czech civil servants arrived in predominantly German Znojmo. According to one of them, Karel Polesný, "Coming from a purely Czech background, we immediately noticed how Germans considered us culturally inferior creatures." Polesný was the head of the local Czech grammar school and the president of the "Domovina" (Homeland) cooperative, uniting Czech state employees, which built apartment blocks in the cubist style, with asymmetrical ornamentation on the first-floor façade and other traits typical of cubist dynamism. The message of this avant-garde design was clearly political—a demonstration of Czech presence in the German borderland of Czechoslovakia. The existing houses are part of a very ambitious project, only partially realized. Photo used by permission of Jan Bažant.

They did not tolerate trade unions, and the absolute control did not stop at the gates of Baťa's factories: in Baťaworld there were norms for lodging, dress, food, and leisure activities; there was no alcohol and no smoking. Many young men and women used their Sundays to escape as far as possible from Baťa's "ideal" city.

The Czech "tramping" movement, a corollary of rapid economic growth, was popular mainly among working-class teenagers. It was not a political movement, but an idyll—absolute liberty, women, songs, and the beauties of nature. It was a "fairy tale from Saturday to Sunday," after which followed a week of hard work in the factory. Czech-German antagonism was conspicuously absent among Czech tramps; all were "cowboys" as they knew them from Hollywood films. Cosmopolitan tramps were hated by the "patriotic" Czech petty bourgeoisie and persecuted by police, especially after a special antitramp law was issued, the so-called Kubát's Law of 1931 restricting camping and "tramping." It was valid only in Bohemia; in Moravia and Silesia tramping was not so widespread. The wording of the law demonstrates that the establishment was worried above all by the fact that girls and boys camped together. In the law there was no age limit, because it was not meant to protect teenagers, but family and legal marriage. The tramping movement no doubt accelerated women's emancipation in Czechoslovakia.

Czechoslovak industry was advanced, but very unevenly distributed; most was in Bohemia and Moravia with virtually none in Carpathian Ruthenia. Czechoslovak industry was located predominantly in German-speaking areas and controlled by German banks; in the Czech lands no more than a third of industrial plants were actually in Czech hands, and in Slovakia only 5 percent was in Slovak hands. Land was also unevenly distributed; one-third of all agricultural land and forest belonged to a handful of German and Hungarian aristocrats and the Roman Catholic Church, in spite of the fact that aristocratic privileges had been abolished and the Catholic Church had lost the right to interfere in the life of Czechoslovak citizens. In 1919 Czechoslovakia launched an ambitious program of land reform; all estates exceeding 1.5 square kilometers of arable land and 2.5 square kilometers of land in general were to be expropriated. But in actual fact, redistribution of land proceeded very slowly.

Economic development in the 1920s and 1930s reflected these discrepancies. The Great Depression devastated the regions inhabited by Germans because its industry depended on foreign trade and German banks, which collapsed in 1931. Products of Czech industry, on the other hand, were destined predominantly for local markets, and consequently unemployment among Czechs was five times lower than in the German-speaking areas. Nevertheless, Czech banks exploited the situation and insisted on the hiring of Czechs as a condi-

tion for aid to industrial plants in German parts of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, the Czechoslovak government did not employ local people in public works in these regions, but dispatched Czechs from the interior of the country. These factors heightened the mutual isolation of the Czechs and the Germans, who continued to maintain their exclusive economic, political, and cultural institutions in this first Czechoslovak republic. Nevertheless, many Czechoslovak Czechs and Germans lived in linguistically mixed territories, and the inhabitants of Masaryk's republic were thus at least partially bilingual.

The brothers Jiří and František Langer illustrate the diversity of life experience and the multiethnic culture of Masaryk's Czechoslovakia. Born in Prague into a family of Jewish businessmen who respected Jewish rituals, they identified wholly with Czech society. The Czechoslovak Republic was the only European country to recognize the Jewish ethnic group, but when Jiří, the younger brother, became an Orthodox Jew, his assimilated parents found this difficult to accept. Jiří taught at the Prague Jewish school and wrote books in Hebrew, German, and Czech. His most important book is called *Nine Gates* (1937), a collection of legends of Chassidic saints that he learned in Galicia, the easternmost part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where he lived from 1913 to 1918. His older brother František became a medical doctor, and during the First World War he joined the Czechoslovak legions and served in Siberia as a chief physician. After his return to Czechoslovakia he wrote Czech books and plays; his greatest international success was his 1923 comedy, *Velbloud uchem jehly* (Camel through the eye of a needle).

The era of Masaryk's republic is usually considered a peak of Czech culture, and linguistically, it was almost exclusively Czech. Slovakia and Ruthenia were known mainly through the books of Czech writers, who repeatedly visited this easternmost part of Czechoslovakia. Ivan Olbracht was not only the author of heavy-handed texts propagating communism, but also of outstanding works set in Carpathian Ruthenia, above all *Nikola Šuhaj, loupežník* (Nikola Šuhaj, the Robber), published in 1933. Olbracht, whose mother was from a Jewish family, took great interest in Jews and Rusyns (one of the peoples inhabiting Carpathian Ruthenia, or Rus). In his story of the struggle of the local hero Nikola Šuhaj with the Czechoslovak police force, he attained the monumentality of myth. In his narrative he continuously changes points of view; from the matter-of-fact approach of policemen, he switches to the perspective of Rusyn peasants for whom Nikola is a superhuman avenger, or to the perspective of Rusyn Jews who view the present as merely a reenactment of biblical stories. In the 1970s, in communist Czechoslovakia, Nikola Šuhaj's story was adapted for theater and cinema as a defense of freedom against the dictates of the state.

The economic and cultural situation in Slovakia and Ruthenia improved radically after their incorporation into Czechoslovakia. In 1919 a university was founded in Bratislava, and in 1922, eight-year compulsory education was enforced by law in Slovakia. This ambitious plan was realized with the help of Czech teachers and greatly affected education in the eastern parts of Czechoslovakia. Still, in the culture of the new republic, Czechs dominated. German and Jewish German literary traditions in Bohemia, which had been very strong and seemingly inexhaustible, persisted, but only in the background; the front stage was wholly occupied by Czech writers. They came out in surprisingly great numbers, well-prepared and bursting with energy and imagination. How could this miracle have happened? The crucial fact was that they wrote in an independent Czech state, and in a truly democratic republic. Thus relieved of the burdensome duty to instruct or comfort their readers, they could fully develop their creative potential.

Jiří Wolker was "the last great, bad ideological poet" of Czech literature, as his avant-garde colleagues wrote after his premature death in 1924.[4] In 1921 the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia arose; among its founders was Wolker, creator of proletarian art and propagandist poems inspired by the Russian communist poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and intended to depict the working class and its exploitation by capitalists. The Czech Communist Party was one of the largest in the world. In the October 1929 elections it came in fourth with 10 percent. In the following year, the number of members in the electoral college radically declined due to a pro-Soviet orientation dating from the 1925 party turnover, but the party line was maintained all the way to 1948. In his first speech in the Czechoslovak parliament in 1929, the party leader, Klement Gottwald, acknowledged that its headquarters staff was in Moscow and clearly proclaimed the ultimate goal of Czech communists—namely, the destruction of democracy and establishing a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The most influential Czech literary movement of the 1920s was called "poetism," which set out to free art from politics, even though it was left-wing and some members belonged to the Communist Party. Outstanding members of the "poetism" movement were the novelist Vladislav Vančura, the theoretician Karel Teige, and the poets Vítězslav Nezval, František Halas, and Jaroslav Seifert; Seifert was author of the famous collection of poems *Na vlnách TSF* (On the waves of wireless telegraphy) of 1925—the image of wireless telegraphy (i.e., radio) in the title indicates that Seifert intended to penetrate all countries and continents. In his poems, New York, Yokohama, and other distant cities are mentioned, and the world is presented as a series of film clips celebrating enchantment and free play of fantasy. Poetism was the creation of the avant-garde group Devětsil (Nine forces). Its roots were

in Wolker's proletarian art, but rather than depicting present misery, it tried to prefigure the communist paradise. It was not so much poetics as an attitude to life based on indifference to politics, on joyfulness and playfulness: the whole world should become poetry. Its best expression was in lyrics, and in these poems metaphors were lined up with no logic. The main stress was on the beauty of rhymes.

In Masaryk's republic we observe a radical broadening of themes, with social questions and global problems in the forefront. The trend is exemplified in the work of Karel Poláček, whose fascination with professional or interest groups and their rituals and jargon became one of the sources of his literary humor. Poláček came from a family of Jewish tradesmen in a small city in northern Bohemia. In 1922 he began to work for *Lidové noviny* (People's news), at that time a famous newspaper in which his colleagues included the brothers Josef and Karel Čapek. As in Čapek's novels, Poláček's main hero is a "small man," but his stories are, on the one hand, more humorous and, on the other, less indulgent; he mercilessly mocks the narrow-mindedness and hypocrisy of the petty bourgeoisie.

Poláček's *Men Offside* (1931) was a bestseller and was immediately made into a successful movie. It is a vivid portrait of two apparently disparate Prague communities, one of football fans and the other of Jewish merchants. In Poláček's time soccer had already become the number one national sport. In 1891, the legendary AC (Athletic Club) Sparta team was founded, and in the next year its main rival, SK (Sportovní Klub) Slavia. The Czechoslovak soccer team came in second in the World Cup of 1934. *Men Offside* includes a dream of the main protagonist, a small Jewish merchant and devotee of SK Slavia, about a soccer match between AC Catholic priests and SK Jewish rabbis. In 1943 Poláček was transported to Terezín, and then to Auschwitz, where he ended in the gas chamber.

In Czechoslovakia at large, a range of dynamic associations, discussions, and controversies gave birth to a remarkable diversity of spiritual life and of genres and forms. In this ostensible chaos there was nevertheless a visible change between the 1920s and 1930s—a move away from experiment, playfulness, and lyricism, toward tradition and moralizing, in epic or dramatic forms. The shift was connected with the worsening of European political climate after Hitler rose to power in Germany and Stalin launched his purges. An eyewitness of Stalinist terror was Jiří Weil, a communist intellectual who worked in Moscow as a journalist and translator between 1933 and 1935. There he was accused of taking part in a conspiracy against Stalin, expelled from the Communist Party, and exiled to Central Asia. From his experiences Weil wrote a documentary novel, *Moskva-hranice* (Moscow-border), published in

1937. It was about a communist who confesses "in the interest of the party" to crimes which he did not commit, but for which he is severely punished. In its time it was one of the harshest criticisms of Stalinist regime, and as such it was condemned by Czech sympathizers with Soviet Russia. Weil came from an orthodox Jewish family, but Jewish themes began to play a prominent role in his writing only after the Nazi occupation, which he spent in hiding. Weil's best-known book, *Life with a Star*, was published in 1948.

In the center of the intellectual scene was a group of writers who wholly identified themselves with Masaryk's republic. The most important of them was Karel Čapek, a journalist, novelist, and playwright. He studied philosophy at the Czech University in Prague and wrote a graduate thesis in 1918 entitled "Pragmatism or the Philosophy of Practical Life." Čapek's skepticism about finding a unitary explanation of the world, and his strong belief in common sense, would characterize all his writings. His best work is generally considered to be his trilogy of philosophical novels, at the center of which is "ordinary man": *Hordubal*, *Meteor*, and *An Ordinary Life* (1933–35). In them Čapek presents a postmodern examination of personal histories illuminated from contrasting viewpoints. The same persons and events are thus presented in ways which are mutually incompatible. "Man" is a construct; in reality every man is actually a crowd. "An ordinary life" is ordinary only apparently, because the orderly railway clerk whose history we follow was also an accursed poet and murderer.

Owing to poor health, President T. G. Masaryk resigned his post in 1935; he died in 1937. Čapek's only political work, the monumental *Hovory s TGM* (Conversations with TGM, 1928–35) is a valuable document of Masaryk's life and work, and also manifests his extraordinary status in the Czechoslovak republic. In one passage, the president is expounding his highly interesting theory on Czech forms of pragmatism: "Komenský, Palacký, Havlíček . . . these three turn their thoughts to the practical things of the life of the nation. All three are politicians. In fact typical Czech philosophy is political—perhaps because a small nation cannot allow itself the luxury of thinking for thinking's sake."[5]

The Čapek brothers, along with František Langer, Karel Poláček, Ferdinand Peroutka, and others, were called the "pragmatic generation" because of their support of Masaryk and sympathy with Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition and especially with pragmatism. These intellectuals rejected not only the militant Catholicism of writers like Jaroslav Durych, and the extreme right nationalism of Viktor Dyk but also the communism prevalent in Czech avant-garde circles. Along with the wit and humanity of Karel Čapek's

philosophical novels and plays, there is Jaroslav Hašek's Švejk, a humorous plebeian type embodying the proverbial Czech "take-it-easy" attitude. Hašek was famous for his "bohemian" life. During the First World War he served in the Austrian army and was taken prisoner by Russians. At first he served in the Russian Imperial Army, then became an active Czech legionnaire, and finally changed over to the Soviet Red Army, where he worked as a political commissar and journalist.

When it first came out, Hašek's *Good Soldier Švejk* was regarded as trivial reading. The first to recognize its outstanding literary qualities were a communist writer, Ivan Olbracht, and two Czech-German writers, Max Brod and Alfred Fuchs, who did not hesitate to compare Švejk with Don Quixote. But Švejk also enlivened the ongoing dispute about the Czech "national character." Hašek's Švejk became the target of criticism by Catholics, Czech nationalists, and communists because of his "base," pragmatic attitude, devoid of any higher ethical values—an attitude considered by some to be typically Czech.

Before the Second World War, the outside world knew only two Czech authors, a sharply contrasting pair, the liberal Karel Čapek and Jaroslav Durych, a militant Catholic and opponent of democracy. Durych was a military surgeon in the Czechoslovak army and rose to the rank of colonel. A passionate advocate of Catholic revival, in his historical novels he glorified the battle of Bílá Hora for saving Bohemia from becoming a part of Germany and for bringing the country nearer to God. Man's desire for divine grace is also a main theme of his 1935 mystical novel *Bloudění* (Descent of the idol), set in the time of the Thirty Years' War. Its main protagonists are a Czech Protestant, Jiří, and a Spanish girl, Anděla, who might be interpreted as the soul of the Czech nation and that of the Roman Church, which are bound to flow one into another. An English translation appeared in 1936, in New York. After the Nazi occupation, Durych, the foremost Czech patriot, was silenced; his absolute isolation continued under the communist regime, this time because of his Catholicism.

Durych's ornate language is similar to that of Vladislav Vančura, with whom he also shares sensualism and genuine sympathy for oppressed social classes, but not his pessimism. High spiritual aspirations bring Durych close to Čapek, although Durych criticizes Čapek for his liberalism, pacifism, and cosmopolitanism, which he wanted to replace with discipline, patriotism, and religious fundamentalism. Catholic orthodoxy restored as the only religion and exclusive foundation of the Czechoslovak state? The idea was not as eccentric as it seemed. In the First Republic, it turned out that Catholicism was

no longer a faith imposed from above. Among its 13.5 million inhabitants, 10 million identified themselves as Catholics. Moreover, the attempt to revive the Hussite church was not received with the enthusiasm expected.

The most famous Czech composer in this period was a Moravian, Leoš Janáček, the key figure in musical life in Brno. Janáček tried to reconnect music with everyday life; he studied the rhythm and pitch contour of spoken Czech, which inspired his highly original vocal melodies in the operas *Káťa Kabanová* (1921), *Příhody lišky Bystroušky* (The cunning little vixen) (1924), *Věc Makropoulos* (The Makropoulos affair) (1926), and *Z mrtvého domu* (From the house of the dead), which premiered in 1930, two years after his death. One of his best-known works is *Sinfonietta*, which opened in 1926 in Prague. In the next two years it was performed in New York, Berlin, London, Vienna, and Dresden and became internationally famous. According to Janáček's Christmas Day essay "Moje Město" (My town), the work celebrates the independent Czechoslovak state as well as Brno, the capital of Moravia and his home.[6]

Janáček was already sixty-four when the Czechoslovak state was formed, with an impressive career as an avant-garde composer behind him, but he produced his best work after 1918. This outburst of creativity is usually explained not only by the optimistic atmosphere in the young republic, but also by Janáček's new muse, Kamila Stösslová, a married woman whom he met in 1917 and to whom he afterward sent hundreds of love letters. In 1926 he wrote to her that he was working on *Sinfonietta*, inspired by their meeting in her hometown, Písek, in southern Bohemia. Písek was a charming town of students and soldiers, and at the promenade Janáček happened to hear a military band, whose patriotic marches impressed him greatly. Whether it was Kamila Stösslová's Písek or his newly acquired Czech self-confidence, it was only in his last decade that Janáček overcame the oppressing pettiness of the Czech milieu.

In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Europe in the twenties and thirties, Czech artists and musicians, in no way tied down by language they spoke, left in great numbers for France. The painters Kupka, Šíma, and Zrzavý, the composer Bohuslav Martinů, and many others found in Paris a more stimulating atmosphere and there became citizens of the world. French culture was also the main source of inspiration for art created in Czechoslovakia. The cubism invented in Paris by Picasso and his circle had a counterpart not only in painting, but also in the architecture of the Czech lands. Czech cubist architecture (1911–23) has no parallel elsewhere in Europe, and is now seen as an important precursor to postmodernism in architecture. Originally, however, Czech cubist architecture had a political message as well; it was presented as the expression of the Czech national idea, a return to "original Slavonic"

The Legion Bank in Prague, Na Poříčí Street. In 1917, when Soviet Russia exited from the war, the Czech Legion in Russia, created from Czech and Slovak war prisoners, had to leave the country. Since European ports were not safe enough, they had to cross Siberia to the Pacific port of Vladivostok. En route home, the Czech legionnaires became de facto lords of Siberia, from the Volga River along the railway up to Vladivostok. After their return, which they financed with gold appropriated from imperial Russia, they set up the Legion Bank, as a monument to the Siberian march of Czech soldiers illustrated in its relief decoration. The building of 1921–23 is in the late cubist style of the new republic. Photo used by permission of Leona Telínová.

forms. Cubist architecture, which in some parts of Prague still prevails—the most ambitious example is the Legion Bank—is the only truly original Czech contribution to the history of architecture.

Postmodern architects also discovered Josef Plečnik, a Slovene architect who worked in Prague from 1911. Plečnik's commitment to classical architecture and folk traditions greatly impressed Masaryk, who appointed him architect of Prague Castle. It was taken as given that the first president of

the Czechoslovak Republic would reside at Prague Castle, but when Masaryk moved in it was a dilapidated medieval fortress that literally everywhere recalled Habsburg monarchy. Between 1920 and 1934 Plečnik ingeniously transformed this old castle into a modern presidential seat, a symbol of the new democratic state.

New architectural trends, functionalism, and constructivism (the last of these stressing the aesthetic qualities of the construction itself) were wholeheartedly adopted in the Czechoslovak Republic. Buildings from the late 1920s and 1930s with smooth but imaginative façades still dominate Czech and Moravian cities. A key figure of modern architecture, Adolf Loos (1870–1933), was a German from Brno, who in 1918 received Czechoslovak citizenship but worked in Vienna. Several of his realizations were for clients in Czechoslovakia; deservedly the most famous is the functional-modernist Villa Müller in Prague (1930), built for the engineer František Müller and his wife Milada Müllerová in 1930. It was sold in 1995 to the City of Prague and reopened in 2000 as a museum. Another architectural landmark is the impressive Veletržní palace (Fair palace) in Prague by Josef Fuchs and Oldřich Tyl (1925–28), today the seat of the National Gallery, in which art of the nineteenth through twenty-first centuries is permanently exhibited.

Czech cinema is famous because of its new wave period in the 1960s, but a rich film history had preceded it. The most important film of the silent era was Gustav Machatý's *Eroticon* in 1929. With *Extase* (*Ecstasy*) in 1933, and its then-controversial shot of a nude woman swimming, Machatý became world-famous. The Czech avant-garde poet Vítězslav Nezval cooperated on the script. In *Ecstasy*, for the first time in an art movie, sexual intercourse was brought onscreen, although the camera never left the faces of the protagonists. The building of the Barrandov Studios on the outskirts of Prague, "European Hollywood" as it is called now, was a watershed in Czechoslovak cinematography. It was opened in 1933, as the most up-to-date and best-equipped studio in Europe, by the brothers Miloš and Václav Havel, uncle and father of the anticommunist dissident Václav Havel, who later became president of the Czechoslovak Republic.

Foremost among the achievements of Czechoslovak scholarship was the activity of the Prague Linguistic Circle, indicative of the traditional Czech preoccupation with language. The Prague Circle was at that time evolving a school of linguistic thought called structuralism, which would become influential worldwide. The founding members were a professor of English at the Czech university in Prague, Vilém Mathesius, and the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson, who had emigrated to Czechoslovakia. Members of the Prague Circle distinguished themselves in the study of sound systems and

Olbracht (left) and Vančura (right) in the mountains of Carpathian Ruthenia during a break of shooting the film *Faithless Marijka* (1934). This drama from the life of Ruthenian woodcutters was shot with local people as actors—except for the caricature of a Czech tourist played by the writer Ivan Olbracht, author of the theme of the film. The director was the writer Vladislav Vančura (it was his third movie) and the impressive score was by Bohuslav Martinů, the famous Czech composer, who lived in Paris and later emigrated to New York. In the interest of creative freedom, the film was produced by an association formed by the director's friends. The film was a commercial failure, mainly because of its experimental character; all actors, for instance, speak in their own language, Ruthenian, Yiddish, or Czech. The film is interesting not only because of its form, but also as an ethnographic document and Marxist sociological analysis. In the movie both Czechs and Jews appear as exploiters of the native population. Used by permission of ČTK.

founded phonology as an independent linguistic discipline; this achievement is credited above all to Count Nikolay Trubetskoy, who came, like Jakobson, from Russia. Besides linguists, the literary historians René Wellek and Jan Mukařovský and the anthropologist Petr Bogatyrev, another Russian émigré, were members of the circle.

At the first congress of Slav philologists, organized in Prague in 1929, a paper, "Propositions of the Prague Linguistic Circle," was presented as a collective work, which shows the close cooperation and friendly atmosphere of the group, composed of a dozen Czechs and Russian émigrés meeting in university offices or in private homes. The Prague Circle was the product of the newly acquired self-confidence and the unrestrained ambitions and optimism of Czech intellectuals, who saw their task as nothing less than a reevaluation of contemporary linguistics. Members of the Prague Circle followed the teachings of Ferdinand de Saussure on linguistic signs. Other sources of inspiration were the Russian formalist school and German phenomenology. Their intellectual criticism was aimed mainly at German comparative linguistics. The impact of the Prague Circle was enormous and not restricted to linguistics. After the Nazi occupation, Jakobson emigrated to the United States, where his ideas greatly influenced the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss. French structuralism came to dominate the European intellectual scene in the fifties and sixties, creating a direct line from the Prague Linguistic Circle of the twenties and thirties to the much later semiotic teachings of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida.

In 1925, the cabaret duo of Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich ("V + W") founded the Osvobozené divadlo (Liberated theater), which soon became the chief venue of Czech humor. Their main source of inspiration was Dada, and their style was close to Czech writers of the "poetist" movement, with whom they also shared a leftist political orientation. In the 1930s, as a reaction to Nazi expansionism, their plays became militantly antifascist. When they produced the play *Kat a blázen* (The executioner and the madman) in 1934, the German Embassy officially protested that they had insulted Hitler. The Liberated Theater was first expelled from their theater and then, in 1938, closed down altogether. Voskovec and Werich emigrated to the United States. After the war, Jan Werich returned to Czechoslovakia, but his partner remained in the United States, as George Voskovec, an American character actor. Voskovec and Werich were lucky to have had as their composer and conductor Jaroslav Ježek, who later also emigrated with them to America. Already in Prague Ježek had kept up with the latest developments of Duke Ellington and the American jazz avant-garde. Ježek was a great propagator of American jazz, and records of his swing band for the Czech Ultraphon label, completely un-

known to most Americans, represent some of Europe's most original "hot" music. Many of Ježek's songs are still sung in the Czech Republic.

Voskovec and Werich were to the left politically, like almost all artists and intellectuals in Czechoslovak Republic. In the 1920s the unprecedented economic growth also had its dark side, and in 1931 the Czechoslovak economy was toppled by the economic depression that originated in 1929 in New York. Devastating and lasting social conflicts followed. A modest recovery came in 1934, but prosperity never returned to Czechoslovakia. The country experienced a series of hunger marches, bloody demonstrations, and strikes, the greatest being at Most in 1932, in which about twenty-five thousand miners participated. From the radicalization of Czech society both communists and fascists profited, even though the fascist movement never found mass support in Czechoslovakia. The separatist movement in Slovakia, where the social conditions were harsher than in Czech lands, was another tragic consequence of the Great Depression. The Wall Street crash was thus indirectly linked with two crucial events of Czechoslovak history—the separation of Slovakia in 1939, and the fateful victory of the communists in the Czechoslovak elections in 1946.

The situation of Czechoslovakia immediately before the Munich Agreement and the Nazi invasion is impressively evoked in Karel Čapek's theater play, *Bílá nemoc* (Power and glory) of 1937. It is a play against dictators, and its performances in the Estates Theatre in Prague were a form of political demonstration. The German Embassy strongly protested the staging of this play, in which the occupation of Czechoslovakia was vividly foretold. Čapek did not emigrate to England when he could have done so, and the fierce campaign of local sympathizers with Nazi Germany contributed to his premature death on Christmas Day, 1938. The administrators of both the National Theatre and the National Museum refused to arrange his funeral, for fear of reprisals, but he was finally buried with honor in the national pantheon of artists in the cemetery of St. Peter and Paul Cathedral at Vyšehrad.

Notes

1. Constitution of the Slav Empire, May 1914. In 1915 Kramář was arrested by the Austrians and sentenced to death in a fabricated trial (he was lucky that the constitution was not discovered). In 1917, after the death of the emperor, he was released. His status as a martyr under Austrian tyranny later helped Kramář to become the first prime minister of the future Czechoslovakia.

2. Masaryk's memorandum, reprinted from R. W. Seton-Watson, *Masaryk in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; New York: Macmillan, 1943), 116–34, is accessible online at http://www.h-net.org/~habsweb/sourcetexts/masaryk1.htm.

3. *Sčítání lidu v Republice československé ze dne 15. února 1921*, vols. 1–3 (Prague: Státní úřad statistický, 1924–27). For a summary, see http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prvn%C3%AD_republika (accessed April 23, 2010).
4. A. Černík, F. Halas, and B. Václavek, "Dosti Wolkera!" (Enough of Wolker!) in the literary quarterly *Pásmo* (1925).
5. *Masaryk on Thought and Life: Conversations with Karel Čapek*, translated by M. Weatherall and R. Weatherall (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938), 11.
6. Leoš Janáček, "Moje město," in *Lidové noviny*, December 24, 1927.