



The Czechoslovaks in the United States

by

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THE Czechoslovaks are the westernmost branch of the great Slav race. Their language is closely related to Polish and somewhat more distantly to the Russian and Yugoslav tongues. Their geographical location in the center of Europe, rather than in the east and southeast, has helped to differentiate them from other Slavs. They are nearer to the western European and American type than any other Slav people.

The two branches, Czechs and Slovaks, alike but different in history and cultural development

The Czechoslovaks consist of two branches, the Czechs (or Bohemians), and the Slovaks. They use practically the same tongue, the difference between Czech and Slovak speech being less pronounced than that between high and low German. But there are other differences—one might call them cultural—which are of more importance and which have been causing friction in the new Czechoslovak Republic.

The reason for this is that Czechs and Slovaks, though close neighbors, have lived a separate life for nearly a thousand years. The Czechs had for centuries their own kingdom of Bohemia, until in the 17th century they were merged with the Austrian possessions of the House of Hapsburg, while the Slovaks were a part of the kingdom of Hun-

gary and lived under the sway of Magyar landholders.

Populations

The bloodless revolution of October 28, 1918, united them in the Czechoslovak Republic. The new state has a population of thirteen and a half million, of whom roughly seven million are Czechs, two million Slovaks, half a million Rusins (also a Slavic people), three million Germans, seven hundred thousand Magyars, a few Poles and many Jews.

According to the United States census of 1920 there lived in this country 234,564 Czechs born abroad and 388,232 persons born in the United States of Czech parents, a total of 622,796. Slovaks born abroad numbered 274,948 and their children 344,918, a total of 619,866.

Czech immigration

The Czechs, or Bohemians, as they are still known in America, belong to the older immigration. A few came in the colonial days, but the modern immigration wave started in 1849, when democratic revolutions on the continent of Europe were suppressed by autocratic monarchies. The first comers were political refugees. There have always been among the immigrants many young men with an adventurous spirit, but the mass of the Czechoslovak immigrants crossed the ocean because of the economic opportunity which America presented to the poor peasant. Slovak immigration on a larger scale began about forty years ago and was especially strong in the ten years preceding the war.

The Czech immigrants of the third quarter of the nineteenth century settled for the most part on farms. They took up homesteads in the Central West, and there are now prosperous Bohemian farming settlements in

Wisconsin, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota and the Dakotas. From the province of Moravia a stream of land-hungry families was directed toward Texas, the only southern state where Czechoslovaks have settled in considerable numbers.

Some Czech immigrants from the very beginning preferred the cities. Chicago, St. Louis, New York, and Cleveland have had large Bohemian "colonies" for more than fifty years. As good homesteads grew scarce, immigrants congregated more and more in the cities. Today Chicago and its suburbs have over 150,000 Czechs of the first and second generation, not counting thousands of the third generation which is pretty well merged in the mass of Americans.

Almost all Slovak immigrants became industrial workers. Thousands are employed in the various industries of New York and vicinity, in the stockyards of Chicago and the steelmills of Gary, and in the factories of Cleveland and Detroit. But the greatest numbers are in the anthracite coal region around Scranton, Pennsylvania, and in the coke and steel district of Pittsburgh.

They seek the companionship of their own people

It was natural for Czechoslovak immigrants coming to a new country with a strange language and unfamiliar customs to seek the companionship of their own people and to live in colonies affording the social life familiar to them. They built churches and halls, founded fraternal societies, social and athletic associations, and published newspapers in their own language. There is a full score of benevolent societies with memberships ranging from two to fifty thousand. Czech Sokols (falcons), a very important organization with athletic, social and educational aims, have 12,000 members, and Slovak Sokols a like number. In Chicago

there are four Czech daily papers, in New York one Czech and two Slovak, in Cleveland two Czech and one Slovak. Weekly and monthly publications exceed one hundred.

Difference of parents and children in attitude toward America

Children of Czechoslovak immigrants become keen Americans in the public school. They speak English even to their parents, they look upon the United States as their country and the best country in the world and they take little interest in the country, language and customs of their parents. The older people seldom learn to know the true America; they come in contact mostly with the seamy side of American life. Some few grow bitter and return, or adopt radical opinions. But most of the Czechoslovak immigrants gradually adjust themselves to their American surroundings. Their ambition reaches toward a comfortable home, movies, radios, victrolas and perhaps an automobile. In short, they seek material prosperity. The America of the Christian churches, typified by idealism and altruism, remains a stranger to them.

Religious affiliations

In the old country over 95 per cent. of the Czech immigrants were Roman Catholic, at least nominally. Of the Slovaks about one sixth belonged to the Lutheran church, with a smaller number of Calvinists. In the United States over a half of the Czechs abandoned the Catholic church. A similar movement is going on today in Czechoslovakia, since its liberation from Austrian rule; but whereas in Czechoslovakia the former Catholics joined for the most part the Protestant church or the New National church, the earlier movement away from Rome in America was rationalistic and openly anti-religious. Its force has by this

time spent itself, and much of the credit is due to the work of the Protestant churches. There are today about 125 Bohemian Protestant congregations in the United States; Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists and Congregationalists are most numerous. The Catholics have about 275 priests and 320 churches, some of them administered by Irish and German priests.

The Slovaks have adhered more faithfully to the creed in which they were brought up. Rationalism has never taken hold among them as among the Czechs. They have several hundred Catholic churches, over a hundred Lutheran churches and missions, and some ten Presbyterian churches, attended largely by those who were Calvinists in their old home. But even among the Slovaks a considerable percentage never attends church or has the opportunity to attend services which they would understand.

Presbyterian work for Czechs

Our Presbyterian Church has two organized Bohemian presbyteries, one in Texas, and one in the Central West. The churches in these presbyteries, for the most part, minister to the rural populations of Czech farmers, and among them are many strong, self-sustaining churches. The Czech churches in the country and in the cities are now finding it necessary to carry on many of their activities in the English language in order to reach the young people, and the day is not very far distant when most of these churches will be using the English language entirely as our Dutch and German churches are doing. There are many rural and urban communities with a considerable Czech population which is entirely unchurched, and these people may now be and should be reached by our regular American churches, as language is no longer a barrier.

The Jan Hus Presbyterian Church of New York City has rendered a unique service to

our American culture by the preservation and cultivation of the arts and music of the Czechoslovak people, so that the distinctive gifts of these people may not be lost upon their amalgamation in our American life. This church, which has been blessed by over fifty years of the ministrations of the pioneer missionary to the Czechs, the Rev. Vincent Pisek, D.D., has sent out over a score of ministers and missionaries to serve their countrymen in this country and abroad. Another strong church is the Hubbard Memorial Church of Chicago, of which the Rev. Vaclav Vanek, D.D. is pastor. Other splendid churches are located at Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Clarkson and Wahoo, Nebraska; Hopkins, Minnesota; and Maribel, Wisconsin. The Presbytery of Pittsburgh, one of the first presbyteries to introduce a thoroughgoing program for the foreign-born, has developed several splendid centers of work for the Czechoslovaks under the leadership of the Rev. Vaclav Losa, D.D. The Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church of New York City is an example of what an American church may do for its foreign neighbors. Nearly one half of the 1800 members of the Bible School are of Czech extraction, and they mingle democratically with children and young people of the wealthy families of Fifth and Park Avenues.

Presbyterian Work for the Slovaks

Our Presbyterian Church has a number of fine Slovak churches in Pennsylvania and Ohio, and in many missions and neighborhood houses the Slovaks are being reached with the same program which ministers to other nationalities of the newer immigration.

There are more naturally Protestant people among the Czechoslovaks than in the case of any other Slavic group, and our church should be doing a much larger work than it is doing now.

Study your own community! If you find Czechoslovaks there, you may be sure that a way can be found to win them for Christ.



*The border and the motifs used in this leaflet were drawn by a
Czech artist*

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