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CZECHOSLOVAK CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD CULTURE

Prof. Roman Jacobson of Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, on whom the University of Chicago conferred an honorary doctorate for his outstanding contribution in linguistics, was guest of the Czechoslovak Society for Arts and Sciences on April 5th in Chicago. He came with Prof. Hugh McLean, head of the Slavic Department, Dr. Edw. Stankiewicz, Dr. Joseph Anderle and Polish members of the faculty at Chicago University, to address a group of Americans of Czechoslovak descent. Reminiscing on life in free Czechoslovakia in the twenty years of peace between the two world wars, Prof. Jacobson paid tribute to Thomas Masaryk and other great men who have contributed to European culture.

Born in Russia, Prof. Roman Jacobson left his native land in 1920 at the age of twenty-three. He had studied Slav languages at the University of Moscow so that when he arrived in Prague he had a limited knowledge of Czech. On the train coming to Prague he read for the first time Mácha's superb poem "Máj." "I was carried away by the striking originality of this great romanticist, so little known abroad," said Prof. Jacobson. "I was soon to realize that the Czechs themselves underrated their great poet and even their great past. My work was set out for me from the first day.

"I arrived in Prague at the time of the Sokol meet; throughout the nation there was a spontaneous desire to celebrate the end of war and Czechoslovakia's independence. Joy was in the air, one felt it everywhere, and soon one was swept along by the joyous tide.

"Prague is beautiful. Not long ago I discussed with several Harvard professors, who also know Prague, what it is that makes Prague so unique among the cities of the world. It is, of course, one of the most cultural places in Europe. Its buildings reveal all strata of Czech history: the earlier medieval, the fantastic gothic which took on such lovely forms here, the exquisite Prague of the 14th century when it was the capital of an empire. And then came the renaissance and the baroque - few cities in the world have such a luxury of baroque."

"Coming from Moscow I could view it impartially and perhaps I was able to see things that may not have been apparent to those living there. At the University of Prague they were suffering from provincialism imposed upon the nation by accursed foreign domination over a long time. There were marks of it everywhere; I soon felt a lack of communication between the professor and students, the university and the young writers. The professors held a deprecatory view of their country's great contribution to world culture and could not understand my excitement over Bohemia's sculptors, painters and poets of the Middle Ages. It was a fantastic age and yet so little appreciated by the Czechs themselves. Fortunately, this attitude was to change rapidly. The twenty years of peace in Czechoslovakia was a period of dynamic development in Czech science in many fields. There was a close relationship between science and literature. Provincialism was overcome and Czechs quickly moved into the international circuit.

"The man head and shoulders above the others was Thomas Masaryk whose breadth of vision in many fields was most remarkable: sociology, history, philosophy, linguistics. One could speak with him on any of these subjects and marvel at his grasp and visionary interpretation. His influence on his students was pronounced. Masaryk foresaw clearly the great difficulties of the future and prayed that his nation be given 40 years of peace to fortify itself to meet the dangers."

(Over)

For twenty years Prof. Jacobson took a very active part in Czechoslovakia's cultural life as professor of Masaryk University in Brno and as member of a linguistic group of structuralists. He speaks with deep affection of the writers and poets and as a discoverer sighting a new continent on the horizon he rejoices in Bohemia's great past, so little known to the outside world. There was Jan Hus of the pre-Reformation, who was also a fine poet, a fact almost unknown, and there was the great Comenius of the Reformation, "one of the first people of the world. It is unbelievable how little is known about him. For instance, it was believed that his most important manuscript, over which he had labored for many years, had been burnt. The manuscript was discovered not so long ago in a library and will now be published. This work of Comenius is unique linguistically and philosophically."

"Take almost any age and Bohemia has given the world a great heritage. An almost unknown chapter is the period of the Great Moravian Empire of the ninth century. It was not known until recently, that there were any stone churches in Bohemia and Moravia at that time; however, in 1957 I saw proof of my theory in the excavations of two magnificent cities with palaces and churches in Southern Moravia. New ideas were born and flourished in the Great Moravian Empire. The world should know about it."

Prof. Jacobson himself has done much in bringing to life Bohemia's glorious past. His collected works will now be published in eight volumes in Holland.

In closing, Prof. Jacobson spoke movingly of his farewell to Prague in April 1939, following Czechoslovakia's annexation by Hitler. At the Masaryk railway station - the Communists have since erased Masaryk's name - Prof. Jacobson met a very dear friend, the poet Jaroslav Seifert, who said: "I ask only one thing of you: Tell the truth! Tell people everywhere that there was nothing more wonderful than life in Czechoslovakia these last twenty years of freedom."

"Czechoslovak contribution to arts and sciences" will also be the theme of the Congress of the Society for Arts and Sciences at the Statler Hotel in Washington, D. C. from April 20th to 22nd incl. The society has a membership of 600, of whom 400 are in the United States and Canada. Many of the professors, writers, journalists and artists had to flee when Hitler and later the Communists seized their country, although some of the members are second and third generation Americans of Czechoslovak descent.

The lecture program is divided into several groups: Medicine and Technology, headed by the President, Prof. Václav Hlavatý, University of Indiana; Linguists and Slavistics, Chairman, H. Kučera, Brown University; Czechs and Slovaks Abroad, Chairman, V. E. Andic, University of Pittsburgh; Sociology, Theology, Philosophy, Chairman Otakar Machotka, Harpur College; Literature and Literary Criticism, Chairman René Wellek, Yale University; Law, Economics, Chairman Vratislav Bušek, New York; Fine Arts, Chairman Karel B. Jirák, Roosevelt University; History and Political Science, Chairman Francis Schwarzenberg, Loyola University.

For information pertaining to the program or the Society write to the Secretary General: Dr. Jaroslav Němec, 2067 Park Rd. N. W., Washington, D. C.

The famous Czech pianist Rudolph Firkušný, who is also a member of the Society, will give a private concert for the participants of the Congress Saturday evening, preceding the banquet at Statler Hotel.

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**CONVENTION
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CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Prague newspapers announced in one sentence that the mausoleum where the body of Klement Gottwald had been resting in state has been temporarily closed: When reopened, the place of the late President of Communist Czechoslovakia will probably be empty. - Stalin's huge statue on top of the hill overlooking the city is presenting a much weightier problem. Of course much will depend on the pressure exerted by Moscow; so far, Stalin's name has not been erased, as yet, from street signs, factories and mountain peaks.

This uncertainty presents a problem to American publishers. For instance, we have been asked by a publishing house preparing a new issue of an encyclope-

dia whether the highest peak of the Tatra Mountains in Slovakia is still named in honor of Stalin, or whether it has been given back its original name of Gerlach. No one can answer the question of what happens next in a Communist country.



Another important political figure has been swept aside recently in Czechoslovakia, Vice Premier Rudolph Barak. He has been stripped of all state and public functions and faces grave charges for various crimes. To Jan J.R. Lorenc (National Observer) he is the victim of a purge made necessary by Czechoslovakia's difficulties with the "Master Plan," which was started in 1960 by order of Moscow. The plan called for a complete remapping of the administration into ten new regions (oblasti); in effect it was "a controlled upheaval" which uprooted a great many people. "The streamlining was needed," says Mr. Lorenc "because Czechoslovakia has been getting more and more demanding assignments from COMECON, the Soviet bloc's 'Common Market' headquarters in Moscow." But something went wrong and Rudolph Barak is the scapegoat.

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PRAGUE'S GLITTER AND GAIETY MASK RED CURBS ON FREEDOM

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Loyal Gould (Chicago Sun Times, April 1, 1962) reports from Prague that Communists rightly call Prague the Paris of the Eastern Bloc. It is intended as a showcase for communism, especially for the emerging African and Asian nations the Communists want to woo. It's all part of a grand plan. But behind the glitter are the many curbs on freedom of the individual: the secret police, the plain-clothes men who keep long vigils outside hotels where foreigners stay to prevent citizens from making contacts with the outside world etc. Freedom is the greatest lack. As one Czechoslovak complained to the American visitor: "Hundreds of American tourists come here every year and all they can do is marvel that we are not as poor in material things as some people in the West believe. So many of them can't seem to grasp that what we lack is the freedom to say and do what we want." - Communist "persuasion" has a subtler side: "For example, a pensioned Czechoslovak suspected of theological deviations is judged by a neighborhood committee that decides whether his pension should be reduced. Children sent to church by their parents cannot receive a secondary education. Western newspapers and magazines are banned from newsstands...Despite police pressure the people manage in one way or another to show friendliness to Westerners. Americans are cheered at international sports events...despite the daily outpouring of Communist propaganda that paints Americans as bogey men of the world."

IN OUR MAIL BAG - "Your March issue of the American Bulletin mentions that American magazines and gift packages cannot be sent to friends or relatives in Czechoslovakia. I want to tell you that I sent two suits to my relatives in Bohemia. I also sent a package of shoes, worn but still usable. On one suit they were charged \$15., which they were able to pay. On the other suit, they were charged \$45. or 315 crowns. The Communists charged my cousins an equivalent of \$250. or 1,750 cr. for the shoes. (The monthly salary

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'Greatest Boss'

Boss Cermak of Chicago, a Study of Political Leadership, by Alex Gottfried (University of Washington Press, \$6.50) is fascinating reading, especially for Americans of Czechoslovak descent. As John Drury points out in the Chicago Daily News (March 26, 1962): Although the author was not personally acquainted with the Mayor of Chicago, his well-documented scholarly work brings to life one of the most unusual political leaders in recent American history. "Aside from his place as the man who died of an assassin's bullet intended for Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933, Anton J. Cermak, mayor of Chicago during the early years of the Great Depression, stands apart as having welded one of the most powerful, successful and cohesive political organizations in American city history. What is more, the Democratic organization that "Tony" Cermak formed and headed a generation ago has remained in power continuously since then."

Prof. Gottlieb, whose work was financed by grants from the Ford Foundation and the Walgreen Foundation, asks and answers such questions as: How was it possible for a poor, uneducated, Czechoslovak-born immigrant to become mayor of the second largest city in America and, as political boss of Illinois, select one of the state's greatest governors, Henry Horner.

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of a doctor is from 1,800 to 2,000 cr.; an office girl earns 800 cr. and a farmer 500 cr. a month, note.) I also sent them some medicine for which the Communists did not charge. Put that in the Bulletin. My relatives had to turn the medicine over to the clinic and were told they could use up a part of it, but had to share the rest with others. - It is strange that some of our people visit over there and say the people are happy. Whom are they trying to fool? The people are dejected and would run away if they could. Do not mention my relatives' town. Sincerely, R. J. S., Chicago."

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WHAT CAN I DO ?

People sometimes ask: "What can I do for my country?" and then proceed to do nothing. There is work for everyone, but it is up to the individual to find his place in the community. Mrs. Marie Vitek found a very effective way when she returned home to Cedar Rapids, Iowa from a visit to Czechoslovakia in 1948 where she witnessed the Communist seizure of a free country. Stirred by the death of Jan Masaryk and the grief of the people at his funeral and by the quick succession of incredible events that took place as Communists took over, she decided to bring home the truth and tell disbelievers about what happens to a country and to everybody under Communist rule. It was quite difficult in the beginning, but Marie Vitek persisted. She now has an enviable record: more than 800 speeches in every corner of Iowa to women's clubs, schools, forums, on television and radio. Recently the Woman's Club of Iowa recognized her outstanding contribution with a special award.

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