

Francis D. Raška. *The Long Road to Victory: A History of Czechoslovak Exile Organizations after 1968.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. 250 pp. \$55.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-88033-706-9.



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Francis D. Raška's previous book, *Fighting Communism From Afar: The Council of Free Czechoslovakia* (2008), studied the activities of the Czech and Slovak politicians and patriots who went into exile after the Communist coup d'état of February 1948. It uncovered the "hardships, illusions, and disappointments of individuals who worked relentlessly for the restoration of civil rights and democracy in Czechoslovakia" (pp. vii-viii). The present volume, *The Long Road to Victory*, maps out and studies the labyrinth of Czech and Slovak exile organizations in the aftermath of the Soviet invasion of August 1968.

The Czech national cause has been advanced by exiles for many centuries: Jan Amos Komensky, Thomas G. Masaryk, Milan Stefanik, and Edvard Benes were all exiles. The Allies granted de facto recognition to the Czechoslovak National Council in October 1918 because of the more than 100,000 Legionnaires who served on their side in France, Italy, and especially in Russia. The Czech and Slovak pilots who joined the Royal Air Force in World War II or soldiers who fought the Nazis fulfilled

not only a military role but also a political one—for the benefit of the vast majority that remained at home. Importantly, Czech culture managed to survive the Stalinist fifties and the decades of Gustáv Husak's "normalized" regime to a great extent thanks to exiled writers and artists. Just as important were small-scale publishing houses that operated outside Czechoslovakia, especially Zdena and Josef Skvorecky's Sixty-Eight Publishers in Toronto, Canada.

Nevertheless, many Czechs are uncomfortable, even suspicious of those who chose to live abroad during the years of foreign occupation, domestic misrule, and dictatorship. Herein lies a paradox: the Czechs at home have repeatedly depended on the political and cultural support from those in exile, and yet the relations of the two groups have been plagued with suspicion and distrust. It was true for Masaryk and Benes during World War I. It repeated itself twenty years later, and again after the Velvet Revolution when Karel Schwarzenberg, a presidential candidate in the recent elections, was soundly defeated with the

use of such arguments as *nezil tady s nami* (he didn't live here with us). The electorate preferred his opponent, a former Communist Party member, over Schwarzenberg, who with his family was forced into exile where they worked tirelessly on behalf of the elusive dream of a free Czechoslovakia. The public gave preference to a chain-smoking self-declared alcoholic with multiple chins and a blemished ethical record over an elegant aristocrat whose patriotism could not be questioned because the former had stayed put during the Communist dictatorship, while the latter had lived abroad.

Raška's book thus deals with an intriguingly complex phenomenon. It opens with a review of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia. It then focuses on a number of other exile groups seeking to overturn Communism and restore democracy in Czechoslovakia. Their locations indicate that exiles active in support of the cause were spread mostly in Western Europe. There was the Listy Group led by Jiri Pelikan, who worked in Rome; the Paris-based journal *Svedectvi* edited by Pavel Tigrid; the Czechoslovak section of Radio Free Europe in Munich; the Charter 77 Foundation, run by Frantisek Janouch in Sweden; the Palach Press operation, organized by Jan Kavan in London, and the Documentation Center established by Vilem Precan in Scheinfeld, Germany.

The Council of Free Czechoslovakia, the overarching organization of Czech and Slovak democrats formed in February 1949 in Washington, was troubled from the beginning by conflicts between Czechs and Slovaks, personal rivalries, infighting between representatives of the old political parties, and large issues (e.g., the expulsions of the Sudeten Germans) on which it was impossible to achieve any sort of consensus. Two men campaigned for the leadership position of the Czechoslovak exile community. One was Petr Zenkl (1884-1975), a cabinet minister in the interwar period and concentration camp prisoner during the war. He was the democratic politician most re-

spected by the Americans during the critical 1945-48 era. They brought him to the United States in a clandestine manner with an eye to putting him in charge of a yet-to-be established Czechoslovak exile organization.

Zenkl's chief rival for the leadership of the Council was Ferdinand Peroutka (1895-1978), a journalist and public intellectual. His position was strengthened by believable rumors that Edvard Benes, Czechoslovakia's last democratic president, would have liked to see Peroutka as his successor. The rivalry had to have been particularly painful because Zenkl and Peroutka had survived the war together as concentration camp prisoners.

The tensions between Zenkl and Peroutka resulted in several schisms and walk-outs, but Zenkl kept the top position into his eighties—from 1949 to 1973. This power struggle, and such issues as Czech-Slovak tensions, nearly immobilized the Council. Nevertheless, Raška credits it with several positive achievements, e.g., assisting Czechoslovak refugees who—in far too many cases—languished under abominable conditions in German and Austrian refugee camps for years. He acknowledges that many members of the organization became disillusioned, and no wonder. In choosing exile in 1948 most believed that Soviet Communism would soon suffer a strategic defeat and that they would return to a liberated and free homeland. "It was difficult for them to appreciate and accept the true realities of the divided world," writes Raška, "especially the lack of sympathy of Western governments for exile movements unless they could be used for Cold War propaganda purposes" (pp. 12-13).

The Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 triggered a new wave of refugees and injected new talent into the slumbering émigré organizations. It also caused new frictions: the post-1948 exiles tended to have clean democratic credentials but quite a few of those who escaped in the aftermath of the invasion were disillusioned former Communist Party

members. This caused further tensions but also brought much-needed energy. Raška quotes the perceptive Pavel Tigrid: “To tell the truth, the Czech and Slovak emigration acquired speed and a more defined political expression only after the arrival of those who defeated us in 1948 and who were themselves defeated in 1968-69. Only they gave the exile, so to say, pizzazz. The majority were former Communists, terribly industrious, very busy, who could not live without doing something” (pp. 71-72).

Raška is right to stress the centrality of the human rights issue that emerged with the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. The renewed council--Mojmir Povolny had replaced Zenkl--quickly saw the relevance of the Third Basket, i.e., human rights, of the Helsinki Protocol. This proved to be the correct strategy, especially as the Jimmy Carter administration directed attention to human rights violations in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. This fortuitously coincided with the emergence of Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, an organization explicitly lauded by Ronald Reagan eleven years later, in 1988, when the collapse of Communism had become a thinkable outcome of the Cold War. Raška correctly concludes that the council did not play a central role in defeating Communist rule. But by “bringing all repressive actions of the Czechoslovak Communists to the attention of the Western public and politicians” it certainly helped to keep the dream of democracy alive (pp. 46-47).

The Listy group, which Raška examines in detail, represents a counterpoint to the conservative council. It attracted the reform Communists who had spearheaded the Prague Spring and were driven into exile by the August 1968 invasion. Most of them arrived in the West with a sordid record. Their leader, Jiri Pelikan, had been responsible for the purges among the students and faculty of Charles University after the Communist coup d'état in 1948. Although some, e.g., Eduard Goldstücker, briefly suffered at the hands of the

regime they had helped to establish, they remained--despite their mistreatment--fully committed to the values of Communism. Raška quotes a rare British critic of Goldstücker, who noted that “[f]or Goldstücker, history begins and moral lows coincide with the time when he himself suffers injustices. He then offers a very selective view of the past. As we saw, only then was he willing to admit his own share of guilt. Such a confession belongs to an infantile universe, where a simple ‘I’m sorry’ erases damaging acts from the past and from the present responsibility for its consequences” (p. 79). Despite his refusal to renounce Communism, Goldstücker flourished in exile, effortlessly obtaining a professorship at an English university and honorific membership in several prestigious academies.

Other members of the Listy group, such as Zdenek Hejzlar, had been uninspiring party bureaucrats or, like Ota Sik, Communist economists. Zdenek Mlynar, a college roommate of Mikhail Gorbachev in Moscow at the height of the Stalinist era, rose to become a Communist Party politburo member in 1968--before he was expelled from “normalized” Czechoslovakia into a comfortable exile in Austria. The group achieved considerable visibility in 1979 when Jiri Pelikan, the purger of Charles University during the Stalinist era, was elected in 1979 and 1984 to the European Parliament as a member of the Italian Socialist Party.

Pavel Tigrid, the editor of *Svedectvi*, had brought to exile the values of the prewar democratic Czechoslovakia of Thomas Masaryk but also the political acumen and skills so amply exhibited by the leftists around the Listy group. Raška demonstrates this by reviewing a number of intellectual controversies the journal hosted, e.g., the issue of postwar expulsions from the Sudetenland and Milan Kundera's concept of Central Europe. Unfortunately, he says next to nothing about the journal itself and the circumstances of its birth at the height of the dramatic events in Poland and Hungary in 1956: *Svedectvi* was one of the intel-

lectual journals created and financed, at least for some time, by the Central Intelligence Agency--arguably one of the best investments of the agency's funds throughout the course of the Cold War!

Raška also takes on the curious phenomenon of Jan Kavan, the founder of Palach Press and a player in the British-based European Nuclear Disarmament (END). Kavan had attracted the attention of the Czechoslovak special services already in 1967, when he was a liberal student activist. In the aftermath of the Soviet invasion, Kavan was allowed to study in Great Britain but he met there with officers of the First Directorate (Foreign Intelligence). According to the files the Communist agents working in Britain kept on him, Kavan carried out the tasks he received flawlessly. Unfortunately, Kavan's file created by the Czechoslovak State Security (StB) covers only the period from 1969 to 1977. The rest, most likely the juiciest part, covering the remaining period until the Velvet Revolution in November 1989, had been destroyed by the StB just before it ceased to exist.

Pavel Tigrid had sensed for years that Kavan was a profoundly dishonest man and said so. Vilem Precan had called Kavan a "source of destruction, manipulation, and disinformation" and Raška is far too cautious, in my view, in concluding merely that "[m]uch remains unclear about Jan Kavan's activities" (pp. 155, 148). However, he acknowledges--without naming anyone--that the exile was "infiltrated by the StB" (p. 171). Despite the many unexplained aspects of his relationship with the First Directorate during the Cold War, Kavan went on to serve as the Czech Republic's foreign minister from 1998 to 2002 and as president of the United Nations General Assembly from 2002 to 2003.

Given the size of this project, the book contains surprisingly few factual errors. Most should have been caught by the editor, e.g., Karel Schwarzenberg is a "knize," a prince, not a count.

Raška has written a highly informative and important book based on solid research in lesser

known archival collections (for instance, in the Center for Czechoslovak Exile Studies in Olomouc, Czech Republic), interviews with direct participants, and a wide spectrum of secondary sources.

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