

Prague:

October and November *

(¶) The plane from London was met at the Prague airport by representatives of the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs, and of the Faculty of Charles University, who took me to my hotel. Petr Koubek, from the Salzburg Seminar, was also on hand, and we walked out together for the late afternoon view. We went through side streets of the Old Town, since Petr wanted to reach the river just at the point, near the Charles Bridge, where we would get the full sweep of the Cathedral standing high on its hill, irradiated by the watery autumn sun. Later we went to a little restaurant with bare wooden tables, where he told me I would eat a better steak than any I had had in England. He was right.

Still later Petr introduced me to my first Prague beer hall, where there was a lively party of a couple of dozen at the next long table: a professor from the University being given a celebration by his students. They were mining engineers, and sang a great many mining and mountain songs. For such occasions two students stand, one at each end of the table, as double masters of ceremony, keeping up a rapid fire of jokes and personalities. The jokes were fairly usual, to judge from Petr's translations: about a professor who fell

* These reflections on Czechoslovakia, like the rest of this journal, remain as I wrote them, passages of personal history. I have added only two or three notes, dated, like this one, late in March 1948.

down a well, about a student who passed his examination in spite of being drunk, about another who passed his only by paying court to the professor's ugly daughter. Gradually the men at the neighboring tables became involved in the cross-fire of talk, were asked to join the group, and were properly toasted in Pilsener. A visiting professor could hardly have had a better introduction.

The next morning, at eleven, I had my official introduction, and that was very pleasant too. It took place in the office of Dr. Jan Kozak, the Dean of the Philosophical Faculty. I met the members of the English Department, and we sat around a table and talked, over a bottle of good Slovakian red wine. Dr. Kozak, who is a philosopher, has a face both sensitive and shrewd, but he looked very tired, as did the others. Even more than scholars elsewhere in this post-war period, they are badly overworked. Charles University was kept shut by the Nazis for six years, and the huge influx of students now finds a smaller faculty than before. Teachers murdered in concentration camps cannot soon be replaced. The Dean brought out the charter of the University, which, founded in 1348 by Emperor Charles IV, is the oldest in Northern Europe. He added, with a twist of his lips, that this charter was of course only a facsimile. The original was carried off by the Germans, and has not yet been traced.

Jan Stern also welcomed me, along with George and Patsy Ritter, who are here for George to make some study of Czech labor law. Jan, on his home ground, is even more effervescent, if possible, than he was at Salzburg. He now has his passport to study in the Soviet Union, but until he leaves he is working as the poetry critic for *Young Front*, the Communist paper for youth, which is edited entirely by a staff in its early twenties. He invited me to his house, where he introduced me to his mother. His father, a prominent Jewish Social Democrat, was executed by the Nazis, at the same camp where Jan had been sent. His one sister is married to a trade-union organizer. His mother, who is not Jewish, is a quiet and self-effacing, but keenly intelligent woman, who has helped support her family by translations of Henry De Man and other writers of socialist theory.

Jan took me up to his room, where the chief decoration was a modernist abstraction by one of his friends. On the desk there

were some manuscripts, translations that Jan had been making of Mayakovsky. He wanted to read some poems by his favorite living Czech poet, Vladimir Holan, who uses something of the delicate technique of Rilke, but has filled it with a more direct social content. Jan stood in the middle of the floor, gesturing as he translated, and looking even larger than usual as the desk lamp silhouetted his form against the wall. The window was wide open to the cold October evening, as Jan went on with rising eloquence from one poem to the next. We might have stayed there for hours, if his mother had not come up to tell us that tea was ready.

(It is interesting to listen to Jan and Petr discuss Czech politics, since, the one a Communist and the other an equally convinced Social Democrat, they seem to differ hardly at all in objectives. Both accept the Czech Revolution of 1945 as the central point in their lives, and feel bound to do everything they can to realize its aims. There does not seem to be the same hostility between the two parties of the left here as in countries less advanced in their drive towards socialism. Even the National Socialists, the party of the center, are Socialists, despite their dubious name, and have supported the nationalization of what by now is approximately 70 per cent of all the industry. The fourth, the People's Party, is Catholic, as, for that matter, are almost three-quarters of the twelve million people of Czechoslovakia. This party is not committed to socialism, but since it is based on the farmers newly released from the big German landowners it is hardly reactionary. In Slovakia, to be sure, where some of the Catholics who formed the support for Father Tiso's native Fascism are still unresolved in their conflicts, the situation is not so clear-cut.

But in Bohemia and Moravia, in the elections of May 1946, the Communists polled 40 per cent, the National Socialists 24, the People's Party 20, and the Social Democrats 16 per cent. What distinguishes the first group from the last is no fundamental divergence in aims, but, just as between Jan and Petr, a difference in temperament, a different emphasis on means. Petr is outspoken in his respect for the Communists' achievements, and knows that without them the Czech Revolution would not have been won. But he is critical of their party organization, of their tendency to lose

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the rights of the individual in their too exclusive concern with the mass.

Four or five years older than Jan, Petr is more cautious in his judgment. He was just finishing high school when the Nazis moved into Czechoslovakia in 1938, and was able to continue his studies until the universities were closed a year later. Then he went to a job in a bank. From the desk where he worked he could hear the shooting when the two young Czech paratroopers who had killed Heydrich were finally cornered in a church—after six thousand other Czechs had been murdered in reprisal. Shortly after that Petr himself had been sent as a forced laborer to Germany. Assigned as a clerical worker in a radio factory in Erfurt, his position gradually took on more responsibilities and involved travels of inspection, in which he found that he could be of use to the underground.

He described for me a little of the underground's organization. To insure the greatest possible safety, you knew the names, in your chain of communication, only of the men immediately behind and ahead, so that if you were caught and forced by torture to talk, you could not involve more than two others. Petr was active for a couple of years before he was caught. A letter, which he left at the house of the boy immediately ahead of him in the line, miscarried because the boy had already been arrested. When they got Petr, they did things to him that left a scar on his temple and permanently weakened his eyes. But they got no further in the chain. He spent the last eight months of the war in Buchenwald, lost weight from a hundred and forty pounds to ninety, and reached Prague again the month after the Revolution.

He then settled down to finishing his work in economics at the university, with a job in a government bureau on the side, and had received his degree just before he left for Salzburg. He is now in between jobs, and the kind of decision he wants to make for his future points up his reasons for being a Social Democrat rather than a Communist. He could get a job at once as an organizer for his party, and he obviously possesses outstanding executive gifts. But he does not want his career to depend upon the party in the way that he feels the Communists are far too prone to do, to the ultimate detriment both of the men and the party. Instead he wants

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to make his career as an economist, and is hoping for a full-time appointment now in one of the bureaus. On the subject of the corruption that will overtake any party if it does not subject itself to constant self-criticism, he also expressed the kind of central conviction—that is shared, to be sure, by Jan—that the Czech Revolution, in releasing potentialities for the mass of the people, will also create a fuller freedom for more individuals.

¶ When I stepped out of my hotel to meet the Ritters with their car, they were talking with the owners of a car from Illinois. They had seen the Ritters' Connecticut license plates, and had stopped and come over. They were eager to say hello to anyone from the States. Both the man and his wife had been born in Czechoslovakia, but they had met and married in Chicago, and hadn't been back here since the early nineteen-twenties. They both looked as though they might have come from, peasant families, the woman awkward and plain beneath her expensive American clothes, the man very rugged despite the diamonds on his fingers.

Now they had returned, intending to stay a year, but were leaving at the end of three months. They didn't like it at all here any more, things were so upset, the woman was saying. When Patsy asked her what the matter was, she answered that the lower-class people had taken over. Wasn't that what made a healthy country, I asked, and wasn't America also built on a revolutionary tradition?

The man saw trouble coming, and didn't want an argument. He was perfectly frank in saying that he had worked hard for his money, that he had been a sales manager, but was over sixty now and meant to enjoy his money. He didn't enjoy spending it here, why, this hotel was no better than a dump, and you couldn't tell what wouldn't happen in the political situation ahead. He was going back to spend the winter in Florida. He gave George and me each a package of Gillette razor blades that he had in his pocket.

¶ Petr, without ever explicitly saying so, has quietly constituted himself my guide. The first few mornings in particular he would turn up shortly after breakfast at this hotel

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that he found for me in a side street not far from the Old Town Square, and want to know what I would like to do that day. He soon took me to the big student hostel, which he helped convert back from a battered, lice-ridden German barracks and then helped manage during his own student days. This is Unity Hostel, but two of the others, to emphasize the international spirit of the student body, are named Tito and Roosevelt. The furnishing is the barest, and often four students are crowded into a single room. But the food is good, and is priced low enough to enable a student to live on the fifteen hundred crowns (thirty dollars) a month that he is granted by the government if his family has no means to support him. The hostel is run entirely by the students themselves, including the ordering of the food and fuel and the management of the kitchen, and they are obviously proud of it. But many of them also seem tired because of the fierce pressures upon them to make up for the more than six years' lost time between Munich and their liberation. Petr is bothered because too many of them are too serious, and seldom take time enough off to laugh.

My first Saturday night he invited me out to his canoe club, a few miles along the Vltava from the city, to witness the final ceremony of the year: saying good-bye to the boats for the winter. It seemed wise for each of us to take a bottle of wine for the libation.

The party was well launched when we arrived, on the upper floor of the boathouse, in a room lined with pennants and photographs of the river. On such an occasion I had to be introduced in a speech by Petr, and welcomed in a speech by the president of the club. Then they sang 'John Brown's Body,' which may have been the only American song they knew, but no other could have been more heart-warming. While we drank and listened to their other songs between dances, Petr told me about some of the members. The president was a carpenter, the vice-president a young doctor of law. A very quiet member in a corner was one of the nation's heroes, who had blown up six different bridges in the teeth of the strictest German surveillance.

Petr was eager for us to try his boat, so about midnight they bundled me up in four jerseys and a pair of pants much too big for me, and we paddled a mile or so towards the city, the distant towers standing out sharply in the full moonlight. By the time we

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got back the party had advanced to dramatic skirts, with a gruff-voiced little man acting Svengali and a very tall ungainly one dressed up as Esmeralda, but having so much difficulty in preventing her improvised breasts from sliding down to her belt that most of her hypnotized answers were drowned in laughter. All of a sudden the president was addressing me again, in an even more formal speech, and then presented me with a certificate of membership headed *Variagove Nezapomini* ('Variags Do Not Forget'). He also gave me the little red, green, and blue pennant of the Variags Club, which I promised that I would put on my own canoe in Maine.

We relaxed again and had some soup, with meat balls in it. Then it turned out, as everyone in a Catholic country would know, though I hadn't, that October 4 was St. Francis day, my name day. So four of them grabbed my shoulders and feet, tossed me in the air, and bounced me, gently, on the floor. After this all the men, shook hands with me, I was kissed by the girls, and felt that I was really *in*.

Towards three Petr escorted me to a tram car, and the rest of the party came out on the roof for a final salvo of 'John Brown's Body.' When I assured Petr that I could find my way back to my hotel, he was obviously pleased and left me, though not without instructions to the conductor where to put me off. He then returned to the boathouse for the final ceremony, which would not take place until dawn, when every member would see that his canoe was well stacked for the winter, and would pour a little wine, if any was left, on its bow.

(¶ The walk from the hotel to the University is entirely through the old city. It begins near the Powder Tower, the one remaining gate of the medieval town, then twists through narrow streets past St. James' Church, whose elegant baroque façade is superimposed upon a much older structure. Then it ducks through an alley into the court of the oldest market, the roofs of which are crowned with the red-brown tiles that characterize so much of Prague. The spacious upper balcony running around three sides of this court makes it look quite like the inn yards where the old English plays were performed. It is given its accent at the

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farther end by an arch with the hatched and roughened columns which the Renaissance here liked particularly, and leads out to the Parish Church of our Lady of Týn, mostly in late Gothic. Skirting its buttresses, you come out into the breathtakingly broad Old Town Square, with the huge memorial to Hus in the center.

In front of the Town Hall, the most famous medieval building in Prague, the execution of the Czech patriots took place after the disastrous battle of the White Mountain, in 1621. This spelled the defeat of the Protestants by the Catholics, and the beginning of the long domination of the Germans over the Czechs. The Town Hall itself is now only a broken shell. It was the scene of the worst fighting in the Revolution of May 1945. The Germans brought their tanks into the streets and the Czech patriots inside the building had only whatever arms they had been able to seize from the occupying army. Several of the other buildings around the Square are badly scarred by gun fire, and are marked by many of the small white tablets which give the name and age of a Czech who died on that spot, sometimes with his already fading photograph in a tin frame, sometimes also with a fresh bunch of flowers. On the farther side is the temporary memorial to the unknown dead. This is simply a taper within red glass, and, inscribed on wood, the dates 1914-1918 and 1938-1945. The first signifies here the time when Czech freedom was regained from the Germans after three hundred years, the second the cruel time when, after only two decades, it had to be won all over again.

In this Square the grandstand was already going up for the celebration of the national holiday of October 28, the day in 1918 when the Czechoslovakian Republic was founded, only ten days after Thomas Masaryk had drafted his Declaration of Independence in Washington. At the far corner you come out into a broad street with an unimpeded view to the river. There on the opposite side is the hill, with the Gothic cathedral on its crest and the long horizontal lines of the seventeenth-century Castle cutting across it, emphasizing in the most spectacular manner, for the whole city to see, the mixture of medieval and baroque which gives Prague its particular quality. With this view to hold my eyes for the last three blocks, I walk over the patterned sidewalk of small rough black

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and white stones to the now modern buildings of Charles University on Smetana Square.

Prague, like Paris, and unlike so many other European capitals, was still spared most of its beauty by the war, except for the spots where the street fighting in the week of the Revolution was heaviest. And there is an ugly gash in one of the residential sections where, not long before V-Day, an American squadron lost its bearings and, apparently thinking that it was over Dresden, killed several hundred people in five minutes' bombing. The outlying industrial plants were also heavily hit. Czechs don't like to talk about this to an American, since we made these raids during the last weeks of the war, too late for them to do much harm to the Nazis. But they have made it much harder for the Czechs to regain their industrial potential.

Paris comes most to mind in this other city lying on both sides of a river and spanned by so many bridges. But the light emanating from the fronts of the buildings is not the lustrous silver gray of Paris, but something blonder and softer. It reveals how both the Renaissance and the Baroque washed up here in their full tide from the Italian south.

One of my colleagues is Zdenek Vancura—who was appointed last year to the first professorship of American literature to be established in Central Europe, and the third, after the Sorbonne and Upsala, in the Eastern Hemisphere. He remarked, while we were making an architectural tour of the city, that Prague, in its prevailing quietness, was like the old parts of Boston. Boston could hardly be more flattered. At the time the Pilgrim fathers were still planning their Plymouth Plantation, the Czechs, already centuries old in national experience, had just thrown the imperial ambassadors out of a window of the Castle—giving the jargon-word 'defenestration' a place in every history text-book—and Prague's beauty was already established in its main outlines. And Boston, attractive as it is from the period of its eighteenth-century houses down through Bulfinch and the Greek revival, has nothing to rival Prague's magnificent series of banks and office buildings and apartments in the international style of the late nineteen-twenties and thirties, which bear such impressive witness to the vital architectural planning of the early Czech Republic. Wheelwright's Subway

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Bridge is a distinguished piece of functional engineering, but it is the only Boston bridge that could be put in competition with half a dozen of the bridges of Prague; and cultured Boston does not yet name many of its bridges and squares after artists and musicians and historians. I wouldn't want to swap my apartment looking out on the warm brick housefronts of Louisbourg Square for an apartment in any other small square anywhere; and yet, when you look from Beacon Hill across the Basin, though you may no longer see the mud flats that so depressed Henry James, there is only a jumble of warehouses and factory chimneys, and the white buildings of M.I.T. supported by no other effort at architectural planning.

(¶ From my study window—to borrow a phrase from James Russell Lowell—I look directly down into Smetana Square. The first thing that caught my eye was the immense red star, in geraniums, that serves temporarily to mark the graves of the Russian soldiers who were killed in Prague during the Czech liberation. The gardeners spaded up the soil for the winter, a few days after my arrival, but the star will bloom again in tulips in the spring.)

One of my chief memories of Prague, from a brief visit here in 1931, was the night view of Woodrow Wilson Square outside the main railroad station, with the white statue of the president gleaming under a brilliant flood light. That statue was torn down by the Nazis. On its site there is now a rock-garden representation of an American flag and a Czech flag, and a temporary tablet in gold letters in both Czech and English, headed by Wilson's most famous sentence: 'Svet musi byti zabezpecen pro democracii.' What follows in English may not be perfectly spelled, but its meaning and its feeling are clear: 'From 1928 there stood on this place a monument in honour of Woodrow Wilson President of U.S.A. This monument was destroyed by the Germans in 1941 and will be re-erected by Americans of Czech decent in U.S.A.'

(¶ The library of American literature belonging to the English department here shows a fascinating variety of layers and accretions, as any library must which has grown up largely by accident. Only since 1945, with the United States now in-

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escapably involved in Europe as it was not after the last war, has Czechoslovakian education started to become systematically concerned with our culture. But now, ironically, dollars to buy books have become more and more unobtainable. Heretofore the few standard editions were overlaid in greater numbers with whatever became available in Tauchnitz, and with what various American ladies seem to have left behind them in their sentimental journeys. Then there were the best-sellers and/or *Kitsch* of the nineteen-twenties and 'thirties, and whatever publishers' promotion schemes could put across, particularly Albatross editions: Hamburg-Paris-Bologna. At that point the Nazis moved in and the University was shut. Just this summer, following an appeal in the States by Maurice Hindus, two thousand additional volumes have come, and are now in the process of being catalogued.

Before this new accession the library had plenty of Louisa May Alcott and of Gertrude Atherton, but of Sherwood Anderson only *A Story Teller's Story*. Louis Bromfield, who must be one of the best publicized writers in Europe, is here with six titles, and Pearl Buck with eleven. Willa Cather appears only with *Lucy Gayheart*, but this collection does not include translations. *My Antonia* in particular is very popular in its Czech version, for its picture of Czech settlers in Nebraska.

There is more than enough of Frances Hodgson Burnett and F. Marion Crawford, but of Stephen Crane only *Bowery Tales*, and of Hart Crane nothing. Indeed, as might be expected, modern poetry as a whole is fairly sparse. Among the writers of the 'twenties there are Floyd Dell and Carl Van Vechten, Joseph Hergesheimer and Booth Tarkington and Edna Ferber. Hemingway and Dos Passos are pretty well represented, but of Farrell there is only one book of short stories, and of Faulkner so far only *The Unvanquished*. The two contemporary writers nearly all of whose works are here are O'Neill and Sinclair Lewis. O'Neill's popularity seems also to be continuing on the stage, and a production of *Desire Under the Elms* is already announced for this season. Of Upton Sinclair there are *The Jungle*, *The Brass Check*, *King Coal*, *Boston*, and *Little Steel*, and even more of Jack London. A Jack London Club still continues in Prague among the young socialists.

Of our major nineteenth-century authors Emerson and Poe are

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most extensively represented, each in a couple of more or less complete editions. There are several copies of *Leaves of Grass*, and a good deal of Mark Twain, though not *Life on the Mississippi*. Of Melville there are reprints from the nineteen-thirties of *Moby Dick*, *Redburn*, and *Piazza Tales*. *Moby Dick* was also widely read in a translation made at that time. Howells appears in sixteen of his quiet novels and sketches—mostly Tauchnitz editions of the eighteen-nineties—but not in his most ambitious social study, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*. Of Henry James, who was reprinted less by Tauchnitz, there are only *Roderick Hudson* and *The Outcry*, which is now virtually unobtainable anywhere.

Several oddities crop up, such as six novels from the eighteen-seventies and 'eighties by John Habberton, the then popular author of *Helen's Babies*. It is not surprising to find a wandering cosmopolite like Lafcadio Hearn, but half a dozen of William Gilmore Simms' historical novels of the older South were hardly to have been expected. I am at a loss to explain the presence of the three novels by Theodore Winthrop of New Haven, which were all published posthumously, after Winthrop was killed in the Civil War.

The books given in response to Hindus' plea help fill many gaps. For instance, Sherwood Anderson will now be almost complete, from the time of his earliest work. But any such donation also depends on what people have dug out of their attics. There is much Washington Irving and Cooper and Longfellow, as well as nineteen volumes by Oliver Wendell Holmes, all of whose *Autocrat* series were here already. There are also nine copies of Van Wyck Brooks' *New England: Indian Summer*.

(¶ For the week-end before my opening lecture Petr made arrangements for us to visit the rest home of the Syndicate of Writers and Artists, thirty miles out in the country at Dobris (pronounced Dobrzish, which is quite beyond my tongue). It doesn't look much like Yaddo or the MacDowell Colony. It is established in what used to be the castle of the Collerado Mannsfeldts, one of the noble Austrian families who moved in, to complete the subjugation of the Czechs, in the seventeenth century. They built here, using serf labor, an enormous baroque mansion in

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strawberry-pink stucco. It is not heavy like Schloss Leopoldskron, but airy, spacious, and commanding. The grounds are large enough for an hour's walk. During the occupation, this estate was the headquarters of Heydrich's successor as the Nazi Protector, and it was turned over to the writers only after the Revolution. Here an artist can come and live at a very low fee, while doing his work. Full membership is limited to those who have published three books, or the equivalent in the other arts, or—since this country's cultural life is so bound up with that of other countries—six translations.

The first evening I met several of the large group who had come out for the final session of a meeting to arrange the details of the cultural treaty between Czechoslovakia and France. This is the kind of procedure that many European countries are now using to encourage the circulation of their books and ideas, and to ensure the greatest possible number of exchange scholarships for students and professors. Everyone consumed an appropriate amount of cognac, as Czech and French amity were pledged anew.

The next day there was a lunch for Rex Warner, who had been invited here on a tour by the Ministry of Information. I sat at the left of the chairman, a man of fifty, whom I had not previously met. The name on the card at his plate was Vladimir Prochazka. Then began the fascinating game of starting from scratch to try to place him. He opened by apologizing for his English, which he spoke far better than I can handle any foreign speech. He said that he had no difficulty in reading it, since he had done a good deal of translating, including *The Grapes of Wrath*. But the slang there had given him considerable trouble, and he had turned often for help to Mencken's book on the American language. He had finally decided that the nearest equivalent to the Okies' talk would be South Moravian. The Germans had not objected to *The Grapes of Wrath*, since it criticized America, but after 1941 they had shut down on all translations from English or American, and Prochazka had had to support himself by translating German.

I had just about placed him as one of the prolific translators of the Syndicate, a fairly safe character probably, since he had been left unmolested during the occupation. I asked him if he was doing any translating now. He said he didn't have time, what with being

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a member of Parliament. 'What party?' 'Communist.' But how had he managed to survive in Prague during the war? With a slow grin he said that, luckily, he had a brother in the army, who had escaped to Russia and become a general. The Germans got mixed up and believed there was only one of them, since his Czech friends had thoughtfully crossed his name off the city directory. He went underground, and made his living translating under a new name. He had been a lawyer by profession, but had been a member of the Communist Party since its first founding in Czechoslovakia in the early nineteen-twenties. He had fought all four years through the other war on the Polish front. What he had observed at first hand of the Russian Revolution had committed him to its aims, once for all.

We were sitting facing portraits of Masaryk and Benes, and, after a toast, I tried to say why I had wanted particularly to come to Czechoslovakia, why his country seemed to me a test-case for my future as well as for his. Americans ought not to forget—no matter what Neville Chamberlain may have said about 'that distant and little-known country'—that the founding of the Czechoslovakian Republic was closely related to our political theory, from Jefferson to Wilson, and that its Declaration of Independence was read publicly for the first time in our Independence Hall. Since my country was also a country of revolution, I wanted to observe how his country was carrying forward its political revolution into the economic sphere, supplementing the revolution of Wilson and Masaryk with that of Marx and Lenin. The test was whether it could fuse and preserve elements of both, whether, habituated through its whole long history to looking both East and West, it could still manage to do so in our threatened times. And this would be a test for America too. The most vital creations in American culture had depended on open assimilation of ideas from all sources. Jefferson drew upon the thought of both England and France, and Emerson found some of his inspiration in German philosophy and Oriental scriptures. If America now pretended that foreign ideas were bad, if we tried to shut them off and to freeze the West into the conservative *status quo* of so-called free enterprise, our responsibility for the future would be grave. We would have done much to compel a country like Czechoslovakia to turn entirely toward

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the East. And we would have isolated ourselves hopelessly from the progressive peoples' movements of the present, behind a heavy gold curtain of our own making.

Vladimir Prochazka politely corrected some of my facts. It was not accurate, for instance, to refer, as I had in passing, to Czechoslovakia as a socialist state. It was not yet socialist, though moving in that direction. It could best be described as a people's democracy. Its few wealthy property owners had been mostly Germans, and these had now been expelled. Its people had taken over the control of the land's resources, and were faced once again with the problem of building their own society. But the dominating characteristic of this people—and here he tapped my arm—was its ineradicable devotion to freedom, against whatever oppressors.

By now the lunch had moved on from the excellent dark beer they served with the soup, through the white and red Slovakian wines with the main courses, to coffee and cigars. Our talk also moved on from politics to other topics. Prochazka was, in addition, a professor of law in Charles University, and he asked me some questions about the plan for my lectures. From there we coasted back again to the problem of language and of translation, which still fascinates him. He pointed out a man farther down the table who is working on what will be the fourth complete version of Shakespeare in Czech. Two of the others date back to the nineteenth century, and one to the early twentieth. But even in the short time since then, especially since its release from the official German in 1918, the Czech language has blossomed and developed as it has become the real cultural medium of its people. And so a fourth translation is needed.

As the party broke up, the chairman shook his head once more over the difficulties he had in speaking English, how he did not know enough to convey any of the nuances of his thought. It struck me that he had conveyed plenty.

¶ An inaugural lecture at Charles University is quite a ceremony. All the professors of English gathered in the office of Dean Kozak, who put his traditional gold chain around his neck and led us in procession to the lecture hall. In his speech of introduction the Dean stated what I hadn't realized before, that

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I was the first American ever to be a regular visiting professor at a Czech university. He claimed with some pride that Czech students were not altogether ignorant of American literature, that nearly every Czech boy knew about Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, that Whitman was widely loved, and that William James' *Principles of Psychology* was still the greatest book in its field for every Czech philosopher. As an added instance of what was known here, he recalled how, sometime before the war, he had been splashed by a small nephew at a summer lake, and when he had remonstrated, the boy had said that he was impersonating Moby Dick.

I began by speaking of the reasons why I had been eager to come to Czechoslovakia, about as I had advanced them to the chairman at Dobris. I had come not only to teach but to learn everything I could—a student in professor's clothing. But I also wanted to tell what I could about life over there across the Atlantic, 'behind the gold curtain.' I let that phrase stand without comment until the end, until after I had outlined what the subject of my lectures would be: the range and variety of our literature from Emerson to the present. The continuity through all this diversity was that American literature, both in its great affirmations and its great protests, had always been a literature intensely critical of the *status quo*. One of the main functions of our writers, from Emerson to the Steinbeck of *The Grapes of Wrath*, had been to burn through the official version of American life. I tried to pin down again what I mean by 'the official version': promotion literature, spread-eagle orations, sales talk, slick propaganda, the obsessive development of advertising techniques, the phony standardized picture given by the news magazine. I had no need before this audience to elaborate on the last point: the current issue of *Time* (sold here uncensored on all the newsstands) had carried in a half-column story about Czechoslovakia four major distortions of fact, designed to support its line about the sinister conditions behind the iron curtain.

I went on to suggest that American thought and expression in all its varied conflicts cannot be reduced to a single formula. There are the conflicts between our debts to Europe and our independence, between the settled sections and the frontier, between the regions and the nation, the country and the city, the poor man and the plutocrat. There is the glaring conflict between our peculiarly high-

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pitched idealism and our peculiarly crass materialism. These conflicts from our past and present prove in their abundant energy that the phrase 'the gold curtain' gives as misleading a view of our life as Churchill's reckless phrase, picked up from the Nazis, gives about life in Prague.

The official lunch afterwards at the National Club was somewhat different from what it would have been at the Harvard Faculty Club. One advantage of a people's democracy in Europe is that it can take over for its purposes any number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century palaces, each of them bigger than any ten Colonial houses in Boston. There were about a dozen of us at the table in a sunlit room overlooking the court, some history professors, the professors of literature, and Dr. Havranek from the Ministry of Education. The talk was not unlike what it would have been at home—questions about American colleagues and work being done in various fields—but the easy flow was certainly helped by the sequence I have already developed a fondness for: beer with the soup, followed by wines and brandy.

Dr. Havranek, who is one of the Czech delegates to Unesco, was very interested to hear about the Salzburg Seminar. He suggested the possibility of Charles University sponsoring next summer a comparable Seminar in Slavic Studies, to which scholars and students would be invited from the Soviet Union, as well as from America and from the other European countries. The group took up this suggestion eagerly and discussed candidly the current difficulties in getting the Soviet Union to co-operate on any international project. There seemed to be no hesitation nor reserve in their criticism. And yet, while Dr. Havranek is a Social Democrat, his brother, the head of the Slavic department in the University, is a Communist about to leave for a course of lectures in Moscow.

What distinguished this group from a comparable one in America was not merely that these men could all speak four or five foreign languages fluently, as scholars must in a small country, where even the Prague policemen are expected to speak at least one language besides Czech. Nearly all of these men had been in exile or in concentration camps. Professor Otakar Voadlo, their leading interpreter of English cultural life and the author of a book on American literature in the nineteen-twenties, had been sentenced for such

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work to Buchenwald. You could still sense his three years there in the slightness of his frame, in spite of the animation and gaiety of his conversation. One way he had kept his spirit alive was by reading over and over some poems of Keats. He had pieced these together from the torn sheets of a book that the Nazis had sent to the camp as toilet paper.

Dean Kozak and his wife had escaped to America, where he had taught at Oberlin and had done a great deal of broadcasting for the OWI's program for Central Europe. But his brother had been caught by the Nazis, and his children had had to go underground. The Dean's youngest son had managed to get to England, where he had fought with the R.A.F. He was killed one week before V-Day. The nephew who played Moby Dick in the lake had contracted typhus at a concentration camp, and had been thrown out with a heap of corpses. A passing guard saw that he was still alive, and rescued him. After that he survived still another camp from which less than a quarter of the inmates came out alive. At the end of the war he started his study of medicine, but now he had temporarily broken down—and his uncle stressed the word temporarily—with tuberculosis.

(I had looked forward to the topical revue of Voskovec and Werick, the comedians whose anti-Fascist satires were one of the great sensations of the 'thirties. They had been in America during the war, and, in Margaret Webster's production of *The Tempest*, were uproarious as Stephano and Trinculo. They had rescued those roles from the worn-out winks and gags of the nineteenth century, and restored to them the elaborately stylized business of Elizabethan and *commedia dell'arte* clowns.

They came home after the liberation, and their shows, which they write and direct themselves, are still widely popular. But they are finding it harder now to discover and maintain their new stance. Satire is their mode, and satire is not now the prevailing mood in Prague. But in their current production, an uninhibitedly free parody of *Julius Caesar*, they contrive to pack in a good deal of satire, particularly in the scene when the ghost of Caesar reappears to tell the people—in the words of the detailed English synopsis that is furnished to those who need it—'that though Caesar was,

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indeed, killed in the Senate, he won't be dead as long as he lives in their minds and souls,—he'll not be dead unless they succeed in killing him in their own hearts and heads. If his slogans and the cracking of his whip are still in them, he might as well be alive.'

Another scene from recent history brought roars of delight. A political opportunist, making an alarmed but clumsy attempt to prevent his maid from displaying the Czech flag in May 1945, only succeeded in letting it hang over his balcony, and was promptly proclaimed a revolutionary patriot by the enthusiastic crowd in the street below.

We went backstage after the show. Voskovec and Werick brought out a bottle of *stivovice*—the plum brandy that is a cousin to vodka—and plunged almost at once into politics. They are very sensitive to their audiences, and they feel everywhere today a great insecurity, always the latent question, 'Who knows where we'll be two years from now?'

They are also acutely aware of their own problem. They were in the forefront of the fight against the Nazis, stinging in their satire of the early betrayal of Loyalist Spain. But when they came back from America, they refused to join any political party. As Voskovec talked, he used the word liberal in the looser American sense. He feels the pressures now from both the East and the West. He doesn't like either, though he believes that the Americans' cynical by-passing of the United Nations, in the plan of military aid for Greece and Turkey, bears the major responsibility for the Soviets' new counter-militance.

What bothers both him and Werick most now in Czechoslovakia is the residue of some of the attitudes of mind bred by the long occupation by the Nazis. That was what they were striking at in their presentation of Caesar's ghost. Werick cited an instance involving a friend who had had a car sent him from America, and who was visited, unexpectedly, at his apartment by some government agents who wanted to find out how he had paid for it. The agents had no business to enter in that unannounced and intimidating way, and would not have done so without the Fascist pattern behind them. The man in turn became rattled, and when one of the agents noticed his expensive American cigarette case and asked him if he had a certificate of purchase for it, he said, no, he hadn't,

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and foolishly handed it over, though there is nothing in Czech law demanding such a certificate. Werick was disturbed even more by his friend's behavior than by that of the agent, since it betrayed a lack of resolution in affirming his own rights, a fear which had been engendered by the Nazis.

Voskovec insisted on the need of a third way, neither that of Russia nor America. I wondered what the chances would be for such a middle course. Just that morning Dr. Hromadka of the Jan Hus Theological Faculty had presented an honorary degree to Hewlett Johnson, the Dean of Canterbury. The Czechs possess a fine sense for ceremonies. This one was accompanied, at entrances and exits, as well as in its salutations and significant pauses, by sennets on the trumpet and trombone. The Dean is a very tall and imposing old man, and his speech of response phrased the theory of mediation upon which we must learn to act. He cited the great heritage of Western freedoms, of speech and worship, of assembly and demonstration and press, freedoms which, since the time of Jan Hus, Czechs have had their share in making, freedoms which need continual re-making, and not one of which we can afford to lose. The Dean then quoted Whitehead's view that, priceless as these freedoms are, they are only the final flower of civilization. Before they all can be attained by the mass of the people, other freedoms are necessary. These are the freedoms that have been insisted upon by the Revolution in the East: freedom to work—if you need a job—freedom from want, freedom to be housed and clothed and to receive medical care, the essential economic freedoms. The Dean's main point was that there is nothing inherently contradictory between these two sets of freedoms, that they must now complement each other if a Christian or any humane society is to endure.

The light was strong on his face as he spoke. He was stating a faith, many violations of which can be cynically demonstrated by partisans of East or West. But it is a faith which I share. There is only one third way that a just man should accept between present-day Russia and present-day America, between—to give them their worst names—the dictator's corruptions of the communist ideal and the capitalists' corruptions of the democratic ideal. It would be not a compromise, but a more complete socialism which would do justice both to the individual and to society.

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