

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

DBP-5

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Dear Peter,

Before I give you some details about some of the new groups that I listed in my last letter, here is my favorite new joke (with a minor variation of my own) that is Czech and twentieth century in flavor, as well as pertinent to this letter's topic:

"Ahoj! Vašku! What are you up to these days?"  
"Jardo! We've started an independent quartet!"  
"That's great Vašku. How many members?"  
"Three!"  
"Who are they?"  
"My brother and me."  
"You've got a brother, Vašku?"  
"No. Why do you ask?"

Be prepared

After an absence of nearly twenty years, Scouting has returned to Czechoslovakia -- again. With the change in government here, the Scouts are but one of many new groups that have resurfaced after years of suppression by the Communists. I met their new spokesman, Mr. Čejka, along with his colleague Mr. Petr Zabalák, at the National Museum where they are employed. They provided me with information on the past and present of Scouting in Czechoslovakia.

Scouting goes way back and even precedes the birth of the Republic of Czechoslovakia in 1918. A teacher of physical education, Antonín Benjamín Svojsík, founded the Scouts in Bohemia around 1912. Svojsík hoped that he could set up the Scouts as part of the Sokol gymnastics organization. His approach to Scouting was based not only on Lord Baden Powell's view, but also on that of E. Seton (who, in fact, had been

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studying the arts and culture of Czechoslovakia

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excluded from Scouting -- a "dissident" Scout) whose book was published here as Kniha lesní moudrosti (The Book of Forest Wisdom). Svojsík's Scouts survived in the Austro-Hungarian Empire even during the First World War, despite the fact that its founders were British and hence the enemy. In 1919, Czechoslovak Scouting was established and Svojsík went on to become the Minister of Physical Education in the new Republic.

Scouting is commemorated on a stamp that the Scouts put out to welcome back from exile the first Czechoslovak President, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Today it is one of the most valuable Czechoslovak stamps and can fetch as much as 100,000 Czechoslovak crowns (Kčs). Masaryk was the Scout's first "Protector", Beneš the second, and in light of current President Václav Havel's own experience as a Scout it is likely that he will become the third Protector.

Since their establishment, the Scouts in Czechoslovakia have had a sporadic life. In 1940, just before they were banned during the Nazi occupation, Czechoslovak Scouts numbered in the tens of thousands. Many Scouts were active in the anti-Nazi resistance, so long as it existed in the first years of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile renewed the Scouts from London in 1941, but they were renewed here only after the war, when they again became members of the World Scouting Organization. Two years after the Communist Party's takeover of power, the Scouts were again banned in 1950. Scouting was considered an anti-state activity. Dozens of Scouts, including those from the rank-and-file, were jailed. This was despite the fact that the Communist Minister of Education, Zdeněk Nejedlý, said in 1945 that he would be unable to imagine the young people of Czechoslovakia without the Scouts. In August 1948, when the Hungarian Youth Organization held its international conference in Budapest, it condemned International Scouting as an agency of imperialism in the form of a children's movement and announced the start of the battle against it.

There had always existed an organization ready to help bring the Scouts back to life but they existed mostly in secrecy, often as a part of another organization (e.g., the Pioneers or TOM -- the Tourist Club of Youth). None could, however, use any of the symbols of Scouting. Attempts to reestablish Scouting in 1965 were unsuccessful, but in 1968 during the Prague Spring, Scouting finally was renewed for a second time in Czechoslovakia. They had, however, suffered from a weakened middle generation and an overall generational gap. Nevertheless, they revived their magazine Junák (which means "Scout" or "Youth") and were able to put out a few attractive issues before the regime eventually abolished Czechoslovak Scouting in October 1970 during the period of "normalization," which followed the Warsaw Pact invasion of August 1968. The then Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Lubomír Štrougal, once said something to the effect that Scouting is a method to lead Czechoslovak youth away from the real problems. Even as late as 1985, Scouting remained a target for abuse. Around this time, according to Čejka, the journal of the Socialist Youth Movement was reproaching

Scouting for supporting the Declaration of Human Rights instead of Marxism-Leninism, and instead of promoting the class struggle, promoting abstract humanism. The author of the Velké encyclopedie her [the Large Encyclopedia of Games], Miloš Zapletal, also had some problems with the authorities because he was said to be promoting Scouting. He had merely described many games that the Scouts also play.

In the wake of the Gentle Revolution, Czechoslovak Scouting is being revived for a third time and from scratch, i.e., without materials, buildings, or other property. Just over two weeks after the large student demonstration on 17 November, a reassembled Scout leadership decided to renew the organization. On December 28, they registered with the State as an official organization. There is a group currently working on the design of the uniforms and an editorial group preparing the scout handbook. At the beginning of April the initial registration of members will be completed. From 19-20 May, the Czech Congress of the Scouts will meet, followed by the Slovak Scout Congress a week later, and then, hopes the spokesman, a Czechoslovak Scout Congress (NB, that this, too, is a manifestation of Czech-Slovak relations). If these congresses decide there will be one Czechoslovak Scouts then they will apply to the World Scouting Organization for membership. The first edition of their yet-again revived magazine, Junák, may be ready for readers by August. In the meantime, they managed, on January 23, to begin broadcasting a five-to-ten-minute long radio show, every Thursday afternoon.

Mr. Čejka recognizes that young Czech and Slovak girls and boys may not want to join the Scouts, since society has changed over the past twenty-one years. On the other hand, he sees the prospects for Scouting in Czechoslovakia as being quite good. The Socialist version of the Scouts had been the Pioneers, which apparently did not meet its aim of helping in the raising of the new Socialist Man. The aspects of Socialist training seemed to be largely scoffed at or ignored by young red-scarfed children who came from families of all sorts of political outlooks, and the wilderness aspects were also ignored. The Pioneer camps, which are some excellent pieces of Czechoslovak land, have televisions, and meals were prepared for, but not by, the Pioneers. Scouting as part of its wilderness orientation will also focus on ecology and will form volunteer brigades to work on forest reclamation in Czechoslovakia's once beautiful, but now largely devastated, woods. The Pioneers were reformed on January 20, and will apparently not be Socialist or political. In the meantime, the Scouts are negotiating for some of the Pioneers' camp sites.

Čejka and Zalabák themselves support Scouting because they consider it one of the best educational systems available; it creates "a strong individual and a strong collective; it brings nations together and gets rid of hate between people." To some this may sound sentimentally optimistic, but in prerevolutionary Czechoslovak society, where, as has been widely discussed in speeches here and was in fact noticeable, tension had been rising and basic day-to-day civility had been lacking, something like Scouts helped ease the tension. "Even

during times when there was no official Scouting," said Čejka, "when two people met and each learned that the other had been a Scout, the way we related to one another changed for the better." And that's how Čejka and Zabalák met in their laboratory on the top floor of the National Museum in Prague.

### Zuzana's Brickyards

Near the end of January, I met a young painter (who has recently become an actor in the amateur troupe Sklep) named Kryštof Trubaček. He had prepared a letter that announced "a new society called Malostranské centrum pro umění (Lesser Quarter Center for the Fine Arts -- CFA)" and presented the society's program. "The Society's first task is to reconstruct the building of the Herget Brickyards in the Lesser Quarter and further to take advantage of the building according to the following program, with the aim of supporting the arts and young artists, to revive the cultural tradition of the Lesser Quarter, to share, therefore, in raising the level of the whole community environment, and to take advantage of this most intact historical part of old Prague. In the event that the program of our society interests you, we are most interested in your cooperation."

The idea for renovating the Herget Brickyards belongs to Zuzana Vranovská's, a friend of Kryštof's, who is currently the link between the Coordinating Center of Civic Forum and Czechoslovak Television. She has worked at a variety of other jobs, including at a society whose task was the care of castles and other historic sights, and at the state enterprise Merkur, which produces publicity films. It was her childhood dream to own a gallery, and for ten years she has had in mind this particular building of the Herget Brickyards. When the revolution began, Zuzana participated immediately, running messages and getting declarations and other printed material copied. And, she also wrote the National Committee for the City of Prague requesting the right to buy the long-abandoned brickyards.

Zuzana and Kryštof would like to see the building of the Herget Brickyards used in the following manner and with the following features:

- as a gallery for the Association of Young Fine Artists (the larger room for group exhibitions of young Czechoslovak artists, for young artists from abroad, and for international exhibits)
- a commercial gallery intended for leading artists working in glass
- a commercial gallery intended for leading Czechoslovak fine artists (painting, sculpture, and graphics)
- a hall for lectures, seminars, musical performances, films and video, as well as small theater productions
- a boutique (original fashion design: clothing, jewelry)
- a business office (including a travel agency for young people, independent financial activity, setting up

- exhibitions and other programs, an employment opportunity center, etc.)
- a video studio and archive (for fine) art
  - an information center (contacts for museums, galleries, and collectors; a list of arts craftsmen, transportation possibilities, legal and commercial advice, etc.)
  - advertising and promotions
  - a small printing press
  - retail art supplies (including rental commercial space for firms with top quality art supplies)
  - rental of studio space and equipment (for graphics, ceramics, etc.)
  - a small restaurant with a garden in summer
  - a warehouse and storage space
  - an apartment(s) for a manager(s)
  - sculpture in the garden and around the building

The building would be for the use of the Association of Young Fine Artists (about 800 members), and people involved in theater, film, and music, the lease holders of the two private galleries, the boutique spaces, and the restaurant space, as well as investors who have participated in the reconstruction of the building (e.g., share holders). The Hergel Brickyards will be a joint-stock company, with 49 percent foreign investment probably in the form of stocks. They will also get state support from the National Committee of the City of Prague, the Institute for the Reconstruction of Historical Buildings, the Association of Young Fine Artists, private individuals, and revenues from sales commissions.

Zuzana and Kryštof hope to get the building by March or April and already have an investor (a Brazilian) and one American firm is also interested. Prof. Jiří Nehněvajsa of the American-based Czechoslovak Society for Science and the Arts offered support early on. By this summer, they hope to begin repairs to this truly dilapidated but lovely looking building. Of course, this all depends on whether Zuzana and Kryštof get the building. At present, as they just recently learned, there are twenty-nine other interested potential buyers.

Zuzana is also a member of Združení občanů a přátel Malostranské [The Association of Citizens and Friends of Malá Strana (the Lesser Quarter)]. This is an association of approximately 70 members, many of whom are residents of the beautiful but neglected Lesser Quarter. The association was founded on 29 January of this year and hopes to raise public awareness of the need to protect this historic quarter of Prague. (A similar group has formed in the historically working-class Prague district of Žižkov, which has also recently faced redevelopment that is insensitive to the need to preserve traces of the past.) The Civic-Forum television broadcast on Czechoslovak TV recently ran a fifteen-minute report on the devastation of Malá Strana. There have also been rumors for a long time that the Communist Party wanted to turn this residential quarter into the exclusive domain of Communists and a diplomatic quarter for offices and their homes (a cooler analyst of local politics tells me that the

Communists would never try something so ambitious, because it would go against their desire to maintain the image of the humble Communist). They were also planning to accommodate Western hotel developers who, Zuzana feels, wanted to build in Malá Strana without the slightest sense of respect for the area. Zuzana and other members of their association feel Malá Strana residents should have first say about matters concerning their neighborhood.

Zuzana recently gave an American art historian and me a tour of Břetislavská street and the Janský vršky area, which are right near the United States Embassy. For approximately five years, their Renaissance buildings (here, this means the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries) have been empty. Their inhabitants (hundreds, I guessed by a rough count of the apartments) were evicted and sent to live in pre-fab housing projects. Several older residents who had lived for years in these old three-story houses committed suicide rather than suffer the relocation -- or dislocation -- of the eviction. If any former occupant of one of these apartments were to return now to have a look at his old home, he would probably die of a broken heart.

We squeezed through a crack in the corrugated steel barrier that blocks off the end of Břetislavská and walked down the muddy street. The scaffolding overhead turned it into a long, dark and damp passage. We climbed over piles of bricks and broken glass, through jagged holes punched through Renaissance walls, and looked up through collapsing roofs. Hand-painted tablets and beams lay roughly piled and for the most part exposed to the elements. The ambitious aim to turn this into a luxury hotel in one fell swoop was evident, as we made our way through each half-gutted room after half-gutted room. There was almost no indication, however, of reconstruction after five years of work. The people who are doing the actual labor are employees of a collective farm. They are stone masons and other laborers who have less obligations at their farms during the winter months than at other times. In other words, this is far from top-notch historical reconstruction. "These buildings have the same historical value as those in Venice," said Zuzana. "It's unimaginable that the same thing happens there."

#### SPUSA

In 1945, just after World War Two, the Svaz Prátelů USA (the Association of Friends of the USA) was established. Like the Scouts and numerous other organizations it didn't survive long after the Communist takeover of 1948. It was not until the summer of 1987 that a group similar to the first Association of Friends was formed. The man largely responsible for its establishment is Stanislav Devatý, a 37 year-old former employee of the renowned collective Slušovice -- until he was thrown out of his job in 1988 for becoming one of the spokesman of the human-rights group Charter 77 (which he signed in the year of its founding, 1977). Along with several other people from Zlín (until recently, named Gottwaldova) in

Moravia, including Pavel Wonka who died in prison where he was sent for attempting to run as an independent in the 1986 elections, Devatý set up the first SPUSA (Společnost přátel USA -- the Society of Friends of the USA), in 1987. It had roughly 450 members during its illegal existence. It was officially recognized in January. Only a few weeks ago its founders were scrounging for a place to hold a meeting and ended up in the club room at the dormitory Kajetánka about thirty minutes from downtown. Now, they occupy -- for 700 crowns a month -- a two-room, fourth floor office overlooking the Vltava River. A nice irony is that their offices, located at the far end of a maze-like corridor, previously belonged to the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Society, who still occupy most of the rest of the building. (Recall that the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friends also owned the building now occupied by Civic Forum). SPUSA's membership is already several thousand.

I spoke with Robert Hocker (pronounced Hawker -- it's his real name and he is of Czech origin) who is one of SPUSA's main organizers here in Prague. He is a 22 year-old, former student, who is interested in "everything about the USA" -- more concretely "its political system, American freedom, and American literature." Which literature? "The earlier stuff, like the Beat Generation and Salinger."

In the official words of SPUSA, as set out in the preamble to their "Organizational Rules and Regulations:"

"The Society for Friends of the USA shall be an organization of a non-governmental, apolitical nature, arising from the tradition of friendship and relations of the Czechoslovak and American peoples. The organization shall be linked to the common humanitarian and democratic ideals of our nations and nationalities. In light of these facts we feel the need to create an effective and functioning organization with the aim of removing the state of insufficient information and knowledge of many areas in the life of our two nations. We are connected with the USA and its people by important historical experiences and spiritual links. It was in the USA that the Constitution was first declared, which laid down the inalienable rights of every member of the human race, the right for life, for freedom and for the pursuit of happiness. It was an American president who defined democracy as the right to self-government of citizens, as government of the people, with the people and for the people, and he expressed our shared belief in democracy's future. It was the USA that in the past and even in this century became the refuge for tens of thousands of Czechs and Slovaks, who left or were forced to leave their home and thus created our largest native community abroad. It was the United States that, in the person of President Wilson calling for the right of nations to self-determination, together with T.G. Masaryk, significantly contributed to the birth of an independent Czechoslovak Republic. It was the USA that sympathized with our cause and supported it when we lost this independence."

As Robert explained, there are two main tasks which he and SPUSA are trying to administer. The first is to begin English language instruction for which they have the help of two Fulbright fellows in Prague and some British students. (Perhaps the armada of Canadian English teachers, soon to total about 135, will be of some help, although judging by Stephen Maly's last ICWA newsletter this may not be a likely cooperation, eh?). The second task is far more ambitious. The half-dozen people of SPUSA's office are preparing a new magazine, Revue America. This will be a hundred-page, color monthly, in an "American format" says Robert. It will have four main sections: an introduction and profile of America; information about the USA including all kinds of culture, politics, science and technology, trade, economics, history of the USA and profiles of individual states; the third section will be dedicated to US-Czechoslovak relations; and the fourth is for sports. They foresee having a literary supplement, as well as a "Language Corner", contests, and a crossword puzzle.

Robert says that eight to ten people will work on Revue America, and he would like to establish a professional editorial board. Presently a half-dozen young people are working in SPUSA's new offices, answering the phone, preparing mailings, and running errands. The magazine is not only an ambitious project in terms of time but will also stretch financial resources. There will, therefore, be plenty of space dedicated to American advertisers. The Voice of America will probably also help with the magazine and its distribution, as will the American-Czechoslovak Society that was established in Maryland in January this year. On March 2, Robert had a meeting with the printers of the newspaper Práce (Labor), which is the newspaper of the ROH, (The Revolutionary Trade Union Organization), i.e., the trade union of the trade unions. (Is this an example of peaceful coexistence, Práce's swallowing its revolutionary pride, anything for a dollar, or purely in the spirit of a new Czechoslovakia?). The first edition is set to come out "in April at the latest."

SPUSA's other plans, which at this stage are merely "working ideas", include their own publishing house that would publish translations in Czech of American authors and vice versa. They would like eventually to publish an English (or American?) language magazine, Revue Czechoslovakia. SPUSA also wants to establish a travel agency that will provide Americans with information about what to see in Czechoslovakia (i.e., besides Prague) and also list places, especially private ones, with room and board. (It can only be an improvement on the "surly, couldn't-care-less" official travel agency ČEDOK -- as my father recently described his confrontation with their Manhattan office -- which has so far had a near-monopoly on tourism in Czechoslovakia). Other potential projects include the promotion of concerts of American music, art shows, and exhibits. For the time being, however, the basic principle remains the exchange of information between the two countries. For Revue America this means starting with Andy Warhol and Philip Roth. One story SPUSA is too late for is Frank Zappa: his greying goatee, walrus moustache, and perpetually burning



cigarette are already on the cover of numerous Czech magazines.

I asked why their Society was actually focussed strictly on the USA and not, for example, the English-speaking world in general. This is not only due to the need to focus but is also based on the members devotion to the USA. After reading one of SPUSA's introductory letters, which said it would like "to import American culture and the American way of life," I was especially curious how Robert saw Czech (not to mention Czechoslovak) culture's relationship to the powerful influence of contemporary popular US culture. Won't it, I asked, pose a threat to Czech culture (whatever that complex concept may be)? Many Prague grocery stores and restaurants already seem to depend on Coca-cola and Pepsi as the centerpiece of their shop windows and of the decor on their walls (although this month they take backstage to Masaryk's face -- sort of an older, bald Zappa -- whose 140th birthday is on March 7th). The first private hotel in Czechoslovakia, in Kersko, (which to my surprise lacks any imagination in its furnishings) was ornamented with Marlboro ashtrays, a Marlboro beach ball, Marlboro clock, Marlboro barometer, and no other significant decoration.

"We don't have to be afraid of the huge American influence. We survived Nazism, Communism; we'll survive American capitalism." This answer is an oversimplification, because it is one thing to survive and another to make genuine progress. On the other hand, the question is complex and there was no time to properly pose it, so it got the answer it deserved.

Robert then continued on the theme of Czech culture as being based on absurdity, which, on an intellectual level, I basically do not agree with, although I often find myself in situations here when I begin to suspect that it may be right. "Czechoslovakia is the birth place of absurdity," he explained. "Absurdity appeared here early, for example in the death of Charles IV. ... Each Czech is a mixture of Kafka and Švejk." This is a typical and easy (and, to be fair, undeveloped) answer, however I find it a colorful but distorting generalization. "The Czech changes over time but doesn't change," said Robert getting warmed up, "one variant follows another. Even American culture can't destroy this essence. The greatest proof or argument for the presence of absurdity is that Havel is President, since he is especially known as a dramatist concerned with the theme of absurdity." Whether or not this is right, what seems clear is that this conception -- like the popular notion of Central Europe -- is attractive for young Czech intellectuals.

"Ahoj, Vašku! What's new?"

"Jardo! We started a quartet."

I'll leave you now with some photographs of the Herget  
Brickyards.

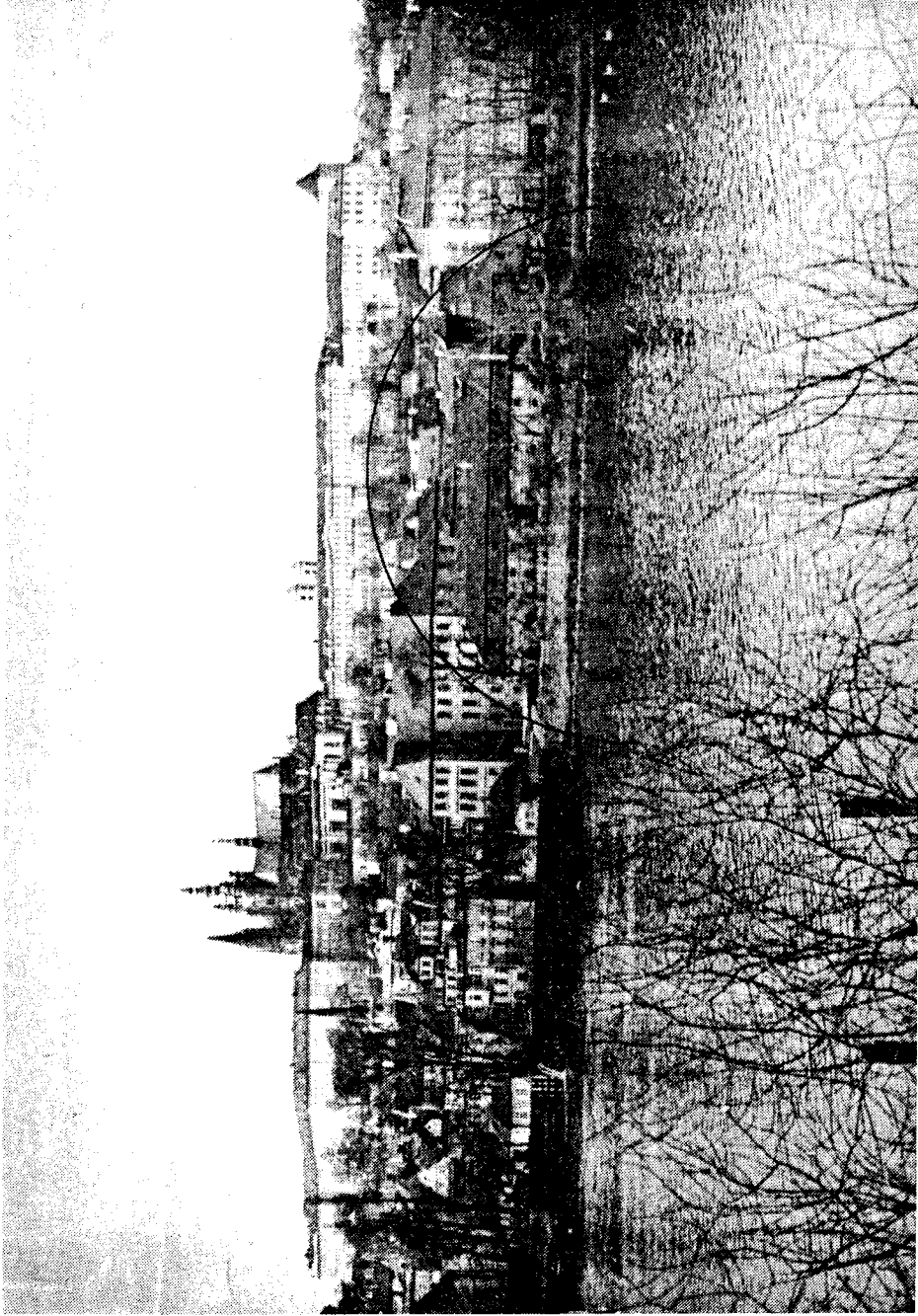
All the best and Ahoj!

Derek

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The abandoned Herget Brickyards on the banks of the Vltava.  
Hradčany (The Castle) in the background.