

Ivan DUBOVICKÝ

**Češi v Americe a česko-americké vztahy v průběhu pěti staletí [Czechs in America and Czech-American relations in a course of five centuries]**

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Czech emigration has historically been strongly associated with transoceanic population movement to the United States of America, and it is the topic that Ivan Dubovický deals with in his book as well. The author tries not just to describe the process itself, but also the social and economic situation of the Czech minority in the United States as it developed over the centuries. His approach is primarily focused on the selection and subsequent description of particular important personalities and their activities in their new homeland. The book gradually and in chronological order describes the emigration of the first Czech settlers to the United States and their moves across their new homeland from New York to California.

It describes the process of growing the Czech minority in the US from the period after "The Battle of White Mountain" during the existence of the Habsburg Empire, the period of the First World War and the subsequent efforts of Czechoslovak Americans to support the emerging state. The book is further devoted to the following events, such as the visit of T. G. Masaryk in Chicago and Czech minority efforts to support the emerging state during the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Another significant part of the book is the description of Czech emigration throughout totalitarian periods in Czechoslovak history, i.e. during the Nazi rule and the period after the Communist coup in 1948.

The book inevitably deals with the most important political events that occurred in Central Europe over the centuries that fundamentally influenced the emigration to the United States. Nevertheless, it focuses not just on emigration caused by the political events such as oppression under the Nazi regime or Communist dictatorship. In his text, Dubovický also focuses on the activities of Czech-American community, helping their persecuted compatriots living overseas.

The book was published at the time of great interest in the history and origins of the Czech-Americans. The proof of that interest is that in the last decade, several books have been published on the subject of Czech emigration and community settlement in the United States. As a reminder, we can mention Dagmar Hajkova's book *"Naše česká věc"* (2011), which describes the activities of American Czechoslovaks in the United States during the First World War, including their activities in support of the creation of an independent Czechoslovak state. Another book that focuses on the described topic is Marek Vlha's book *"Mezi starou vlastí a Amerikou"* (2016), which approaches the topic of the early founding period of the Czech community in the United States in the mid of 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Eva Heyd is an author who has recently also contributed to the topic of Czech-American migration and the Czech Community in the USA. In her bilingual book from 2018 *“Lístek do Nového světa”* she focused on the question of the emigration of Czechoslovak artists to the United States shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War and the subsequent war years. The last important publication about the topic of the Czech minority in the United States is the Renata Fučíková's book *“Historie Čechů v USA”* (2019), that through sophisticated visual form is trying to show the Czech historical footprint in the United States mostly to the general public.

Finally, Ivan Dubovický's book follows not only the topic of Czech migration to the United States but also the significant activities by the Czech minority across the ocean. The book itself was created to celebrate the centennial of independent Czechoslovakia and it aims to map the relationships and actions of the Czech community in the so-called “New World”, from the first Czech written works before the founding of the USA itself during the 16<sup>th</sup> century to Czech-American relations after the Velvet Revolution. Just like the later book by Renáta Fučíková *“Historie Čechů v USA”*, the publication aims to map the complete period of existence of the Czech minority in the US and it is meant to be a source of information for the general public that is interested in the topic rather than a comprehensive work for academic purposes. This necessarily implies a partial abbreviation, which however, leads to a clearly outlined coverage of its subject matter.

What is also an indisputable advantage of the book is that it is written just like the book *“Ticket to the New World”* in a mirror image and is therefore available to both American and Czech readers. Numerous illustrations added to the text are also very beneficial. These are in particular photographs of the then prominent Czech personalities in the US or various archival documents such as the copy of the so-called *Pittsburgh agreement* (p. 82), *Washington declaration of the Independence of Czechoslovakia* (p. 90–91) or a later letter from George Bush to the American Friends of the Czech Republic (p. 110).

Reading the book, one realizes, that much of the Czech migration to the United States was associated with the political events in the Czech homeland. Not surprisingly, the first mention of Czech exiles in the United States is associated with the situation after The Battle of White Mountain, around 1633 is where the story of the book begins. Initially, the book follows important figures and ordinary settlers who had to flee Europe because of religious oppression. Gradually, especially after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the reason for the migration of the Czech population started to change. The motivation remained political ones for a while, but at that time it was caused mainly by the political oppression of the Vormärz era. Economic rather than political reasons for migration began to prevail after 1850 when the last remnants of the feudal system were abolished, and the United States became an attractive destination renowned for railroads and shipping industry, offering potential earnings to the new settlers. As already mentioned, notable illustrations of the book are once more useful when showing advertising posters that tried to attract Czechs to transatlantic travel.

The author further focuses on the gradual expansion of the Czech-American community during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and describes their ways of livelihood and the differences that this migration brought to the way of living for new settlers used to a European way of life. This was also related to the development of a cultural and social life and the establishment

of Czech associations of all kinds, that helped migrants to remember their Czech roots. These began to emerge mostly in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, but played the most substantial role in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially concerning the effort in establishing an independent Czechoslovak state. Among the prominent promoters of Czech culture in the USA, were for instance, Vojta Náprstek after which the museum that also contributed significantly to the creation of this book was named or Vojta Beneš, brother of the later Czechoslovak president Eduard Beneš (p. 49–50).

Several interesting facts that the book notes are associated with the oldest memories of the Czech settlers on American soil, when the author recalls, that many Czech immigrants were directly involved in the American Civil War. Other immigrants were able to establish themselves at most prestigious American universities. This is an example of Count František Lützow, who was even accepted by President Taft in the White House for his university activities (p. 60). After that, the book moves into the storyline of the origin of the Czech press in the United States and recalls the most important titles such as the daily newspaper Svornost or socialist newspaper Dělnické listy.

As previously mentioned, large parts of the book are focused on the struggle of Czechs in the United States to create an independent Czechoslovak state. The author reminds the reader of the fact that during the First World War, Czechs in America already represented a large community with influential association, with the press and members that were seeking their place in politics. Besides this, some members of the Czech community also had significant financial resources that they used to support the newly established Czechoslovakia. These donations were not small by any measure, as the author for example mentions a gift from Aleš Hrdlička from the Smithsonian Institute worth 1 million crowns to build a museum in Brno (p. 113–115).

The focal point of these efforts was Chicago, which was a significant destination for emigrants from Central and Eastern Europe. It was in Chicago where T. G. Masaryk was welcomed by Czech emigrants in May 1918. In addition to Czech, the author also deals with political activities of the Slovak community, represented mainly by the so-called Slovak League (p. 80). Dubovický also mentions Masaryk's all-important talks with US President Wilson in Washington and considers Wilson's important role in the creation of the new state and points out that the Prague railway station was subsequently named after him.

Subsequently, the book's narrative, returns to Chicago where it maps the work of the Mayor of Chicago of Czech ancestry, Antonín Čermák, best known for being shot during President F. D. Roosevelt's visit to Miami (p. 106). Through analysis of American influence on interwar Czechoslovakia, the book follows through to the Second World War and the fight of Czech-Americans against Nazism. Not surprisingly, this struggle is once again connected with the city of Chicago, where the congress of the Czech National Association in America took part in 1939 and issued a call to fight (p. 119). The movement was subsequently supported by the arrival of former President Edvard Beneš to the US. Beneš used his stay to convince American politicians of the need of free Czechoslovakia. For that purpose he even met with President Roosevelt.

The book goes on to describe the liberation of Czechoslovakia, emphasizing the role of Patton's troops in the action itself, and highlighting the financial assistance that the United States provided to the postwar Czechoslovakia. However, this period did not last long

and Czechoslovakia fell into another totalitarian regime, this time a communist one. The subsequent wave of political refugees from Czechoslovakia meant setting new tasks for the Czech community in the USA. For example, the American Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees was established and newspapers in Chicago were frequently writing about the new wave of Czechoslovak emigration.

A whole chapter is devoted to the struggle of Czechs in America against totalitarian regimes in their homeland by support for Radio Free Europe or Voice of America. In this chapter, the reader can also find plenty of interesting attached pictures reminiscent of the most crucial events from this period, such as a sticker commemorating the death of Milada Horáková. Another important political milestone that took place in Czechoslovakia more than 20 years after the Second World War and which also affected the Czech minority in the USA, was the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact armies in 1968. According to Dubovický, the event itself was also significantly important for the American political situation, because it perceptibly contributed to the subsequent victory of Richard Nixon in the presidential election (p. 160). The Czech-American community in the United States, in the following years, tried to financially support resistance against the totalitarian power sending financial donations to members of anti-communist illegal organizations such as the Charter 77.

Finally, the author concludes the historical journey of Czech-Americans by the description of their situation after 1989, reminding the reader of important personalities of Czech origin living in the US and their significant achievements, such as the former United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright or the tennis champion Martina Navratilova. Dubovický also points out the interesting fact that the Czech-American community numbers almost 2 million people, which he sees as a basis for a strong potential to be used for the benefit of both the Czech Republic and the United States (p. 176).

In conclusion, it is clear, that the author has succeeded in fulfilling the primary purpose of his book by creating a publication for the general public, which provides basic information about the Czechs in the United States from the early Czech-speaking settlers almost to the present day. The book deliberately does not dwell much in theory or difficult questions and does not attempt to shed more light onto the general phenomenon of Czechoslovak emigration. It rather deals with the most prominent personalities of the Czech-American community and successfully illustrates the overall situation of Czechs coming and living in the United States over various eras. The book can serve as a first step towards further research and therefore, in my opinion, it is definitely worth reading.

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