

The Present State of Czechoslovak Archives¹

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THE changes brought about by the war and the six years of occupation affected both the archives in Czechoslovakia and their administration to the same extent. Air-raids and war-time destruction hardly inflicted more damage on the documentary material than did the violent actions of the Germans. It was a quiet yet a hard struggle the directors of Czech archives had to take up in order to save the matchless historical documents and monuments.

There were ups and downs in this struggle which was waged at first by a few isolated individuals and later on by a secret group of archivists. In the spring of 1945, when the danger was at its height, there was already an active body of archive experts. On the 4th of May 1945 they set up an archives department with the Czech National Council, which a few days later became the provisional Government of the Republic. In this way the archives department has become a State institution, and a permanent Secretariat for Historical and Artistic Monuments was set up. The task of the Secretariat was to see to it that the archives, registries, and correspondence of Czech and German offices, institutions, organizations and individuals, were kept in safety.

The care bestowed upon these monuments was very important, as the archives had suffered much even before 1945. None of the important archives was administered by a Czech during the occupation. The leading archivists were among the first victims of the terrorism which took a heavy toll of the workers in this field. Among them were Professor B. Mendl, director of the State Historical Institute in Prague, and Dr. B. Jenšovský, director of the Archives of Bohemia. A number of others, with the Nestor of the organization of Czech archives, Dr. Fr. Macháček of Plzeň, at their head, were dragged through prisons and concentration camps.

Material losses were also heavy. The Germans made a point of disturbing the organization of archives in Bohemia and Moravia. They in-

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tended to establish a "Gauarchiv" in Liberec for the territories separated from the Republic in 1938, and chose at random the necessary material from archives at Prague and elsewhere. Other documents were sent directly to Germany, either "on loan" to German institutions or under the pretext that they had to be protected from air-raids. Risking their personal freedom and safety, the employees in the chief archives photographed most of the documents that had to be sent to Germany, or they hid them so well that they could not be found by the Germans.

As the Czech archivists had done their utmost to protect the documents in their care from air-raids, damage done by German interference was far greater than that caused by allied raids. The archives of the chief Government departments, especially those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of National Defence, those of the Army and the forbidden organization (*i.e.*, Sokol), were dispersed and partly destroyed. The Schwarzenberg Archives were transferred from Třeboň in Southern Bohemia to Krumlov, which was occupied by the Germans in 1938. The archives of the family of the Czechoslovak ambassador in London, Lobkowitz, were only saved by removal to Prague. The libraries and archives of the Slovany monastery in Prague were despoiled of all their treasures before the American air-raid turned the monastery into ashes. Fortunately, there was no unity of procedure among the German citizens of Bohemia and Moravia and the more "one-idea" Germans, who were trying to prove that "for hundreds of years Bohemia had been a part of the Reich."

As soon as the affairs of state came into the hands of the new Czechoslovak Government, the Department of Archives became one of the departments of the National Committee of Bohemia in Prague. Similar departments were established with the National Committee of Moravia in Brno, and the National Council of Slovakia in Bratislava. In the summer of 1945 members of the departments inspected and put into safe-keeping hundreds of records, some of them virtually saved from destruction, particularly in the border regions where the American and Russian armies of Liberation were frequently at a loss to distinguish the spoils of war from the property of the State. In the autumn of that year the safe-keeping of most archives had been secured. The members of the Prague Department, headed by Professor V. Vojtišek and Dr. J. Charvát laid down the two principles for the future organization of Czechoslovak archives: (1) the decentralization of the administration of archives corresponding to the decentralization of the administration of the liberated State, and (2) the establishment of a concentrated system of archives for individual regions, zones, districts and corporations. A National Council of Archives, as the supreme or-

gan of archivists for the whole area of the Republic, has been set up by the Ministry of Education, as proposed by the Department of Archives. An Archives Bill providing for the safe-keeping of documentary material and expert schooling of archivists and assistant staffs has already been drafted by this Council, and will be presented to Parliament. The Council is likewise responsible for the re-opening of the State School for Archivists. After a break of several years, a three-year course, the tenth since its foundation, was started last year.

All archivists, qualified and unqualified, are members of the Society of Archivists, which promises to become a focus of archivist activities.

At present, Czechoslovak archives may be classified in the following categories: archives of ministries and other government offices, archives of self-governing regions, zones, districts and towns, and archives of churches.

The archives of the Ministry of the Interior in Prague, apart from containing records of the Ministry itself, are virtually the archives of the State, embodying documentary material of the former Austrian Governor of Bohemia and also some of the records of central authorities in Vienna transferred to Czechoslovakia by Austria after 1918. From other archives of the same category, the records of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where Dr. Opočenský is archivist, of the Ministry of Agriculture, of the Ministry of National Defence, of the Ministry of Transport which has unique documents illustrating the development of railways, are of paramount importance.

The Museum of National Resistance with its documents and objects commemorating the first struggle for Czechoslovak independence in 1914-18 will be enriched by documentary material illustrating the resistance of the Czechoslovak people, both at home and abroad, in the years 1939-45. In the future it will hold comprehensive military archives as well.

Among the records of the country, the Archives of Bohemia occupy an exceptional position, as they contain the collections of the Archives of the Crown of the mediaeval Kingdom of Bohemia. Fortunately they have remained untouched. The Archives of Bohemia take protective care at present of all the unofficial archives in Bohemia. The same applies to the Archives of Moravia in Brno, those of Silesia in Opava and of Slovakia in Bratislava. A network of local archives is being set up by completion and concentration of feudal records, which until 1945 had been mostly without competent supervision and were not easily accessible, as they belonged to a gentry of foreign origin.

Municipal archives receive much more attention now than hitherto. The most important among them, the archives of the City of Prague,

have suffered badly. On the 8th of May 1945, they were destroyed by the Germans at the very close of the struggle for Prague, when the time-honoured Old Town Hall was bombed and set on fire. The library and the index of the archives were destroyed; only that part of the collections which was transferred to the country has been preserved. Professor V. Vojtíšek has undertaken the rebuilding of the archives in the Clam-Gallas Palace of Prague. These are the only archives not to be found in their original pre-war building. The archives of the Charles University suffered badly, as their most valuable documents and University insignia were taken by the Germans and sent to Germany. Up to the present they have not been found. The archives are now again in the building of the Faculty of Law in Prague V.

Research workers coming from abroad to Prague may also miss the Russian Emigrés Collections. The archives, containing especially valuable documents relating to the Russian Revolution and the Civil War, have been returned to Moscow. The important Russian Library, however, has remained in Prague. It contains probably the most important source of information about the early days of the Soviet Union to be found outside Russia.

Students of Czechoslovak-British relations will find these records unimpaired. Noteworthy here are the Archives of the Crown, kept in the Archives of Bohemia in Prague IV, containing mediaeval documents, the Archives of the Ministry of the Interior, the documents dating from the Hapsburg rule in Bohemia, in Prague III, Valdštejnská, and the Metropolitan Archives in Prague III for Church history. British documents are to be found in the National and University Library in Prague I, Klementinum, and the National Museum Library in Prague II, Václavské náměstí.

All these institutions are already accessible to all students. Czechoslovak archivists have carried out their task, i.e. the saving of the muniments entrusted to their care. They are now setting about the other task, which is the organization of the archives in the whole territory of Czechoslovakia and the opening of the archives hitherto inaccessible.