Archives of Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria

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WITHIN the limited time available I should like to give you a condensed account of recent archival developments in Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia, with a few analytical comments of more general nature, viewing archives in the context of current East European policies. I think I can in good conscience refrain from going into the historical background of archives between the two World Wars, because students of that period are fortunate enough to be able to refer to two excellent English-language surveys, prepared in 1944 by your distinguished president, Dr. Posner, and subsequently released by the National Archives under the titles, *Archival Repositories in the Balkan States* and *Archival Repositories in Czechoslovakia.*

In Yugoslavia official cultural policies in the postwar period have promoted the expansion of archives. Since that country represents a federation of six republics, the responsibility for archival matters is divided between the federal government and the governments of the republics. Early in 1945, shortly after Yugoslavia had regained her national sovereignty, a law was passed that put all archives, federal and local, under state control. Subsequently, in 1950, additional legislation for the entire territory of Yugoslavia was promulgated, outlining the general principles to be applied to the reorganization of archives and authorizing the local governments to issue implementing legislation. As a result, the present network of official archives consists of the federal archives establishment, which is in charge of the collection and preservation of archival materials relating to the activities of federal agencies, and the local archives establishments, which serve as custodians of materials under the jurisdiction of the individual republics. Besides these there are the

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Archives of Military History, the Archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, and the Archives of the Party Organizations in the republics. In addition, Yugoslavia possesses a number of ecclesiastical and municipal repositories and collections administered by academies of science, museums, and similar institutions. Prominent in this latter category are the Archives of the Serbian Academy of Sciences in Belgrade, with materials on early Serbian history between the 13th and the 15th centuries; the Zagreb Archives, housing the 11th-century *Monumenta Antiquissima*, which are the oldest documents of the Croatian national dynasty; the Archives of the Yugoslav Academy of Sciences in Zagreb, with the world's largest collection of Glagolithica; the Slovenian State Archives in Ljubljana; and several oriental archives in Sarajevo, which are of outstanding significance for the study of the history of the peoples of Yugoslavia under Turkish domination.

The Federation of Archivists of Yugoslavia, which came into being in 1953 as an auxiliary body for the development and improvement of archival services, counts at present over 600 members. Affiliated societies of archivists have been organized all over the country. The federation publishes a quarterly review, *Arhivist*, which contains a wealth of information on archival developments in Yugoslavia and in other countries; and American activities and publications in the field are given frequent and extensive coverage in the journal. Many of the articles — which, incidentally, are followed by précis in French — are devoted to the description of Yugoslavia's larger collections; and from time to time collection guides are published as special supplements to the journal. The second issue of the journal for 1956 contains an informative bibliographical survey of the postwar archival literature published in Yugoslavia between 1947 and 1956. Indicative of the expanding programs of Yugoslav archivists is the initiation in 1955 of another quarterly, *Arhivski pregled*, published by the Historical Archives of Serbia. I might add that the first volume of the Croatian-language Encyclopedia of Yugoslavia, published in 1955, devotes about 20 pages to all aspects of archival affairs in Yugoslavia.

I shall deal only in passing with archives in Bulgaria; first, because, except for the collections of the National Library in Sofia, Bulgaria is not known to have any spectacular archival collections; and second, because the available information with regard to recent developments is rather fragmentary. Following the general pattern in Eastern Europe, the Bulgarian Government introduced in 1951 and 1952 legislation aiming at the centralization of archival ad-

ministration and the setting up of the Central State Archives in Sofia. Since the texts of the pertinent laws were not promulgated in Bulgaria's official gazette, little is known about the details of this reorganization.

I would like to dwell at greater length on the situation in Czechoslovakia because it exemplifies the transformations made in archival theory and practice in the lands that after the second World War were drawn into the Soviet orbit and that have since been exposed to the pervasive cultural influences of the USSR. After the Communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia, the government lost no time in bringing archives, along with other cultural institutions, in step with the tenets of the new ideology and the changed conditions in the political, economic, and social spheres. Thus, land archives were set up in order to record changes in ownership resulting from the confiscation of land and the collectivization of agriculture; the administrative reorganization of the country by regions led to the establishment of regional archives in the principal city of each of the newly-created administrative units; new policies were established for the discarding of archival materials; and a State Commission of Archives was constituted, with the task of formulating uniform ideological and administrative criteria for future legislation. Finally, in 1954 a government decree directed a complete reorganization, which in effect put the legislative seal on the *Gleichschaltung* of archives in Czechoslovakia in keeping with Soviet experience and practice.

In essence, this enactment embodies the following principles:

(1) Archival repositories are subject to centralized and uniform direction by the government, either through direct administration or by supervision.

(2) The custody, preservation, recording, and servicing of essential archival materials are the prerogative and responsibility of the government.

(3) Archival collections have primarily ideological and political functions.

(4) The sum total of documents related to the activities of nationalized economic enterprises, as well as the present and past organs of government, are considered one indivisible *fond*.

In the western part of Czechoslovakia, policy making and operational power in all archival affairs rest with the Administration of Archives of the Ministry of the Interior and in Slovakia with the corresponding office of the Commissioner of the Interior; these bodies are assisted by advisory boards and have at their disposal a system of local field offices. The country's important and leading archival repositories were decreed to be state archives, that is, government administered and financed research establishments. Thus,

the former Central Archives of the Ministry of the Interior and the Archives of the Province of Bohemia were amalgamated into the Central State Archives in Prague, and the archives of the provinces of Moravia and Silesia, located in Brno and Opava respectively, also became state archives. Agricultural and ecclesiastical archives were incorporated into the network of regional archives, which were likewise turned into state archives. On the other hand, entirely exempt from this system and shrouded in secrecy, are the central and local archives of the Communist Party, which house documents bearing on Party history and on the all-embracing activities of the Party apparatus. They contain the biographical folders for the Party leaders and members, which provide a formidable instrument for monolithic Party control and assume crucial importance at times of struggle for power between rival Party factions. Materials in the custody of the armed forces were placed under separate military jurisdiction. Under the new archival organization, the most important archives in Slovakia are the Central State Archives in Bratislava, the Archives of the Slovak National Museum in Martin, the Slovak Central Archives of Mining in Banská Štiavnica, and the Central Literary Archives of the Matica Slovenska, the present national library in Martin.

Recent years have witnessed a number of active publishing programs, which have resulted in several noteworthy contributions to the knowledge of archives in Czechoslovakia. I have particularly in mind a series of printed inventories and guides to major collections such as those of the Central State Archives in Prague, the State Archives in Brno, and the Municipal Archives in Prague and Plzen. In 1953 there was also published a 184-page bibliography of archives in Slovakia. Another item of relatively recent date is a little dictionary which aims at systematizing archival terminology. Finally, mention should be made of several serial publications devoted to archival activities and studies. Since 1951 the Administration of Archives of the Ministry of the Interior has sponsored two professional journals: *Sborník archivních prací*, a semiannual journal carrying chiefly texts and discussions of hitherto unpublished source materials and papers on the history of diplomatics; and *Archivní casopis*, a quarterly chiefly concerned with the practice of archival work. It is also worth noting that the Department of Czech History and Archival Studies at Charles University inaugurated earlier this year the publication of its Transactions.

The legitimate question arises: *Why* are the Communist Parties and governments within the Soviet sphere so intent on maintain-

ing a close grip on archival resources? I have no hesitation in answering that this solicitude, far from being disinterested, is prompted by quite utilitarian motives. This is no hypothesis; it is openly admitted by contemporary East European archival theorists, who quote repeatedly and emphatically an official Soviet statement, that archives serve — "as a weapon of political indoctrination and mass education." Indeed, the record is replete with evidence that Communist regimes make abundant use of archives as a device for consolidating and strengthening their political power and prestige and for molding public opinion. In this connection, it may be helpful to take a brief look at the role and *modus operandi* of historical documentation in Eastern Europe. As is well known, historiography in Eastern Europe operates in the strait jacket of the institutionalized dogma of historical materialism. Barring an oversight by the censor, no work that fails to meet the specifications of that philosophy stands a chance of obtaining the official approval that is a prerequisite for publication. Looking for new vistas of historical research or exploring novel interpretations or approaches to the past is seldom left to the initiative and discretion of individual scholars, especially if these activities are of political or ideological relevance. As a rule the general line and the slogans for major historical themes emanate from or require the approval of the political leadership. To fit history into the framework of the prevailing ideology or of current political exigencies is a task that requires not only considerable maneuverability in presentation and argument but also such control over primary source materials as is necessary to ensure the availability or unavailability of evidence. For example, until a short time ago one would have looked in vain for one single work on Russian postrevolutionary history published anywhere in the Soviet orbit in the Stalin era that did not completely distort the historical record by suppressing any evidence nonconducive to the glorification of Stalin. It was only in connection with the official launching of the de-Stalinization program at the 20th Party Congress that Party leaders rediscovered in the top secret Party Archives and circulated among the delegates a series of letters and notes written by Lenin in the last years of his life. Included among them was the so-called Testament of Lenin — which, by the way, had been known for many years outside the Iron Curtain and in which Lenin was quite critical of Stalin's qualifications for leadership. Subsequently, these documents were published, "in accordance with instructions of the Party Central Committee," in the ideological journal of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

The ease with which historical documentation is made to submerge into or emerge from oblivion is quite startling and can perhaps be graphically demonstrated by the following example. Volume 5 of the official Great Soviet Encyclopedia, published in 1950, carried a full-page likeness and a long biography of Beria, eulogizing him as one of the pillars of the Soviet Union and praising him as "Stalin's disciple and closest collaborator." By the end of 1953 Beria had been executed as a traitor, and shortly thereafter subscribers to the Encyclopedia received several replacement pages with a little note which said: "Cut out pages 21 to 24 of volume 5, including the full-page portrait, and substitute the enclosed new text for them." Gone from the original version were Beria's life history and his picture, to be replaced in the new edition by a series of illustrations of the Bering Sea and articles on Charles Auguste de Bériot, a Belgian violinist, and Friedrich Wilhelm von Bergholz, an 18th-century courtier at the court of Holstein.

It is also well known that in past "show trials," which were conducted in Eastern Europe against heretical fellow-Communists, the prosecution introduced allegedly incriminating documents that had been held ready in secret archives for many years for use at the opportune moment. In some instances, one set of documents was relied on to clinch a death sentence while another set was later invoked in support of the posthumous rehabilitation of the executed person. A case in point is Traĭcho Kostov, former Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister and secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, who was put to death 8 years ago by his Communist rivals for alleged high treason and Titoism. At that time abundant propaganda use was made of the printed editions of the official "trial proceedings" in various languages. Only recently Kostov was exonerated because of a conviction based on "faked evidence." I should hazard an informed guess that any graduate student at an East European university who would be foolhardy enough to undertake research on a purged and not yet reinstated Communist leader, such as Slanský or Clementis, would find it impossible to locate any primary sources other than those used in the trials.

The use, or rather misuse, of archival resources as a device for discrediting leaders or institutions of opposing political and ideological coloration and the revision of accepted findings of history are familiar techniques of totalitarian regimes. These practices were followed by the Bolsheviks with respect to prerevolutionary Russia and by the Nazis with respect to the Weimar Republic. In Czechoslovakia as elsewhere in Eastern Europe it has become fashionable

in recent years to print collections of documentary materials which, under the guise of evidentiary respectability, are dedicated to these single-minded purposes. Many such collections are characterized by a wholly one-sided selection of documents, which are often cited out of context and in abbreviated form and include pieces of questionable authenticity. The evidence presented is at best inferential and circumstantial, and principal reliance is placed on the techniques of political pamphleteering, running comments, suggestive captions, and the order of arrangement of otherwise disconnected exhibits.

Typical of such items, for instance, is a collection of source materials entitled, Documents on the Anti-Popular and Anti-National Policies of T. G. Masaryk. It is devoted to the task of calumniating Masaryk by accusing Czechoslovakia's first president of about everything under the sun, from being a war monger and instigator of anti-Soviet and anti-Communist campaigns to plotting the assassination of Lenin and kowtowing, as the text says, "to American, English, and French imperialism, and surrendering Czechoslovak national resources and industry to American imperialists for plunder." Another objective of this type of exploitation of archival materials is to belittle the role of President Woodrow Wilson in the creation of Czechoslovakia and to argue — contrary to known historical facts — that the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic were the direct results of a domestic social revolution, which in turn was set into motion by the Bolshevik revolution. Or, to give still another example, the diplomatic history of the Munich Conference is presented in a manner that implies that Churchill was not opposed to the decisions of that conference.

Communist theorists claim that the "progressive" archival policies, as they term them, have brought about many improvements. They point to comprehensive legislation, financial support by the government, improvements in the training of personnel, the publication of printed inventories of archives, the elimination of cataloging backlogs, and so forth. With the Communists' flair for bureaucratic procedures and official planning, they see merit in the fact that each archival institution has its well-defined place in the bureaucratic machine and that archival activities are planned 5 years in advance, like the output of shoes.

Yet I believe it is fair to state that learning and truth have not been the beneficiaries of the material and technical advances in the field of archives that have been attained in captive countries of Eastern Europe. The archivists and historians of those countries

are left with little choice but to temporize with the cultural policies laid down by Party and government. The fact remains that the prime purpose of the rigid governmental hold on archival materials is to provide the key to a manipulation of documents flexible and mobile enough to meet the shifting demands of politics and propaganda. To assess archival developments in Eastern Europe only in terms of statistical growth and bureaucratic refinement would be as fallacious as were some past opinions that held that Nazism and Fascism were quite acceptable because trains ran on time and beggars had disappeared from the streets.

Of late some symptoms of a moderate relaxation of the rigor of governmental and Party interference with cultural affairs have become noticeable in Eastern Europe. It would be too much in the realm of speculation to attempt to predict whether or not this trend will gain momentum in the future. Let us hope that, as time goes on, the intellectual life in these lands of Europe will make steady progress toward ridding itself of limitations on access to the sources of knowledge and eliminating the evil of political partisanship in scholarly investigation. Let us hope that objective fact-finding, which is still being branded as a bourgeois prejudice, will regain its rightful place.