

THE CZECH LANGUAGE IN AMERICA

BY J. B. DUDEK

ACCORDING to statistics, nearly a million Czechoslovaks are sojourning within our borders. They are scattered throughout practically all the States of the Union, Illinois and Pennsylvania leading with about 65,000 apiece; Ohio, New York, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Nebraska, Texas, Minnesota, Michigan and Iowa following with large numbers, decreasing in order. Chicago alone boasts a Czechoslovak population of more than 50,000; New York City takes second prize with little better than half that. Since census-gatherers never get hold of everybody, it is safe to assume that the official figures should be considerably increased.

The term Czechoslovak, in census reports and elsewhere, includes all persons born in the country that is known, but only since 1918, as Czechoslovakia. It is often misleading. In Illinois, for example, fully nine-tenths of the so-called Czechoslovaks are Czechs, while in Pennsylvania nine-tenths are Slovaks. It may be stated emphatically, to begin with, that while the ugly hyphenation Czecho-Slovakia might, with some logic, be the official designation of a state created by a political merger of Čechy (or Bohemia, as we used to call it) and Slovakia, Czechoslovak is no more applicable to a Bohemian or to a Slovak alone than Americo-Mexican would be to a Californian or a New Yorker should this country, by design or chance, possess itself of its sister republic to the south. The Bohemians and the Slovaks are separate peoples. Of the Slavic languages, the Slovak is nearest related to Czech, but it is as distinct from it as Russian or Bulgarian. Of Czech and Slovak, the former is spoken

by three times as many people as the latter; thus, upon analyzing the already meaningless compound adjective, Czecho-slovakian, an additional stupidity is discovered: the more important is assigned the rôle of modifier. It is not impossible that, in the course of time, a Czecho-slovakian language may develop, but there is none now. *Ceteris paribus*, it is more probable that if the Ku Kluxers in Czechoslovakia succeed in making all its inhabitants speak one tongue it will be Czech; or, if the majority condescends to tolerate the hyphen, the minority will speak Slovako-Czeskian. Without going into these possibilities, the present essay concerns itself with the language of the Czechs in America, to the total exclusion of Slovaks, Czecho— or otherwise.

Taking into account that the Czech population here is relatively small and considerably scattered, it is not surprising that its vulgate, within the past few decades, should have performed some wonderful feats of evolution. They amount, indeed, to a veritable metamorphosis. The Bohemian immigrant learns the American language—sometimes so well that he is not distinguishable from the pure Americano,—and at the same time keeps up his Czech, takes pains that his children learn it, and resents, on occasion, palpable attempts to corrupt it; but he actually uses, though perhaps unconsciously, still another language, whose material is taken from the one and fashioned according to the genius of the other. So far has this third language progressed that he has only to take up any one of fifty Bohemian publications appearing regularly in America—

seven of them daily—to discover that almost any paragraph could be rendered fairly intelligible to an American by transliterating a little here and there and lopping typical Czech particles from every other word!

The printed page, at that, tells only the beginning of a long and sad tale. The Bohemian-American journalist is professing a Czech purist; but if he did not actually begin the work of corrupting the language, he is accessory to the unholy business, and the tears he sheds over "the decay of our mother tongue in America" show every evidence of being produced by an onion. It would be unfair to reproach him alone for the fact that his beloved *Čeština* (as the language is known) has become a lady of easy virtue second only to Yiddish; yet it is none the less true that he, together with the nondescript lecturer, pedagogue and lodge organizer, brought to this country and popularized a written Bohemian that had already lost its virginity. The seduction of *Čeština* was not due to any innate weakness or wickedness, since she is strong, chaste—almost prudish—as well as beautiful; nor yet to pressure of poverty, since the native vocabulary is unusually rich and expressive of the most delicate shades. As far back as the Fourteenth Century Czech writers handled philosophical and theological abstractions without resorting to Greek and Latin terms that writers of other nationalities were obliged to employ. But the maid was ravished in 1620, at the downfall of Czech independence, and, until she was rescued by the World War, Woodrow Wilson, Professor Masaryk and company, she remained in the power of the ravisher. To be less melodramatic about it, the Austrian government did, for nearly three centuries, do its best to exterminate Bohemian from the offices and schools of Bohemia, and, for policy's sake at least, all but the most nationalistic Czechs nodded linguistically, if they did not bow, to the powers that were. Hundreds of native words were replaced by foreign terms, popularly dubbed

Germanisms, but ultimately Latin or Greek: *právník*, lawyer, for instance, by *advokát*; *vzdělání*, erudition, by *erudice*; *zeměpis*, geography, by *geografie*; *různorodnost*, heterogeneity, by *heterogenita*; *vystěhovelec*, emigrant, by *emigrant*; *napodobitel*, imitator, by *imitátor*; *směs*, chaos, by *chaos*; *podnebí*, climate, by *klima*; *většina*, majority, by *majorita*; *vychovatel*, pedagogue, by *pedagog*. The new nouns were pronounced in the Czech manner, sounding every letter; accented always on the first syllable, and inflected according to Bohemian grammatical rules, as all other loan nouns are. Verbs like *absolvovati*, to absolve (not sacramentally, but "to complete"); *abstrahovati*, to abstract (in the psychological sense); *evokovati*, to evoke (spirits!); *eliminovati*, to eliminate (in algebra); *generalisovati*, to generalize (in philosophy); *suspendovati*, to suspend (action only), and *proscribovati*, to proscribe (legally), ousted perfectly good Bohemian verbs, but were conjugated in approved Czech fashion. The borrowed nouns and verbs gave birth to numerous adjectives: *evokační*, *geografický*, *heterogenní*, *imitativní*, *chaotický*, *pedagogický*, etc., inflected to agree in gender, number and case with the thing modified.

II

These innovations were not, of course, all introduced at one fell swoop. The first user, in each instance, probably intended no more than to employ a word in some technical sense for which he did not know, or purposely ignored, the native expression; but, with a certain amount of deliberate, concerted action, an impetus was given a movement that eventually brought several thousand native words to perdition. The Bohemian journalists and lecturers, embarking for America, brought with them quite a dictionary of these neo-Bohemianisms. These gentlemen, as a rule, had, or soon acquired, a book knowledge of English, and began assiduously using, instead of real Czech words, the imported ones—not only in the technical senses they had

abroad, but in other meanings of the corresponding English words. *Akceptovati*, first used solely in connection with drafts, now meant to accept a gift, bribe, or anything else; *idiot*, which had in Europe more of its original Greek meaning, came to signify five different kinds of idiots, each represented in Czech by a single, more precise, native noun. *Eminentní*, simply because eminent can be used in more than one sense, threw out four native adjectives, no two of them synonymous; five were discarded for *enormní*, enormous; three for *melancholický*, melancholy; five for *praktický*, practical, and goodness knows how many for *konstituční*, constitutional, and *radikální*, radical.

It was only natural that the element of artificiality in these pedantic loan words should appeal to a certain pretentious class. The average Bohemian immigrant aspired to sophistication; his educational medium was the newspaper, ever an object of veneration to the Bohemian-American. He may scoff at the Bible, but he accepts as gospel everything he sees in his prints. Duly impressed with the editors' show of intellectual profundity, which often ill-concealed downright ignorance of the native vocabulary, he aped the manner of his supposed betters. Indigenous expressions gradually became obsolete, and today are practically unknown except to the philological enquirer and to the compilers of dictionaries of "foreign words in the Czech language," of which several have been published, ostensibly to aid the newspaper reader, but in reality to supply the scribes and lecturers with grandiloquent phrases.

As the immigrant's knowledge of printed English increased, he could not help observing the intimate connection existing between *adaptace*—adaptation, *adopce*—adoption, *representace*—representation, *sensace*—sensation, *subskribovati*—subscribe, or *spekulovati* and speculate. He began giving typical American interpretations to some of them: *sensace* and *representace* might, to the pedagogue, still signify psychological

phenomena, but the laic, noting that American papers referred to a divorce scandal as a sensation, followed suit with *sensace*; he concluded that *representace* might as well mean what the people get in Congress as "the act by which the mind forms an image or concept of an object." *Subskribovati* might mean, primarily, to sign on the dotted line, but Americans subscribed for newspapers, and he ceased to associate the loan verb with any other idea. He speculated, not only regarding theories, but in oil stocks as well. The journalists took the cue, and today nearly all the classical importations, as they may be called, occur in print, as well as in speech, in every possible meaning conveyed by their English counterparts. Some Old World meanings have become extinct in the New: *konvikt*, for instance, as the house of a religious community. Here, it means only a convict in the penitentiary, and no newspaper would dare use it in the European sense. *Detailní* there was synonymous with retail; here nobody would understand by it anything but detailed.

The Bohemian-American layman, however, went further. His native words are written phonetically; the importations, with exceptions immaterial here, also. But, as he became familiar with the vagaries of English orthography, he began associating *subskribovati*, for instance, with the verb he heard from his American neighbors, and came to the not unreasonable conclusion that it ought to be pronounced *sabskrajbovati*—our "subscribe" plus the Czech infinitive termination *ovati*. *Spekulovati*, by a similar process, became *spekju-lejtovati* in common parlance. At this point the editors and other purists were alarmed, wept and besought. Why, this was degeneracy! sacrilege! But the plebeian, undecieved by their hypocrisy, went unfeelingly on. He began boldly to adopt more directly the simpler verbs he heard every day; and, to cut short the story, every verb current in American speech today has, at least in emergency, been converted into an American-Bohemian verb by tacking this infini-

tive ending to the English word as pronounced. The majority of them may be regarded as permanent.

Nearly all are of the same—the sixth—Czech conjugation. Exceptional ones, of other conjugations,—e. g., *američtiti* and *amerikánšititi*, to talk American, *farmětititi* or *farmařititi*, to engage in farming, which are of the fourth,—bear indications of pedagogical supervision and are numerically insignificant. Even these have what are technically known as the aspects—*amerikanisovati*, to Americanize, *farmovati*, to farm,—of the sixth. The colloquial *békovati*, to be backing, and its perfective aspects, *vybékovati*, to back out of, *zabékovati*, to back up, exist also as *beknouti* and *békati* (each with similar native prefixes), which are respectively second and fifth conjugation, but such instances are rare. Incredible as it may seem, the primary accent has been retained on the first syllable, which is a fixed rule in Czech, no matter how long a word may be. But as a modern—certainly revolutionary—development, the accent is becoming wobbly, inclining toward the syllable stressed in English, not only in the longer verbs, e. g., *dybejtovati*, to debate, but even in a few nouns: *dybejt*, a debate. This, however, has not made much headway; they are as often accented on the first syllable, and the concurrent classical loan words, if pronounced as printed (*debatovati*; *debat* or *debata* in the instances cited), are not affected.

III

It is very probable that hundreds of loan nouns modelled on traditional lines were first used in America. These are interesting chiefly because of their similarity to printed English equivalents: *aféra*, affair; *elokuce*, elocution; *chromo*, chromolithograph; *kopie*, copy; *garantie*, guaranty; *garda*, guard; *fasáda*, façade. Many rather modern ones follow the pedagogical traditions both as to spelling and pronunciation: *telefon*, *telegraf*, *stenografie*, *automobil*, *motor*, *aeroplán*; but for most of these there is in the vulgate

an alternative pronunciation closer approaching ours: *telefoun*, *otomobil*, *moutr*, *érplejn*. They are always fully inflected. Czech has seven cases for each number, so, with only the nominative singular given here, only a faint idea can be given of what the words look or sound like in practice. An interesting feature is the number of derived nouns often constructed from one stem: *diskonto*, discount, *diskontováč* or *diskontovatel*, a discounter; *bank*, bank, *bankér*, *bankář* and *bankovník*, a banker, *bankerka*, a female banker, *bankovníctví*, the banking business; *praktika*, practice, *praktičkář*, a practitioner, *praktik*, a practical man, *praktickost*, practicalness; *fysika*, physics, *fysik*, a physicist (colloquially also, a purgative); *elektrika* (colloquially also *elektrika*), electricity, *elektrárna*, electric light plant, power house, *elektrína* (popularly also *elektrickost*), electricalness; *expres*, express (also express package), *expresák*, an express-man (drayman); *drog*, drug, *drogist*, *drogník* or *drogista*, a druggist, *drogárna*, a drugstore, *drognictví*, the drug business.

In the vulgate alone, so far, practically all masculine and neuter nouns current in common American speech have been Bohemianized by simply inflecting them according to the declension, determined by the terminal letter or syllable, into which they would fall if written phonetically with Czech characters: *ajskrim*, ice-cream; *bejsból*, baseball; *džáb*, job; *taunšíp*, township; *munšajn*, moonshine; *staré*, starch; *trejd*, trade; *trolí*, trolley. The animate or inanimate nature of the object, as well as its gender, plays a part in deciding which of a dozen principal paradigms is to be followed for the inflection of the substantive: *bučerač*, of one masculine declension, means a butcher; of another, a butcher-knife. The gender of the native noun denoting the same object sometimes influences the declension of the loan noun; hence, a barn, for which the Czech word is feminine, is not *bárn*, but *barna*; corn, for the same reason, is *korna*; street-car, *strítkára*; pants, *pence* (pl.), and whisky, *viska*. *Džurí* is declined after a neuter for-

mula, but there being two native words translatable by jury, one masculine, the other feminine, the borrowed word takes modifiers of either gender.

Metodyst, *atlet*, *publicist*, and the like exist also as feminine nouns—*metodysta*, *atleta*, *publicista*—but both forms are masculine in meaning and take masculine modifiers. A female Methodist, athlete, etc., is *metodystka*, *atletka*. *Amerikán*, *štorák*, store-keeper, *učer*, teacher, *přitr*, preacher, similarly represents males only; the female of the species is *Amerikánka*, *štoráčka*, *učerka*. *Vejtreska*, waitress (a waiter being *vejtr*), illustrates a curious redundancy. There are other feminine forms of certain personal masculines: *prohibičník*, a prohibitionist, *prohibičnice*, the female ditto; *kongresník*, congressman, *kongresnice*, a congress-woman; *nygr*, nigger, *nygrovka*, negress. Simple nouns like cow, boy, glue, which end in un-Bohemian sounds, are generally avoided, but there is a verb *glúovati*. *Melas*, molasses, *šuky* or *šúže* (pl. only), a pair of shoes; *sodovka*, soda-water; *kornkabka*, a cob-pipe; *indyáňce*, an Indian child, papoose; *nygrlatě*, a pickaninny; *bínze*, a bean, *bejkbínze* (pl.), baked beans; *můlák*, mule; *píčeš*, peach; *mades*, tomato; *kal*, a gallon jar; *hempsenvič*, ham sandwich; *eprikoc*, apricot; *makínchprc*, mocking-bird; *recna*, rat, and *hefr* (masculine!), heifer, are only a few out of many curiosities for whose appreciation a detailed explanation of Czech phonetics, orthography and grammar, impossible to include here, is necessary.

Nouns are often made up from adjectives: *fajnový*, fine, *fajnovost*, fastidiousness; *vice versa*, most concrete nouns have adjective forms: *mólt*, malt, *móltový*, made of or with malt; *džús*, juice, *džusnatý*, juicy. Comparatively few adjectives have been borrowed as such: *braunový*, brown, *pinkový*, pink, *bekvudzový*, backwoods. The American slang "allrightsky," much as appearances favor the supposition, is not of Czech paternity. Imitating the custom of his adopted country, the Bohemian has taken to making verbs out of other parts of speech; hence, *otomobílovati*, to automobile; *džojrajtovati*,

to joy-ride; *daunovati*, to down; *braunovati*, to brown; *butleгарiti*, to bootlegger (to bootleg is *butlegovati*); *bojkotovati*, to boycott; *klerkovati*, to clerk; *houmstedovati*, to homestead; *brglařiti*, to burglar (*brglovati* = to burgle); *čamovati*, to chum; and to compounding object and verb, as in *hauskípovati*, to house-keep; *storkípovati*, to store-keep; *kornhaskovati*, to husk corn; not to mention *horiapovati*, to hurry up; *bouldapovati*, to hold up; *kuklaksovati*, to Ku Klux; *blekbólovati*, to black-ball; *vybólovati*, to bawl out; *gademovati*, to God-damn, and *sanamabičovati*, to son-of-a-bitch! When it is considered that most nouns are responsible for at least one adjective, all verbs for a verbal noun and at least two adjectives, and that many adjectives are convertible into adverbs, it will be evident that only a hint has here been given of the monumental dictionary that might be compiled of the American-Bohemian vulgate.

IV

The latest acquisitions have obtained recognition in print as yet only to a very limited extent, and are then usually bungled in the attempt to spell them partly with characters having English values, but the following random excerpts from recent Bohemian-American newspapers will illustrate the encroachments that the language of the mob is making upon a journalistic Bohemian already heavily laden:

Guvernér nebude činiti žádných překážek klánům. Ani mayor ani šerif prý nepokusí se zastaviti parádu. . . . Nepotřebujeme klany ani protiklany ale potřebujeme gentlemany (The governor will offer no resistance to the Klansmen. Neither the mayor nor the sheriff, it is said, will attempt to stop the parade. . . . We need neither Klans nor anti-Klans, but we need gentlemen).

Rekonstrukční liga konala konvenci, na níž přijata platforma . . . (The reconstruction league held a convention, at which the platform adopted . . .).

Byl zasažen zbloudilou kulkou při boji prohibičních agentů s bootleggery . . . musili lékati

poraněného operovati (He was struck by a stray bullet during a battle of Prohibition agents with bootleggers . . . the doctors had to operate the wounded man).

Řádění moronů . . . Dívka zavlčena do neznámého flatu . . . šest podezřelých individuí v moci policie . . . děvče sedukováno v icecream-parloru (Taking in tow of morons . . . Girl lured to unfamiliar flat . . . six suspicious individuals in the power of the police . . . maid seduced in an ice-cream parlor).

Fordův presidentský boom jest jako fordka: ta je vždycky v cestě velikých mašin. . . . Ford by byl logickým presidentským kandidátem takzv "Middle of the Road Party." (Ford's presidential boom is like a Ford: it is always in the way of the big machines. . . . Ford would be the logical presidential candidate of the so-called "Middle," etc.).

Who but a Bohemian-American, thoroughly versed in all three languages—American, Bohemian, and American-Bohemian,—could penetrate the mysteries of *petrolejnický skandál*, petroleum scandal,

petrolejnický výslech, petroleum enquiry, *progresivní republikán*, progressive republican, *konstituční demokrát*, a constitutional democrat, *konservační politika*, conservative politics, *instruovaná delegace*, an instructed delegation, *kampánní komise*, campaign committee, *bolševický bunch*, a Bolshevistic bunch, *politický fence*, political fences, *strýc Sam*, Uncle Sam, *běžeti pro ofis*, to run for office; *solon* for senator; *filmová hvězda*, a film star, *filmování novely*, the filming of a novel; *trafiční kop*, traffic cop; *plumbařský kontraktor*, a plumber-contractor; *narodil se někde ve srubu*, he was born somewhere in the "shrub" (i. e., "sticks"), or *podle nejpraktičtějších systémů prominentních business-manů*, according to the most practical systems of prominent business men? Or, for that matter, of *ohnivá voda*, fire water, *bílý mezek*, white-mule, *velký klacek*, big stick, *bledá tvář*, a pale-face, and *bílý otrokář*, a white-slaver, in which the words are real Bohemian, but would certainly convey no intelligible notion to an old-country Czech.

GLIMPSES OF A GOLDEN AGE

BY JOHN ALLEN KROUT

FROM the day in 1642 that William Bradford confided to his journal his astonishment at the growth of drunkenness among the Puritans, efforts to put down drinking by law have been unceasing in America. John Winthrop tried to persuade himself by means of a faultless syllogism that statutes against the vice were workable and wholesome, but his fellow Puritans, even in that pious day, were not ready to abandon it. Rather, they seemed bent on indulging themselves freely, and thereby they achieved for themselves a whispered reputation for ardent and even excessive devotion to the bowl. That habit has been ascribed by their descendants to various circumstances: to the hereditary influence of a hard-drinking Anglo-Saxon ancestry, to the hardship and exposure of frontier life, to the universal contemporary belief in the medicinal properties of alcohol, and, finally, to the cruelly ascetic character of Puritanism, which forced the individual to seek relief from his religious exercises in the joys of the cup. Each explanation affords an opportunity for interesting speculation; all are significant because they rest alike upon the hypothesis that heavy drinking was the rule rather than the exception among the Puritans.

Whether the hypothesis be true or not, the Fathers seem to have convicted their own generation. By their writings their fellows stand indicted. Intemperance, resulting from the flagrant abuse of "nature's gift," conflicted with the Calvinistic idea that alcohol was given to man for the benefit of the community and not for the voluptuous gratification of individual ap-

petites. Therefore, by moral precept and statutory provision, the ban was placed upon drunkenness. He who stepped over the shadowy line of moderation was an outcast. His pathway was in side streets and back alleys; summary punishment was his lot if he dared to parade his joy on the main highways. Even the way of the merely prospective transgressor was hard. If he repaired to the public-house for his liquor, he was watched carefully. Unless his previous conduct had been good, he might learn to his sorrow that his name was on the list of those denied the right to purchase any liquor at all. If he got intoxicants and drank unwisely, he was likely to fall into the clutches of the constables. His first offense brought a fine, usually five shillings, or, in default of payment, a sojourn of from one to six hours in the stocks. In case his tipping became habitual, he could be whipped or forced to wear some mark of his shame. At the discretion of the magistrates his kind were frequently put to work on the fortifications, or assigned to some other task that would save money for the town.

In the Middle Atlantic and Southern colonies the law-makers frowned almost as fiercely upon intemperance as did those of New England. That it might be less difficult for the justices to detect offenders, Maryland in 1639 defined drunkenness as "drinking with excess to the notable perturbation of any organ of sense or motion." From everyone discovered in such a state the Lord Proprietor was to receive a fine of five shillings. If the guilty party chanced to be a servant, corporal punishment or confinement in the stocks for twenty-four