2008 ACTA UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE – STUDIA TERRITORIALIA XII PAG. 57–72

THE COUNCIL OF FREE CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1949–1956[1]

FRANCIS D. RAŠKA

Abstract

This paper discusses the early years of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia, which was the first organization of its type to emerge during the Cold War. Democratic Czechoslovak political exiles (non-Communist parliament members and diplomats) founded the Council of Free Czechoslovakia in 1949 in order to help achieve the liberation of their homeland from Communist tyranny. From the outset, the Council was beset with various structural and political problems that hampered its effectiveness. Despite the difficulties, the author concludes that Council members did the best they could for their cause in the context of the contemporary situation.
Keywords: Council of Free Czechoslovakia, Czechoslovak, exile

Introduction

The history of the Czechoslovak political exile after the Communist take over in February 1948 has not been systematically studied. A brief account of the beginnings of the organization and the first difficulties of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia (Rada svobodného Československa) is provided in a monograph by Zdeněk Jirásek and Miloš Trapl.[2] This

[1] This article was previously released in the form of a working paper as part of the Research Objective of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Prague Social Science Studies, MSM0021620841, Ter-017.

[2] Jirásek Z. and Trapl M., *Exilová politika v letech 1948–1956* (Olomouc, Centrum pro československá exilová studia: Moneta F.M., 1996).

pioneering publication is based on materials originating almost exclusively in Czech archives. A compilation of documents was assembled by Bohumír Bunža.[3] It focuses primarily on Council declarations in the organization's later years.

A much more detailed description of the events leading to the formation of the Council and the first years of its existence was published by Bořivoj Čelovský.[4] Čelovský worked with the documents of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia located at the Center for Exile Studies at Palacký University in Olomouc (Czech Republic), the archive of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, and the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa. The Council was also the subject of an article by Slavomír Michálek in 1999.[5] In addition, the specific events surrounding the formation and activities of the Council can be found in the biographies of various participants, the most useful of which is Pavel Kosatík's biography of Ferdinand Peroutka.[6] Much useful information is also available in a detailed history of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party in exile written by Radomír Luža.[7] Views on exile politics from outside the mainstream can be found in a collection of articles by Josef Kalvoda.[8]

Political refugees from Czechoslovakia who were scattered throughout the world tried to organize along political party lines divided into two groups: the non-Communist parties of the National Front, which had held power in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1948, and the pre-war parties forbidden after 1945. In the first group, the National Socialists (Národní socialisté) were the largest and best organized. The Social Democrats (Sociální demokraté) were less numerous, but made use of their contacts with the Labour Party in the United Kingdom. The smallest Czech party within the first group was the People's Party (Lidovci). The Slovaks were organized in the Democratic Party (Demokratická strana) and in a tiny Freedom Party (Strana sľobody). Of

---

[3] Bunža B., *Rada svobodného Československa* (Washington, Rada svobodného Československa, 1990).
[4] Čelovský B., *Politici bez moci* (Šenov u Ostravy, Tilia, 2000).
[5] Michálek S., Rada slobodného Československa, 1948–1960, *Historický časopis*, Vol. 47, 1999, No. 9, pp. 327–344.
[6] Kosatík P., *Ferdinand Peroutka, pozdější život* (Praha, Paseka, 2000).
[7] Luža R., *Československá sociální demokracie. Kapitoly z let exilu 1948–1989* (Brno, Československé dokumentační středisko – Doplněk, 2001).
[8] Kalvoda J., *Z bojů o zítřek*, Vol. 1 (Toronto, Moravia Publishing, 1995).

the second group, three pre-war parties, whose reestablishment had been forbidden after 1945, tried to reorganize in exile. The largest among them was the Agrarian Party, which was later renamed the Republican Party (Republikáni). Also there was the smaller National Democratic Party (Národní demokraté) and the smallest was the Smallholders (Živnostníci). There was little love lost between the parties of the National Front and the other three "civic" parties. The "civic" parties felt discriminated against by the parties of the National Front, whom they accused of collaborating with the Communists. In addition, there was a small number of existing émigré organizations, both Czechoslovak and Slovak, who had little sympathy for the new political exiles. The Slovak organizations tended to be openly separatist and their goal was the renewal of the wartime independent Slovak state. Sudeten German organizations in the American and British Occupation Zones of Germany did not help matters because the majority of refugees from Czechoslovakia in 1948 were concentrated in German refugee camps where conflicts frequently arose.

The road to the formation of a united organ of democratic Czechoslovak exiles proved to be difficult. This author has assembled materials from British (National Archives in London, Churchill College Archives in Cambridge) and American archives (Hoover Institution at Stanford, Immigration History Research Center in Minneapolis, Lilly Library at the University of Indiana in Bloomington) on the activities of Czechoslovak political exiles after 1948. This article summarizes and analyzes the efforts leading to the formation of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia and the first years of its activities.

Formation Of The Council

After the Communist takeover of the Czechoslovak government in February 1948, a large group of non-Communist Czechoslovak politicians sought exile in the West. A large proportion of them left their homeland out of a justified fear of Communist persecution. In fact, some of the non-Communist politicians in Czechoslovakia had been arrested already in February 1948, but were released following the personal intervention of President Edvard Beneš. Most of those who escaped initially found refuge in the western zones of Germany, and others in Austria. As time progressed, significant groups of exiles formed in Britain, France, and the

United States. Smaller groups formed in Belgium, Italy, and other countries as well. At first, most of the refugees were interned in various refugee camps where living conditions were very poor. Their situation improved somewhat in the summer months of 1948 when the refugee camps were placed under the jurisdiction of the International Refugee Organization.[9]

Prominent individuals such as former government members or parliamentary deputies were housed at the so-called Alaska House in Frankfurt. Among the early ones were National Socialists Hora, Čížek, Stránský, and Krajina; People's Party deputy Ducháček; Judge Jaroslav Drábek and editor, Ivan Herben. Their first significant activity was initiating a meeting of the representatives of four parties (National Socialist, Social Democratic, Slovak Democratic, and People's) in Paris followed by another meeting on 10 April in London. The main purpose was an agreement to form a central Czechoslovak organ in exile, which should help provide for a growing number of Czechoslovak refugees.[10] Three National Socialist deputies, accompanied by the Minister of Defense in the wartime Czechoslovak Exile Government, visited Winston Churchill, who tried to arrange a presentation by them in the House of Commons.[11] But, the meeting at the House of Commons never took place. At that time, a Social Democrat, Blažej Vilím, used his access to the Labour government and tried to organize a meeting of thirty escaped Czechoslovak parliamentary deputies prior to the Czechoslovak elections scheduled for 30 May. It should be mentioned that he had to assure the British authorities that there was "no intention to set up any committees, least of all a government-in-exile".[12] Foreign Office official, Mayhew, added his own opinion: "My own view is that this is the 'thin end of the wedge' and that if we do not intend to use Czech refugees for propaganda and intelligence purposes, we would not be wise to open our doors to these Czech MPs". C.F.A. Warner, Mayhew's colleague, agreed: "I think most of these MPs will drift on to America before they become out of date (and therefore valueless) and have become much of a nuisance here".[13] R.M.A. Hankey at the Foreign Office recommended that the Czechoslovak MPs should be given the visas.[14] The meeting of

[9] Jirásek Z. and Trapl M., *Exilová politika v letech 1948–1956,* pp. 16–17.
[10] Čelovský B., *Politici bez moci,* p. 17.
[11] National Archives (London), PRO, FO371/71331, Churchill to Ernest Bevin, 25 April 1948.
[12] Ibidem, Mayhew to CFA Warner, 28 April 1948.
[13] Ibidem, Warner to Northern Department, 29 April 1948.
[14] Ibidem, Hankey to Warner, 6 May 1948.

Czechoslovak parliament members was finally scheduled for 28 May 1948 at Caxton Hall in London. Prior to the meeting, the Czech delegation failed to obtain a reception with the Speaker of the British Parliament. The meeting adopted a two-page resolution deploring the Communist takeover of 25 February and declared that, regardless of party, they would strive "with all our efforts in brotherly unity for the return of freedom and democracy to our country in the spirit of the humanitarian, democratic, and socialist principles of our president-liberator, T. G. Masaryk".[15] The role of these Czechoslovak politicians was difficult indeed because nobody seemed to care much about their predicament. A confidential appraisal of the meeting for the Foreign Office stated: "...having depended so long upon their leader, Dr. Beneš, and been deserted by him at the crucial moment, these Czechoslovak exile politicians are almost at a total loss as to where to go from here. There is no leader of inspiration among them, at least for the moment".[16]

In the United States, early attempts to organize an exile movement were undertaken by diplomats rather than politicians, because the latter were more limited in number. The first meeting, which took place on 14 June 1948 in New York, consisted of eight people, seven of whom were Slovaks.[17] They issued a public declaration and informed the American authorities of their intention to organize a central organ of Czechoslovak resistance, namely the Council of Free Czechoslovakia.[18] A press conference ensued on 29 June 1948, during which a memorandum was presented by Dr. Štefan Osuský, a major rival of Beneš's during the Second World War. The most important meeting took place on 17–18 July in New York. The British Foreign Office, which was closely monitoring the situation, concluded that "the Preparatory Committee of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia was composed of fairly harmless individuals, except for Dr. Osuský".[19]

Yet another center of Czechoslovak exile activity was established in Paris. This consisted of mainly Agrarians, National Democrats, and Smallholders (the three parties not reinstated in Czechoslovakia after the 1945 liberation). The People's Party had its representatives there as well and the National Socialist leader, Hubert Ripka, also joined the group.

---

[15] Ibidem, Resolution made by Free Members of the Czechoslovak National Constitutional Assembly, London, 28 May 1948.
[16] Ibidem, Shaw to Hankey, 31 May 1948.
[17] Čelovský B., *Politici bez moci*, p. 21.
[18] Hoover Institution (HI) (Stanford), Osuský Collection, Box 79, File 79/12, 16 June 1948.
[19] PRO, FO371/71331, Elliott's minute, 26 August 1948.

Both the summer and autumn months of 1948 witnessed frantic activities in both London and Paris. The representatives of individual parties tried to form various coalitions with other parties while, at the same time, excluding others.[20]

On 17 September 1948, the British authorities concluded that an agreement had been reached among all political parties to form the Council of Free Czechoslovakia, which would include representatives of all parties of the "National Front" as well as the Republicans, as the Agrarians now were called.[21]

The British could not have been more mistaken. The negotiations would last for a long time yet. The working charter document stated that the future members would all be government ministers and parliamentary deputies representing all Czechoslovak political parties since 1 January 1935. The British desk officer at the Foreign Office considered this unfortunate. "For the Communists will make much good propaganda if the old reactionary parties are deliberately revived by the émigrés".[22]

A regional meeting took place in Paris in early January with little unity among the parties.[23] Rudolf Kopecký, a National Democrat who worked at the BBC in London summarized his unhappiness as follows:

> I think that our entire group still lives in domestic conditions and that they are awarding ministerial posts instead of admitting that now it is necessary to work together to ensure the possibility of awarding such posts in the future... This reminds me of another mistake on the part of the Czechoslovak exiles. I will use the metaphor of sports terminology. The majority of our politicians think that our struggle is a sprint, whereas I declare that it is a marathon. If I am wrong, then I will arrive at the finish line late. But, if our politicians are wrong, and perhaps they see that they are, they will never reach the finish line. To speculate that war is imminent and that we will return home leads us to erroneous conclusions, which are the reasons for our failure to unite... The task of the politician is to assure for his nation peace, tranquility, a satisfying way of life, and prosperity. We know that, to give this to our people, we have to liberate our country. Therefore, no

---

[20] Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) (Minneapolis), Rechcígl Collection, Box 7, Rechcígl to Kopecký, 27 January 1949.
[21] PRO, FO371/71331, R. Pollak to A. Elliott, 17 September 1948.
[22] Ibidem, Elliott's minute, 21 October 1948.
[23] IHRC, Rechcígl Collection, Box 7, Rechcígl to Kopecký, 27 January 1949.

matter what pacifists we are, we are not afraid of war. Put yourself in the position of a British or American minister. Does he need to assure this for his nation? You may call me a pessimist, but I am not. Life has taught me. I liken everything that took place in Paris to playing with toy soldiers.[24]

The final meeting of the Preparatory Committee was called for 11 February 1949. It took place at All Souls Unitarian Church in Washington, D.C. and resulted in an agreement ten days later to form the Council of Free Czechoslovakia. The formation was announced on 25 February 1949 in a Declaration sent to thirty-nine governments. Twenty-one of them, including the United States, United Kingdom, and France, acknowledged the notification in writing.[25]

The Declaration is an impressive document written by a prominent Czech journalist and writer, Ferdinand Peroutka. Its conclusion stated:

> Even if the Communist regime rages with madness, please preserve spotless the character of the nation. Do not allow yourselves to be deceived so as not to be able to recognize what is freedom and what is tyranny, what is right and what is wrong. In your thinking, be free men. Educate your children to be honest citizens. Teach them, and you yourselves never forget, to distinguish between good and evil. If the character of the nation is preserved, everything else will be restored.[26]

Petr Zenkl was elected chairman of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia. Jozef Lettrich (Slovak) and Václav Majer were both elected vice-chairmen. The presidium consisted of twelve members and the executive committee had thirty. In addition, there was to be a consultative body consisting of about 100 members.[27] Among exiles, reactions to the Council's establishment were mixed.

The *New York Times* published a terse announcement on 26 February 1949. "Yesterday, on the one-year anniversary of the Communist takeover in Prague, the newly formed Council of Free Czechoslovakia announced its determination to liberate its country from the yoke of Communist tyranny".

---

[24] Ibidem, Kopecký to Rechcígl, 31 January 1949.
[25] Ibidem, Rada svobodného Československa-stručná zpráva o činnosti, Washington, D.C., November 1950.
[26] PRO, FO371/77251, Declaration of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia, 12 March 1949.
[27] Ibidem, Jan Stránský to Hankey, 7 March 1949.

The formation of a central organ of Czechoslovak exile resistance was an important event. The road to this goal, however, was complicated by controversy, striking disagreements between Czech and Slovak representatives respectively, and friction among the political parties. The domination of the Council by the parties of the post-1945 National Front did not go unrecognized by other parties in exile. Future developments showed that these conflicts would be ignored only temporarily. It was significant, however, that the Czechoslovak exile was the first of Soviet-dominated European countries to form a central political body in exile.

Early Council Activities

By the end of 1950, the presidium of the Council had met thirty-seven times in New York or Washington. These meetings resulted in the adoption of a number of formal declarations on conditions in Czechoslovakia. Communist terror was deplored, especially the executions of General Heliodor Píka and Dr. Milada Horáková. The Council also protested Communist aggression in Korea.

From the outset, the preparatory committee had difficulties financing its activities. In March 1949, the situation improved when funds began arriving from "anonymous" donors, surrounded in secrecy. Some members of the Council were uncomfortable with the funding situation and began to question the source of the funds.[28] The money actually came from the United States Central Intelligence Agency and was later funneled through the "non-profit" organization known as the National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE). Some members were at this time receiving personal support ranging from between two hundred and four hundred dollars (at first called "stipends" and later "compensation"). In the summer of 1950, the NCFE asked the Council to present a budget proposal. Discussions concerning this took place at a meeting of the presidium on 16 July 1949.[29] Although the proposed budget was 29,200 dollars per month, the NCFE initially agreed to provide 8,900 dollars per month.

A Council report on its activities of November 1950 summarized the state of the Council as exceptionally satisfactory: "The Council finds

[28] Čelovský B., *Politici bez moci*, pp. 48–49.
[29] Ibidem, pp. 52–53.

understanding and sympathies everywhere... The relationship to the American representatives is based on close cooperation with the NCFE. This collaboration is driven by the unity of goals of both organizations..."[30] The report also stated the following about Radio Free Europe (RFE): "Even before the broadcasts of RFE began in July 1950, the Council expressed its interest in establishing close collaboration with RFE..."[31] Indeed, participation in Radio Free Europe's activities probably represented the most effective aspect of the Council's anti-Communist activities.

Regional committees of the Council were established in London and in Paris. Their membership was declining because many members were in the process of moving to North America. In London, vice-chairman of the Council, Václav Majer, sent a list of the London committee's membership to the Foreign Office on 1 April 1949, and the Foreign Office duly noted that of the fourteen members, three had already moved to Canada or the United States.[32] Requests for financial support from the British were denied.

In Paris, the chairman of the local board, Dr. Hubert Ripka, was voted out on 23 January 1950. The Washington-based presidium of the Council refused to acknowledge this result.[33] The split in the Paris regional committee should have been a harbinger of things to come in Washington.

In October 1950, a rift developed between the Council's chairman, Petr Zenkl, and his first deputy, Dr. Jozef Lettrich, who happened to be a Slovak. The bone of contention between Zenkl and Lettrich was the issue of term limits. A meeting of the executive committee was called for 6 January 1951.[34] On 5 January 1951, the Council received an ultimatum from the chairman of the NCFE, C.D. Jackson.[35] It concluded: "...It is honest to announce to you, your colleagues, and legally empowered functionaries, that the NCFE will fundamentally reexamine its relationship with the Council of Free Czechoslovakia in light of the results accomplished at this meeting".[36] The meeting of the Council was affected by Jackson's ultimatum. Lasting two weeks, the meeting represented a picture of disunity and personal invectives.

---

[30] IHRC, Rechcígl Collection, Document previously cited in Note 24, Rada svobodného Československa – stručná zpráva o činnosti, p. 4.
[31] Ibidem.
[32] PRO, FO371/77251, Wilkinson's minute, 7 April 1949.
[33] IHRC, Rechcígl Collection, Box 9, Zpráva o činnosti oblastního sboru v Paříži, 1950.
[34] PRO, FO371/86228, Majer to Foreign Office, 14 December 1950.
[35] IHRC, Rechcígl Collection, Box 9, NCFE to the Council of Free Czechoslovakia, Czech translation, January 1951.
[36] Ibidem.

The ultimate catastrophe was brought about by a discussion of the terms of office that was rejected by the National Socialists, who abruptly left the meeting. The executive committee split into two groups. The opinion of the majority was presented by Ferdinand Peroutka, who killed any chances of the reelection of Zenkl as chairman. A minority group of thirteen dissenting members declared that the Council was dissolved and left the meeting. The majority group, however, continued the activities of the Council. The dissenters subsequently announced the formation of a new organization, the National Committee of Free Czechoslovakia with Petr Zenkl as its chairman.[37] The majority (seventeen members) of the original executive committee empowered Peroutka to negotiate a meeting with Dolbeare and Jackson of the NCFE in order to set up a meeting with a duly elected delegation led by Václav Majer.

Explanations for the breakup of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia by different participants in the events varied. The National Socialists were united, but Professor Stránský failed to provide valid reasons. Stránský categorically stated, however, that it was not on account of the issue of terms of office.[38] A factual and unemotional description was provided by Miloslav Rechcígl, who blamed Zenkl and his supporters.[39] The most interesting was the situation among the Social Democrats. Two of them sided with the Zenkl group and opposed the resolution of their own party. Senator Vojta Beneš justified his decision by expressing revulsion at "the execution of Zenkl" at the meeting by Ferdinand Peroutka.[40] Beneš stated at the meeting: "If you want to execute someone, do not beat him so much before the execution...!" He continued: "The attacks on Zenkl were so obscene that I withdrew my support for the definitions of the terms of office; it changed into an instrument, the executioner's axe". Ján Žák tried to justify his vote in a letter to the party leadership.[41] Bohumil Laušman, a prominent social democrat wrote to Professor Karel Maiwald of Cambridge University that it was a "comedy, but that one should cry".[42]

---

[37] Ibidem, Stránský's declaration, 25 January 1951.
[38] HI, Stránský Collection, Box 2, Ke krisi v československé emigraci. Ústav E. Beneše, London, 26 February 1951.
[39] IHRC, Rechcígl Collection, Box 7, Rechcígl tu Kopecký, 7 February 1951.
[40] Lilly Library, Univ. of Indiana, Bloomington, Hlavaty MSS II, Beneš to Hlavatý, 13 February 1951.
[41] Churchill College, Cambridge University, Maiwald Collection, Zpráva Jána Žáka, 25 February 1951.
[42] Ibidem, B. Laušman to Dr. Maiwald, 3 February 1951.

The breakup of the Council received sharp criticism from other members of the Czechoslovak exile community. Pressure slowly mounted for the two groups to reconcile their differences and unite, but this did not happen in 1951. On the occasion of the opening of the Munich station of Radio Free Europe, the Council of Free Czechoslovakia together with several members of the National Committee of Free Czechoslovakia, including its chairman, Petr Zenkl, made a joint statement on 30 April 1951.[43]

An attempt to bring the two organizations together in May 1951 failed and their respective representatives continued their mutual accusations of pettiness and position-seeking. On 26–27 January 1952, the two organizations formed a committee consisting of twenty-four members on the basis of an agreement that had been reached on 15 January 1952.[44]

The Council adopted statutes which based its organization along party lines and also allowed for a body of personalities unaffiliated with any political party. After difficult and stormy meetings, the Council was reunited. The chairman of the executive committee was Petr Zenkl, whereas the chairman of deputies was Štefan Osuský. The remaining fifteen years were marked by a continuing crisis and attempts to find solutions. Yet, in spite of party rivalries and personal conflicts, the Council would play an important role in the fight against Communism.

The most effective tactic in the fight against Communism was the participation of Council members in Radio Free Europe. Ferdinand Peroutka became the head of the Czechoslovak Section. Between 1 May 1951 and 25 December 1976, Peroutka wrote more than one thousand commentaries for listeners in Czechoslovakia. Most of these commentaries can be found in the archives of the Hoover Institution at Stanford. Except for the first year, the majority of these commentaries focused on international events and presented and defended the interests and policies of the United States. The Communist government in Czechoslovakia paid close attention to Peroutka's activities and spent large resources on a program of systematic jamming of RFE broadcasts. Peroutka's position at Radio Free Europe gave him extraordinary powers on the Council. He decided who would speak on the program to Czechoslovakia, which was not only important for exile politicians, but also provided honoraria. As

---

[43] HI, Osuský Collection, Box 78, File 78.5, Statement on the Opening of Radio Free Europe Broadcasts.

[44] IHRC, Rechcígl Collection, Box 9, Communique, Washington, 28 January 1952.

program director, Peroutka especially valued a young and very talented journalist and People's Party member, Pavel Tigrid. Tigrid was brilliant, but abrasive and soon had conflicts with some older socialist politicians. Peroutka thus fired Tigrid and replaced him with Socialist, Julius Firt. After overcoming some hardship, Tigrid began to publish the periodical *Svědectví* (Testimony) in Europe. *Svědectví* gained a wide circulation and succeeded in its goal to undermine systematically Communist policies.

The Americans appreciated Peroutka's talents and did not hesitate to use him in order to pressure the Council. Peroutka soon found out that the Americans, not he, controlled the Czechoslovak program of the BBC. The best example was the fate of his own piece of work on former president, Edvard Beneš.[45] The most striking was his change of tune with respect to the issue of the Sudeten Germans. The NCFE was very sensitive to this political group (Sudeten Germans), which was becoming politically influential in West Germany and very closely followed the RFE program. The Council's program of 1952 stated: "We consider the transfer of Germans from Czechoslovakia to be definitive. It was implemented on the basis of agreements among the American, British, and French governments and in accordance with the declarations of the Potsdam conference..."[46] The NCFE leadership was concerned about this statement and about the statement regarding the renewal of Czechoslovakia within its pre-Munich frontiers.[47] The Council's position on transfer gradually softened due to pressure exerted by the NCFE in spite of the fact that some Council leaders had been the moving force behind the Czechoslovak Exile Government's transfer plans during the war. Along these lines, it is imperative to note that, at variance with the wishy-washy position of the NCFE in the 1950s, in the 1990s, the United States Government's position on the issue of transfer was unequivocal and the transfer was defended as "...an historical fact based on the Potsdam conference and the United States is confident that no country wishes to call it into question".[48]

On 20 April 1953, Peroutka met with a representative of Dr. Rudolf Lodgman von Auen (leader of the revisionist Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft based in Munich) and stated: "I cannot imagine

---

[45] Kosatík P., *Ferdinand Peroutka, pozdější život*, p. 172.
[46] IHRC, Rechcígl Collection, Box 9, Council of Free Czechoslovakia Program, 1952.
[47] Čelovský B., *Politici bez moci*, pp. 114–115.
[48] Matějka D. (ed.), *Právní aspekty odsunu sudetských Němců* (Prague, Ústav mezinárodních vztahů, 1996), p. 103.

a permanent solution of matters without the return of the Germans".[49] Peroutka's dialogue with representatives of Sudeten German organizations continued. In an interview with a German newspaper in New York, Peroutka stated: "My personal view is that the almost complete expulsion of the Sudeten Germans was a mistake. Moreover, what happened during the implementation of it is a shame".[50] This statement provoked a storm of protests, but Peroutka refused to stop.

Also a major source of conflict among members of the Council was the relationship between the two main nationalities, namely the Czechs and Slovaks. This issue was never resolved satisfactorily and the post-Communist history of Czechoslovakia, which survived a mere three years after the return of democracy, demonstrates the depth of the problem, which ended in the division of Czechoslovakia into two countries on 1 January 1993.

Another major activity of the Council was participation in various international bodies. The European Movement is worthy of mention, but the most important organization the Council took part in was the Assembly of Captive European Nations (ACEN). ACEN was founded in the summer months of 1954 as a representative body of Central and East European countries under Communist and Soviet domination. These included Albania, the Baltic States, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Czechoslovak participation started with a bang. Dr. Štefan Osuský (the head of the first delegation) chaired the meeting of 22 October 1954. The program focused upon Soviet aggression toward and oppression of the "captive nations", violations of peace treaties by Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, and the forced militarization of captive nations. In addition, religious persecution in captive nations and forced labor behind the Iron Curtain were discussed.[51] Czechoslovak participation received much publicity in the Czech and Slovak press in the West.[52] Representatives from the Council presented a number of fundamental contributions to the deliberations of ACEN. Unfortunately, as was the case with almost all other Council activities, its participation in ACEN soon deteriorated due to factionalism and personal rivalries.

---

[49] HI, Peroutka Collection, Box 2, Peroutka's Note on Meeting with Simon, 20 April 1953.
[50] Čelovský B., *Politici bez moci,* pp. 114–115.
[51] IHRC, ACEN Collection, Box 36, *Exulantské Spojené národy*, In: *Nový svět,* Cleveland, 11 November 1954.
[52] Ibidem, Council of Free Czechoslovakia, Šturm to Coste, 3 March 1955.

Already in 1956, problems arose with respect to the Czechoslovak delegation.[53]

The Council ultimately split and Czechoslovak representation in ACEN was awarded for a while to a new competing body called the "Committee for Free Czechoslovakia". This organization adhered to the statutes of ACEN, which prohibited representatives from accepting the citizenship of other countries. Arguments between competing factions of Czechoslovak exiles may seem ridiculous today, but, at the time, they exerted a negative influence on the effectiveness and international standing of their cause.

The archives are filled with documents attesting to an almost uninterrupted crisis in the Council of Free Czechoslovakia. It should be stressed that a number of members proposed remedial actions involving changing the statutes and bylaws of the Council, but to no avail. Among them, we should mention Miloslav Rechcígl, a pre-war parliamentary deputy of the Agrarian Party[54], and Václav Hlavatý, a famous mathematician and former National Socialist MP.[55] Above all, however, a great effort to resolve quarrels among Council members was made by representatives of the young generation of Czechoslovak exiles, who declared: "The basis of real leadership in exile has to be a program and not personal sympathies or antipathies. We wish that work was the only requirement for membership in the leadership".[56] On 29 March 1955, Peroutka informed Bernard Yarrow of the NCFE about the sorry shape of the Council and proposed corrective measures.[57] Revealing is the letter of Julius Firt to Peroutka of 22 September 1956:

> I understand your disgust, but I think you cannot pull back and leave everything to these gangs. I think we would have to bite into the unpleasant, but important problem. The Council needs to be placed on an entirely new foundation and the old one needs to be put on some sort of reservation where the old stags are not hunted, but also cannot be allowed to cross the fence.[58]

NCFE support for the Council came to an end in 1957.

---

[53] Ibidem, Box 35, Multiple memoranda, 29 March–28 September 1956.
[54] Ibidem, Box 9, Návrh na změn stanov Rady svobodného Československa M. Rechcígla, 22 November 1954.
[55] HI, Peroutka Collection, Box 1, Hlavatý Proposal, 25 September 1954.
[56] Ibidem, Declaration of the Representatives of the Young Generation of Czechoslovak Exiles, October 1954.
[57] Ibidem, Peroutka to Yarrow, "Present Situation of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia and Possible Ways of Rectification", 29 March 1955.
[58] Ibidem, Firt to Peroutka, 22 September 1956.

Conclusion

A scathing criticism of the Council's activities was presented by the editor of the exile periodical *Skutečnost (Reality)*. In the final issue of Volume V, Jan Hanuš Hájek wrote:

> Among organizations striving to acquire the character of an exile government, the first place belongs to the Council of Free Czechoslovakia; it is composed on one hand of independent intellectuals belonging to the older generation and, on the other hand, – and this is regrettably the majority – of escaped "people's democratic" politicians who have always been incompetent in the field they selected as their career... The program of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia is, of course, the liberation of Czechoslovakia from Communism, etc. An objective observation of the Council's activities indicates that there is little more than empty phrases...[59]

To be critical of the leadership of the post-1948 Czechoslovak exile today would be very simplistic. It is true that its accomplishments do not compare well with those of the previous two Czechoslovak exiles, both of which formed during a major world war. The situations of the two previous Czechoslovak exiles, however, were completely different. They took place during hostilities of world wars with defined lines of conflict and were relatively brief. Even so, the plans of the first two Czechoslovak exiles changed in accordance with the evolving plans of the major powers.

In contrast, the post-1948 Czechoslovak exiles entered the Cold War struggle, in which the democratic powers felt compelled to observe democratic niceties and were aware that the Soviet yoke over Central Europe had been basically agreed to at Yalta. Professional diplomats showed little sympathy for Czechoslovak exiles and no real support, except for propaganda purposes. The often cited personal rivalries among exile politicians had deep historical roots. Despite their democratic declarations, politicians of the post-war National Front in Czechoslovakia had not permitted the reestablishment of pre-war civic parties in 1945 and remained silent when the leaders of civic parties were persecuted in various ways. Some National Front politicians had been hostile to wartime Slovak

[59] *Pousta Z. (ed.), Rozchod 1948. Rozhovory s českými poúnorovými exulanty* (Prague, Karolinum, 2006), p. 17.

opponents of President Beneš. The personal conflicts were also a reflection of the politicians' frustration with their new existences and the hopelessness of their cause, which was overshadowed by the interests of the major powers. They were patriotic politicians who were powerless in their role in what, for them, represented a never-ending struggle. Their hopes for an early return to Czechoslovakia behind American tanks did not materialize. The outcome of the Hungarian revolt of 1956 taught the Czechoslovak exiles that the interests of major powers supersede those of small nations. The exiles would witness the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and those who survived had to wait until 1989 for Communism to collapse, an event to which they contributed relatively little. Although their personalities are often the subject of criticism by journalists in today's Czech Republic, Professor Igor Lukeš of Boston University concludes his essay on the first years of the Czechoslovak political exile as follows:

> Let us assume that the Czechoslovak exile group would have a Czech Roosevelt, Churchill, and DeGaulle and the rest would be composed of Masaryks. All of them would have been thrown into the reality of the divided world faced by the real leaders of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia. Would they have succeeded in overthrowing the totalitarian regime in Prague and restored democracy? I think not.[60]

This author agrees with Lukeš's conclusions. Despite their obvious shortcomings, the post-1948 Czechoslovak exiles could not have done much better.

---

[60] Lukeš I., Československý politický exil za studené války: první roky, *Střední Evropa,* February 2004, No. 119, available at www.sweb.cz/stredni.evropa/editor/clanek119.pdf, p.12.