

"Czechoslovakian Evenings" in post-war Poland

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The "Czechoslovakian Evenings" were an example of intellectuals education in the form of open-lectures. They were educational activities of the Institute of Silesia in Katowice. Mutual Relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1945–1948 had an impact on the implementation of the "Czechoslovakian Evenings". Organization of "Czechoslovakian Evenings" was a good example of the improvement of Polish-Czechoslovak the years 1947–1948. Implementation of the "Czechoslovakian Evenings" began in October 1947 and ended in May 1948. Liquidation of the Silesian Institute was also the end of the "Czechoslovakian Evenings".

Key words: *Post-war Poland; Polish-Czechoslovakian Educational Relations; Institute of Silesia; Czechoslovakian Evenings*

What were the "Czechoslovakian Evenings"? They were an example of intellectuals education that took the form of open-lectures on topics concerning Czechoslovakia's past and present. They were dedicated to anyone interested in the problems of Czechoslovakia. In a post-war reality it was not an unencumbered activity.

Poles developed their interest in Czechoslovakia after World War II, but their interest was dependable on Polish-Czechoslovakian inter-relations and the social-political situation in both countries. However, there were institutions that seek to actively interest Poles in "Czechoslovakian affairs" despite the precarious situation. Such institution was the Institute of Silesia in Katowice, the association existing since before World War II. The Institute led many cultural and educational activities. One form of relatively large-scale cultural and educational activities of the Institute were "Czechoslovakian Evenings". In order to understand the reasons behind organizing the Evenings, it is necessary to briefly describe the social-political situation in Poland after the war.

Social-political background of "Czechoslovakian Evenings"

Educational Relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1945 and 1946 were difficult for three reasons. Firstly, they were very minimal. In fact, those relations were limited to individual contacts between people within

literary and scientific circles. There was a clear lack of contacts between any institutions. Secondly, the causes of this situation were unsettled border disputes between Poland and Czechoslovakia, which resulted in a lack of bilateral agreements.¹ Thirdly, the immediate prospect of improving cultural and educational relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia required to reach agreements on the most pressing issues in their disputes.

1947 was a breakthrough year in the cultural and educational relations between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Most important was the signing of a treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance between Poland and Czechoslovakia. That took place on March 10, 1947, in Warsaw, and more importantly the Agreement came into force simultaneously with its signing. Then, on 4 of July 1947 in Prague another agreement was signed on cultural cooperation, which entered into force in March 1948 for the duration of five years.² Concluded contracts did not remain on paper only but were, as noted by Mark Korowicz, systematically executed.³ The Cooperation Agreement was executed before it entered into force. A prime example were "Czechoslovakian Evenings" held from October 1947. But it was not the first example of an institutional interest in its southern neighbor before the signing of the Agreements. Developed in spring of 1946, the newly formed Society of Polish-Czechoslovakian Friendship.

In the years 1947–1949 there had been significant changes in the cultural and educational relations between Poland-Czechoslovakia, changes that shifted the perception of the southern neighbor in a number of Polish intellectual circles. First formed the Friends of Czechoslovakia in academia. Then they took active work within areas of "reciprocity" of Polish-Czechoslovakian scientific environments of Cracow, Poznań, Wrocław and Katowice. At the same time the issue of Czechoslovakia took a broad front on the pages of Polish scientific and social-literary works, such as "Życie Słowiańskie", "Przegląd Zachodni" and "Zaranie Śląskie".⁴ Weight of providing information and popularizing was assumed by two magazines, Krakow "Dziennik Polski" and Katowice "Odra". In the first appeared a special addition titled Slavonic Issues, and in the second there was an extra section called "Letters from Czechoslovakia".⁵ However, research and

1 The Polish-Czechoslovak border disputes after World War II, he wrote Kamiński, M.: *Polsko-czechosłowackie stosunki polityczne 1945–1948*. Warszawa 1990.

2 Instytut Śląski. Seria VI *Sprawy czechosłowackie*. Komunikat Nr 50, in June 1948, p. 1, (on quote Komunikat IŚ).

3 Ibidem, p. 2.

4 Nawrocki, W. (1988): *Szkice czeskie i słowackie. Z problematyki współczesnej literatury czeskiej i słowackiej oraz jej recepcji w Polsce w latach 1944–1984*. Kraków, p. 231.

5 Ibidem, p. 232.

dissemination efforts of the Polish-Czechoslovakian rapprochement were most visible in Cracow, Poznań, Wrocław and Katowice. It was at the Institute of Silesia in Katowice where initiated work on issues Czechoslovak, which was established for the conduct of a separate Department of Czechoslovakia.

It is worth to raise the question as to why these actions were taken at the Institute of Silesia in Katowice. It was influenced primarily by the pre-war tradition of unfettered activity of the association. The Institute can boast of rich underground operations during World War II and fast reactivation of its activity soon after the liberation. It began with the reconstruction and development of the organizational structures. In this new structure, there was a special place for the Faculty of Czechoslovakia. All of those new measures would not have been possible if not for the people involved. Especially, deserve the recognition, the director of the Institute Roman Lutman and Mark Stanislaw Korowicz who undertook the organization of the Department of the Czechoslovakia.

Challenging task facing the Department of Czechoslovakia were as follow:

- Establishing and maintaining long-term cooperation in science and culture between Poland and Czechoslovakia.
- Dealing with Polish-Czechoslovakian issues from both the Silesian region as well as nationwide point of view.
- Interest in Czechoslovakia as a whole area.
- Using the assistance of experts in Polish-Czechoslovakian issues from all academic and journalistic circles in Poland.⁶

Program for the Department of Czechoslovakia had been well developed, although many points remained a decelerate intention. It was however specific in the following six points:

1. Action Publishing, which included literary and scientific publications for the mutual understanding of both Nations and their common interests abroad.
2. Action Reading, carried out systematically in Katowice and later in other Polish cities.
3. Mutual visits of Polish and Czechoslovakian researchers and writers.
4. Publishing works of Czech and Slovakian writers in Polish translation and posting Polish articles in Czechoslovakian periodicals.
5. Creating a major center for academic information on Czechoslovakia in Poland and on Poland in Czechoslovakia.
6. Appointment of "Committee for Czechoslovakian Affairs".⁷

⁶ Komunikat IŚ, Nr 1, in July 1947, p. 5.

⁷ Ibidem, pp. 5–6.

Organization of “Czechoslovakian Evenings”

Organizational assumptions of “Czechoslovakian Evenings” were defined by: pursued objectives, recipients towards whom they were addressed, the form in which they were to take place, the designation of their organization and the adoption of a program for each evening. Objective set by the organizers was to inform the Polish public about the important manifestations of the spiritual and material life of Czechs and Slovaks in the past and present. Recipients towards whom the Evenings were directed were people interested in Czechoslovakian affairs. The accepted form of the Evenings was a shared open lecture. The place selected for the Evenings was the lecture hall of the Institute of Silesia in Katowice. Outline of the program included official speeches, readings and performances by famous artists (opera singers, musicians, drama actors).

Implementation of the “Czechoslovakian Evenings” began in October 1947 and ended in May 1948. The first Evening on 28 of October 1947 had an extremely solemn and official character.⁸ It was the National Day of Czechoslovakia. The program consisted of an official presentation from director of the Institute of the Silesian Roman Lutman, speeches from delegate ambassador of Czechoslovakia in Poland, Silesia and Dąbrowa Governor Dr. Eugene Kral, and the Presidents of the Polish-Czechoslovak and Czech-Polish Friendship Societies. The second part of the evening was filled with performances by singers of Silesian Opera in Katowice, to the accompaniment of music. In 1947 the total of three evenings took place. The second from November 27 was devoted to the music and songs of the Czech and Slovak.⁹ The third evening was held on the 2nd of December during which a lecture on contemporary Czech literature was given. Poems from Czech poets were recited by an actress from theater in Katowice.¹⁰

Year 1948 was launched at the Institute of the Silesia Czechoslovak by the fourth evening on 20 January, and the lecture was devoted to a landmark moments in the history of the Czech Republic.¹¹ In the following months, February, March and April, there were three subsequent Czechoslovakian Evenings. The eighth Evening, as it later turned out the last, was held on 25 May 1948. The Evening held a lecture on

⁸ Komunikat IŚ, Nr 13, in November 1947, p. 6.

⁹ Komunikat IŚ, Nr 21, in November 1947, p. 6.

¹⁰ Komunikat IŚ, Nr 22, in December 1947, p. 4.

¹¹ Komunikat IŚ, Nr 26, in January 1948, p. 10.

“Czechoslovakia in the eyes of geography,” richly illustrated with light slides.¹²

Czechoslovakian Evenings were a well thought-out educational campaign. Meetings were held regularly, every month. Although there were always the so-called “Officials” guests, but they were followed by innovative, for those times, readings. The subject of readings were alternate. One time matters were related to Czech, the second time to issues in Slovakia and the third to the common issues in Czechoslovakia. What was extremely interesting was the form of presentation of those readings. Some of the lectures were illustrated with light slides, others were topped with recitations. All were held with musical setting, combined with opera singing.

Remarkable was also the dynamic of “Czechoslovakian Evenings”. The enthusiasm for organizing the Evenings was great. The audience was always in great numbers, and reacted not only during artistic live performances, but above all else during the preached lectures. Numerous live audience gathered to applaud excellent teachers. You could say that the lecture hall of the Institute of Silesia was always filled to the brim. Czechoslovakian Evenings were therefore an important educational and social event. The cyclical character of the meetings had a great influence on dynamics of the evenings. Unfortunately, last night happened after barely eight months. Sudden closure of “Czechoslovak affairs” in the form of Czechoslovakian Evenings was quite a surprise to the intelligence group of Katowice. Direct cause was the inclusion of the Institute of Silesia in Katowice into the organization of the Western Institute in Poznan. As he wrote many years later, Head of the Department of the Czechoslovakia in the Institute of Silesia Mark St. Korowicz, since mid-1948, followed by intensive Sovietization and Komunization of Poland.¹³ Under those conditions, it was impossible to independently work on the development of interest in “Czechoslovakian affairs”.

Although the “Czechoslovakian Evenings” went on only for eight months, we can attempt to answer the question: What have they given the Silesian society? In the first place they gave the opportunity to learn about the history and issues of their neighbors across the southern border, the Czechs and Slovaks who joined back in one country. An important component of an education at that time was the selection of information on post-war Czechoslovakia. Evenings brought an education in the form of lectures, where students could learn about Polish authors latest views

¹² Komunikat IŚ, Nr 47, in June 1948, p. 4.

¹³ Korowicz, M. (1955): *W Polsce pod sowieckim jarzmem*. London, p. 10.

on the topics of Czechoslovakia. It was a broad presentation of researches to a number of people, who later could become the potential readers of scientific publications. Evenings also brought an artistic education, because students had the opportunity to listen to the opera singing and classical music. In addition to that education they also had a chance to converse with the “officials” from political and diplomatic groups.

Final educational activities of the Institute of Silesia was three years after the resumption of its activities after World War II. Employees of the Institute was brought accusation that they are a bunch of reactionaries, which must be eliminated.¹⁴ The first step towards the end was the reorganization in 1948, involving the inclusion of the structure of the Silesian Institute into Western Institute in Poznań. An actual end of the Institute of Silesia happened the following year – 1949. The ending of the Institute happened during a special time, because at the end of the illusory democracy in education. Therefore, open for everyone “Czechoslovakian Evenings” went into oblivion. In addition, the organizer of the “Czechoslovakian Evenings” Mark St. Korowicz chose “freedom” in the United States of America.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 93.