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Mezinárodní časopis
pro dějiny výchovy a vzdělání

International Review
for History of Education

Národní pedagogické muzeum
a knihovna J. A. Komenského

Technická univerzita
v Liberci

Praha 2023

Historia scholastica

Číslo 2, prosinec 2023, ročník 9

Number 2, December 2023, Volume 9

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Valdštejnská 20, 118 00 Praha 1, Česká republika, IČ 61387169, www.nmpk.cz

Technická univerzita v Liberci, Fakulta přírodovědně-humanitní a pedagogická

Studentská 1402/2, 461 17 Liberec 1, Česká republika, IČ 46747885, www.tul.cz

Obálka a grafická úprava *Cover and Graphic Design*

Pavel Průša

Sazba *Type Setting*

Mgr. Lucie Murár

Tisk *Printed by*

Tiskárna PROTISK, s. r. o., Rudolfovská 617, 370 01 České Budějovice, Česká republika

Časopis *Historia scholastica* vychází 2x ročně.

Historia scholastica is published twice a year.

Indexováno v *Indexed in*

SCOPUS, ERIH+, DOAJ, EBSCO, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory

ISSN 1804-4913 (print), ISSN 2336-680X (online)

Číslo registrace MK ČR E 22258

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The Supervision of Schools and the Language of the Czechoslovak Administration. On the Example of School Committees in the Bilingual Moravia



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Received 5 February 2023

Accepted 10 March 2023

Available online 31 December 2023

DOI 10.15240/tul/006/2023-2-007

Abstract Based primarily on printed sources this study examines the building process of educational sector in the first years of Czechoslovakia, with a special emphasis on the issue of the supervisory bodies. Especially primary schools were considered by the so-called nationalist activists, both before and after 1918, strategic for building of the national education. School boards and then school committees played besides others an important role in the school enrolment, a key factor in the rise or fall of individual schools and language communities. Therefore, the process

of creation of the school committees in the year 1921 is researched in particular. After the dissolution of the monarchy, a new organization of the school authorities and schools went hand in hand with a new language of the Czechoslovak administration. New laws, role of school boards and later committees, communication between them and teachers from primary schools are researched as well. Through the stenographic records of the Czechoslovak National Assembly and through other sources, the aforementioned points are analysed, on the example of the ethnically or linguistically mixed area of the former Crown land Moravia. The interests of the Czech nationalist activists clashed there with interests of the German nationalist activists. The Czech and German district school boards, as the supervision authorities, were abolished and new school committees were to be established instead. In the linguistically mixed regions they remained separated, which brought political disputes. At the same time, the daily agenda of schools, teachers and pupils' demands could not be hindered. Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment called for speeding up the administrative steps.

Keywords Cisleithania, Czechoslovak Republic, Central Moravia, nationalist activists, school boards, primary schools

Introduction¹

In the fall 1918, Cisleithania, the Austrian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, was in a deep crisis (Judson, 2016, pp. 430–441; Konrád & Kučera, 2022), with its damaged schools, exhausted pedagogues, pupils and students in the Bohemian Lands. The long drawn-out war was exhausting for the entire population. The establishment of the new state and the dissolution of the monarchy brought a need to ensure functioning of the state authorities on the one hand and to build up a leading idea of the new Czechoslovak state on the other. The basic law norm ensuring a stability at the beginning was the so called Reception Act (11/1918 Collection of Laws; Popelka, 2018, p. 90.), a law declared by the National Committee.

The society of the Bohemian Lands, a multi-ethnic and multilingual territory, was greatly divided already prior to the war. Differences in the minds and mutual hostilities in the population, not only nationalistic ones, but social and religious too, were deepened and escalated by the war. In the future it should not be a nationality state any more but a nation state.

According to the § 131 of the Czechoslovak Constitution from 1920 theoretically everybody had a right to be educated in the language he or she spoke. “In cities and districts where a **significant fraction** [highlighted by an author] of Czechoslovak citizens who speak other language than Czechoslovak (!) resides, the children of these Czechoslovak citizens are guaranteed an adequate educational opportunity in public education within the limits of the general regulation, they would receive instruction in their own language, while instruction in Czechoslovak language may be made mandatory” (121/1920 Coll., Act of February 29, 1920). It was actually an analogy to the well-known Article 19 of the December Constitution from 1867, a source of troubles in the monarchy and then with new legal norms in the republic.

1 The study was prepared as part of the standard project of the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR), Reg. No. 23-06062S, The Modernisation of Commercial Education in Cisleithania 1848–1918: Patterns, Trends, Processes.

The aim of this study is to analyse the process of transition from school boards to the new school committees. Besides that, the language and strategies which were used by the Czechoslovak state for the (re)construction of schooling in the first years of its existence, are researched.

The interwar Czechoslovak educational system in overview was already analysed in the monograph *Velké dějiny země Koruny české, 2020* [Great History of the Bohemian Crown Lands], see the chapter *Mezi říjnem 1918 a únorem 1948* [Between October 1918 and February 1948]. Miroslav Novotný, Růžena Váňová and Dana Kasperová presented the development of laws, structure of schools, pupils, according to their ethnicity or language identity, and denomination, most important personalities of pedagogues and school reforms.

In the book “*Národní školství” za první Československé republiky, 2018* [“National Education” in the first Czechoslovak Republic], authors focused on the particular lands, school reforms and on the special education for mentally and physically disabled children [pomocné školy].

On top of that, the innovative, an in-depth analysis on the topic “new school” of the interwar period, on the example of the industrial, primarily shoemaker city Zlín was done by Tomáš Kasper and Dana Kasperová (Kasper & Kasperová, 2020).

In this study the role of the district school boards plays an important role. It seems to be particularly relevant, not only in the modern history, as highlighted in the recently published collective monograph. (Kasper, Holý, Caruso & Pánková, 2022).

First in-depth analyses of the school boards in Moravia were recently done by Andrea Pokludová, Pavel Kladiwa and Ivan Puš (Pokludová, 2021; Kladiwa, 2021b; Puš, 2022). It would be possible to mention more relevant studies (Pokludová & Kladiwa, 2023). Most of them are to find in the notes.

Ministry, School Boards and Persisting Issues from the Monarchy

After October 28, 1918, it was needed to ensure the functioning of school authorities and schools themselves, to reconstruct the educational sector. On the top of the administrative system Ministry of Education and National Environment was positioned. It was established on November 9, 1918. (*Činnost ministerstva školství a národní osvěty*, 1928, p. 5). The former Ministry of Cult and Education remained in force for the Republic (German-) Austria.

The first minister became Gustav Habrman (1864–1932), a social democrat, experienced revolutionary and an exile, who traveled prior to World War I through the United States and lived there (1889–1892; 1892–1897 and 1913). Habrman served as a minister in the first regular government of Karel Kramář between November 1918 and September 1920.

His direct successor was Josef Šusta (1874–1945, a minister since September 1920 till September 1921; Lach, 2003, pp. 32–39) a prominent historian, who became a member of the first Czechoslovak caretaker government under the prime minister Jan Černý, a former efficient land official. Černý was a professional who expressed his loyalty to the Austro-Hungarian state and later to the Czechoslovak state (Vyskočil, 2011, pp. 68–69; Lach, 2003, pp. 32–39). In the next years, six other ministers served (Vavro Šrobár, Rudolf Bechyně, Ivan Markovič, Otakar Srdínko and Jan Krčmář).

The reason for the relatively frequent changes in the leadership of the ministry is to be found in the rapid changes of the First Republic governments, which were caused, among other things, by broad coalitions (Hájková & Horák, 2018, pp. 420–436). On the one hand there was enough space for the party politics and for not only Czech but Slovak politicians as well, on the other a very frequent changing of ministers led to the slow implementation or to an unsuccessful implementation of the proposed reforms.

School boards (*školní rady* / *Schulräte*), supervision and inspection authorities (Kasper, Holý, Caruso & Pánková, 2022), were subordinated to the ministry. On the territorial principle there were land

school boards, district and local school boards. In the statutory cities there were district school boards instead of local school boards.

These school boards were not only responsible for the everyday agenda. They became very important players in the process of school enrolments already prior to World War I. The idea of the Czech nationalist activists was to bring Czech children to the Czech school. The German nationalist activists tried to bring them to the German school, precisely to the school with German language of instruction. Bilingual individuals were presented as an anachronism.

In Moravia an attempt to calm the situation had already been made before the war, through the so called Moravian Compromise from 1905 and then 1914. This Moravian Compromise implemented the organizational changes in the Moravian Diet, in the municipal administration and in the school system (Urbanitsch, 2011; Marek, 2006; Malří, 1993; von Herrnritt, 1914).

One of important changes in the educational sector was the separation of the school boards into Czech and German ones (Puš, 2022; Puš, 2017), although it caused more troubles. Members of school boards started long drawn-out judicial disputes, relying on the vague sections of the school laws and a ministerial order, on the unclear definition of the language fluency (*Sprachmächtigkeit*). (See the so called *Lex Perek* and the Marchet implementing regulation: Kladiwa, 2021a, 2021b; Pokludová, 2021; Puš, 2022; Puš, 2017; Zahra, 2011.) School boards became defenders of the respective nationality.

Looking at the Moravian linguistic landscape of the late 19th century, it was possible to distinguish between linguistically mixed regions, major Czech regions and the so called German language islands (among others Brünn, Olmütz, Iglau, Znaim / Brno, Olomouc, Jihlava, Znojmo). These were localities with a prevailing German speaking population, surrounded by a Czech population.

Such stratification, especially in the linguistically mixed regions, indirectly supported a phenomena of the bilingualism and the establishment of the respective schools, linguistically “*utraquist schools*”, primarily elementary schools (*Volksschulen*), alternatively lower-secondary schools (*Bürgerschulen*). Since 1870s they started disappearing.

While in the school year 1870/71 there were 86 utraquist elementary schools registered (in Bohemia 69 and in Silesia 56; *Statistik der öffentlichen und Privat-Volksschulen*, p. 104).

In the 1880s and in 1890s only two tens of utraquist elementary schools existed (Schematismus obecného školstva (!) na Moravě, 1885.) The last ones were located in Moravská Třebová / Mährisch Trübau, Zábřeh / Hohenstadt and in Brno / Brünn (Kádner, 1929, p. 172).

In Silesia there were some of them (24 Volksschulen and Bürgerschulen together; Vollständiges topographisches deutsch-böhmisches Orts-Lexikon, 1885, p. IX) and in Bohemia, there was no longer any utraquist school (*Schematismus des Volksschulwesens im Königreich Böhmen*, 1889).

It is not a coincidence that since 1870s the Czech and later German school associations were founded – Matice školská and Deutscher Schulverein. The first Matice associations appeared in the early 1870s (1872 in Prostějov and Olomouc; 1873 in České Budějovice, 1878 in Brno and 1880 in Opava, see Špiritová, 1993). The Czech Central School Association in 1880 and German School Association – Deutscher Schulverein as well. They spread their activities in the particular lands and regions of Cisleithania (Puš, 2018; Zvánovec, 2021; Špiritová, 1993).

Nationalist activists, first of all lawyers and (high school) teachers supported monolingual educational institutions, since the phenomena of bilingualism and bilingual education confused individuals in their feeling and the right national awareness.

Talking in the context of the school districts and monolingual schools, in Moravia, where the influence of the local governments, intelligentsia and business circles was particularly influential, primary schools with Czech language of instruction became often a part of the German school districts. This was for example a case of a statutory city Olomouc (Puš, 2017). This “legacy” of the monarchy was taken over by school board members at the end of 1918.

After the war, since the early 1920s the school boards started be abolished and new school committees were to be established – školní výbory / Schulausschüsse). School districts, created before 1918, usually overlapped with political districts but it was not a condition and rule.

Whereas in the linguistically homogeneous regions one school board existed, in the linguistically mixed regions and cities one or two school boards existed. It was possible to connect Czech and German schools in one school district.

The primary schools, i.e. elementary and lower-secondary school (Volksschule / obecná škola and Bürgerschule / měšťanská škola) were an important part of school boards responsibilities. A tremendously important place for the formation of a new young generation and as such it had to be reformed, in respect of curriculum, teaching methods and in respect of spirit as well. Principals and teachers were responsible for that, school boards, later committees were responsible for pupils, teachers and principals.

School boards were abolished in November 1920. District and municipal school committees were to be created, for the meantime, before the creation of the school counties and county boards (školní župy a župní školní rady) (Government decree, No. 608/1920 Coll., November 6, 1920) (Křížanová, 2011, p. 4; Šustová, 2018, pp. 13–15; *Nariženi vlády republiky Československé ze dne 6. listopadu 1920 o zrušení okresních rad školních a zřízení okresních výborů školních*). In case of the statutory cities, besides Olomouc five other Moravian cities, the district school committees were called municipal school committees.

On December 16, 1920, the Moravian Land government ordered to establish the district / municipal school committees in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. In the place where district school boards, in Moravia nationally separated since 1907 (Puš, 2022) – were located, separated school committees were to be created. That “caused astonishment and indignation of the Czech public”, according to a national democratic deputy Jaromír Špaček (*Interpellation of J. Špaček*, January 19, 1921). Špaček relied on Act No. 292/1920 Coll. of April 9, 1920, which already envisaged the establishment of the county school boards. Minister J. Šusta replied on February 28, 1921. The establishment of school committees was governed by the previous laws on the supervision of schools (i.e. before 1918). A Czech and a German district /

municipal school committees were rightfully established in the place where a Czech and a German school board existed.²

A problem persisting from the time of the monarchy was, that school districts did not always overlap with political districts – as a consequence of the so called district geometry, based on the previous political decisions (Puš, 2017, p. 86).

In the republic, where the officially Czechoslovak language (i.e. Czech language in the Bohemian Lands, Slovak in the Slovak part and possibly in Carpathian Ruthenia (Bartošová, 2018) was legally preferred, the language of instruction for Czech children was assured. A criticism of the government measure laid in the resulting limits of the personnel policy.

František Lukavský, another deputy of the National Democratic Party, criticized, that citizen representatives cannot be elected to their district or municipal school board if the school belongs to a particular school district and at the same time belongs to a different political district.

Nor can they be elected in that political district because they are in a different school district.³ Lukavský demanded a change in the demarcation of school districts and political districts, their full overlapping in favor of the functioning of school committees.

His dissatisfaction stemmed also from inconsistencies in the establishment of school committees. In the linguistically mixed Moravian Ostrava (at this time even trilingual, Czech, German, Polish) only one school committee was established; in other linguistically mixed regions two committees.

Minister Šusta replied once again, that proposed changes – especially that political districts in Moravia and Bohemia, would overlap with school districts would be contrary to the applicable laws. He only mentioned changes which happened in several Moravian school

2 See: https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t1857_00.htm.

3 See: https://www.psp.cz/eknih/1920ns/ps/tisky/t2582_00.htm.

districts through the Decree of the Government of the Czechoslovak Republic, 185/1921 Coll.⁴

It should be noted that German deputies also took part in these parliamentary debates, drawing attention in particular to the situation in less ethnically mixed Bohemia. Ernst Schollich, a deputy of the German National Party (*Deutschnationale Partei*) on the contrary demanded in July 1921 separated school committees and to speed up the process (Interpellation of E. Schollich, July 11, 1921). Oswald Hillebrand, a deputy of the German Social Democratic Worker's Party (*Deutsche Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei*) spoke one week later (Interpellation of Oswald Hillebrand, July 19, 1921). On October 21, 1921 a new Minister Vavro Šrobár responded in the sense that most of district / municipal school committees were established (*Answer from the Minister of Education and National Environment, October 21, 1921*).

Framework of the Republic, the Long Drawn-out Administration and the Spirit of Americanism

Till October 1918, most of population in the Bohemian Lands had naturally used to live in the social, political and cultural framework of the monarchy (Velek, 2018, pp. 19–20). The intention of the state was to remake their way of thinking. Leading authorities in Prague and in the particular regions, in Moravia first of all (because its larger municipal centers were governed by the German local politicians), demanded a quite quick realization of changes. This meant removal of “inappropriate inscriptions” on the school buildings and revision of school libraries. “Slanted books that until recently served dynastic interests and interests of the so called ‘broader homeland’ ought to have been removed.”⁵

The school year acquired a new rhythm due to a new holiday calendar (Hájková et al., 2018). Educational sector as one of the pillars of

4 See: <https://www.aspi.cz/products/lawText/1/2466/1/2>.

5 A letter of the Land School Board in Moravia from April 11, 1919. Czech Municipal School Committee Olomouc. M 5–1, Unit 15, box 1. SOkA Olomouc; German Municipal School Olomouc, M 5–9.

the Czechoslovak state was to provide not only the education, upbringing and care of children, but also to promote a new state. Teachers' responsibility was to create new cultural links between citizens and the Czechoslovak state and teachers themselves were to be shaped by the new state culture, especially those who served in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia (Kudláčová, 2018; Šimek & Bartošová, 2018). The new system of values was built primarily on the ideas of Czechoslovakism and republicanism. The language of administration was strongly influenced by the anti-monarchical phrases.

According to the first minister for education and national environment Gustav Habrman, the old school under Habsburgs was a "tool to enforce the education of a submissive spirit, blind loyalty to the emperor, obedience to pay taxes by property and blood [...] to blind faith, written and unwritten dogmas, serfdom, humiliation and to push back the workers" (Habrman, 1924, p. 311).

One of the main tasks a new minister declared, was to reopen regular classes at school. The number of free days (holidays) at school was to be minimized, in a contrast with war time, during which classes were often interrupted. Textbooks and other teaching materials, that previously were banned, were to be returned. Already in October 1917 a (presumably) Moravian teacher published in the Komenský journal (this journal has been publishing since 1873) an article with a headline "Svědomí českého učitele" (Conscience of a Czech Teacher) dealing with an impact of the war on the society, and with tasks of a Czech teacher toward the Czech nation, its soul and its rebirth in the future (Komenský, 1917, p. 1).

One year later, the spirit of the new state had to be omnipresent. Habrman stated: "Let the poison, poured into the souls of the Czech youth by the former Viennese and Hungarian administrations, be eradicated. Let our liberation be the basis for the education of a citizen of the Czechoslovak Republic. Let the schools and teachers be restored to their profession as soon as possible – school for children, teacher for teaching and education" (*Věstník No. 1*, 1919, p. 8).

This anti-monarchical language was not only a declaration of an idea of the Free School (Pokorný, 2018, pp. 337–339), whose principals were successfully parodied in many films of the 1930s and 1940s⁶.

The modern (elementary) school in the Czechoslovak Republic had to be monolingual, democratic, socially just and free of an intensive religious educational element (Kasper & Kasperová, 2020). For a long time, many teachers could not accept the absence of pupils in religious exercises and punished them with a lower grade in the evaluation, although parents had the legal right to excuse their child from these exercises since 1919 (Kasper, 2018, pp. 35–36) or the end of 1918 respectively (Ministerial Order No. 214 from November 25, 1918, On the Religious practices at schools).

Welfare of children, their male and female teachers and other staff depended on the day-to-day, effective functioning of school authorities that decided about their recruitment, transfers, salaries, pensions etc. It was a problem not only in the crucial year 1921 when the district school committees were to be created. A broad system of administrative steps could not be hindered, though many processes were significantly slowed up.

Such conditions and systemic deficiencies incited reactions of teachers and even students who got directly in touch with Ministry of Education with an intention to speed up the process. Ministers asked then their employees and officials of school boards to be active, pointing on a necessity of a good image of a new republic (*Věstník No. 4*, 1919, p. 62).

In the economically, socially and politically tense post-war period, the newly built bureaucratic apparatus was partly burdened with a multitude of official matters. Pupils, students and school staff routinely waited several months for their applications to be processed. School managements, local and district school boards and then committees were overloaded, and the Ministry of Education and National

6 For instance *Škola základ života* [School is the Foundation of Life], 1938; *Studujeme za školou* [We are truants], 1939; *Jarčín professor* [Jarka's Professor], 1937; *Studentská máma* [Student Mom], 1935.

Enlightenment was aware of this, and in time applicants themselves began to turn to it. On the other hand, according to information from the Ministry, the education authorities did not meet the applicants well and treated them autocratically. “As was common in the former Austria, but it in no way corresponds to the modern view of state power and the purely democratic forms of our state organism”.⁷

In April 1919, for example, the ministry drew the attention of the school boards to a situation where teachers and even students approached the ministry with their requests or complaints. In order to speed up the official process, the Ministry at the time allowed principals and teachers these direct meetings, but only in urgent matters. Prospective applicants were advised that the inherent delay, the last-minute application before the start of term, was inexcusable. Among other things, this was a sabbatical.⁸ It was desirable for the school boards to bring more dynamism to their proceedings, to deal with individual submissions orally or by telephone, if this corresponded to the merits of the matter. According to the Ministry’s instructions, when dealing with requests by telephone, officials were to make sure that they were actually dealing with the party concerned in order to avoid misuse of information and then deal with the request without undue formality. Minister Habrman stated that “in this respect, it would not be a bad idea to bring a little Americanism into our environment”.⁹

Conclusion

After the establishment of the Czechoslovak state, it was necessary to return pupils and teachers to schools and to ensure the functioning of primary schools in particular. This meant that the school administration system had to be partly reconstructed and partly rebuilt. At the top was the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, and

7 Czech Municipal School Committee, Fund M 5–1, No. 15, Box 1. Land School Board in Moravia to all of Czech District School Boards on April 11, 1919. SOkA Olomouc.

8 German Municipal School Committee Olomouc. Fund M 5–9. [Unit number is missing]. Land School Board in Moravia on April 17, 1919, No. 9980. SOkA Olomouc.

9 Land School Board in Moravia on March 21, 1919. SOkA Olomouc.

the school boards, land, district and local school boards (školní rady), were subordinate to it. These supervisory bodies, which existed since 1868, were then divided in Moravia in 1907 according to nationally criteria into Czech and German ones. In Moravia they were then divided according to nationality criteria in 1907 into Czech and German ones.

This legacy of the monarchy was taken over by the Czechoslovak republic. After two years, it was decided to abolish the school boards. They were to be replaced by a county system (župní systém), which was not eventually implemented in the Bohemian lands, and school committees (školní výbory) were established for a transitional period.

The creation of these committees was lengthy and posed a problem, especially in linguistically mixed regions.

Such areas were typically located in the former Crown land of Moravia. In Moravia, in the 19th century, bilingualism was naturally developed and cultivated, besides others in the linguistically ultra-quiet elementary schools. However, they were gradually displaced in favour of nationalism and monolingual schools. While the separation of school boards (in the year 1907) was advantageous to national activists during the monarchy, after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic and the abolition of school boards (1920), politicians and Czech national activists demanded, first, that only one school board be created, and second, that the territory of the political districts overlap with the territory of the school districts. This was repeatedly rejected by the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment.

German national activists, on the other hand, were satisfied with the state of the separate school committees and demanded the speeding up of the process.

The district school committees, respectively in the statutory cities the municipal school committees, were mostly established in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia by the end of 1921. The ideas of the Czechoslovakism and the republic were gradually disseminated through the “national school”, although they encountered the natural limits of the social structure of the Czechoslovak society.

What the so called nationalist activists had to deal with, in the monarchical era and in the republican era as well, were the nationally

indifferent individuals. Individuals, who through their family background, milieu, education or all of them gained a supranational identity, which especially bothered local politicians. As Tomáš Kasper rephrases, “Civil and national identities formed a strong bond on the path of the monarchy towards a liberal society; however, this did not prevent many organizations and individuals from maintaining a degree of choice in their life and resisting submission to the considerable pressure of nationalist activists” (Judson & Zahra, 2012, 26 according to Kasper, 2022, p. 270).

All these procedures, along with other problems of the nascent Czechoslovak state, hampered the daily agenda of schools and the handling of the pupils’ and teachers’ demands. Teachers and sometimes students or parents of pupils therefore turned to the ministry in order to have their requests resolved. The language of official declarations, documents and legal norms was influenced by the new ideological anchorage of the Czechoslovak state, which defined itself against all symbols of the monarchy, on school buildings, in textbooks, in declarations of state officials and reformist pedagogues. The aim was to unify the educational system and create the conditions for the functioning of a new, democratic school and the strengthening of the Czechoslovak identity.

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