

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

THE THIRTY YEARS WAR

Whether your family is presently very religious or staunchly irreligious or somewhere in between, the arc of your current belief system may share a connection with your Czech ancestors, who were subject to some very powerful geopolitical and socio-economic forces over the centuries, culminating in the Thirty Years War, which lasted from 1618 through 1648.

Imagine this: it is 400 years ago in Central Europe and you are a poor peasant farm family living a hand-to-mouth existence in a feudal system in which you serve a wealthy land owner. As the result of a failed political uprising, your landlord is forced to flee the country for his life and the land your family has worked for generations and centuries has been given to the foreign friends of the ruling power. If your family is non-Catholic, you are given six months to make your decision to renounce your faith and to start practicing the religion of the Holy Roman Empire or to sell your possessions and to move out of the country by foot. And you have probably never stepped foot outside your village.

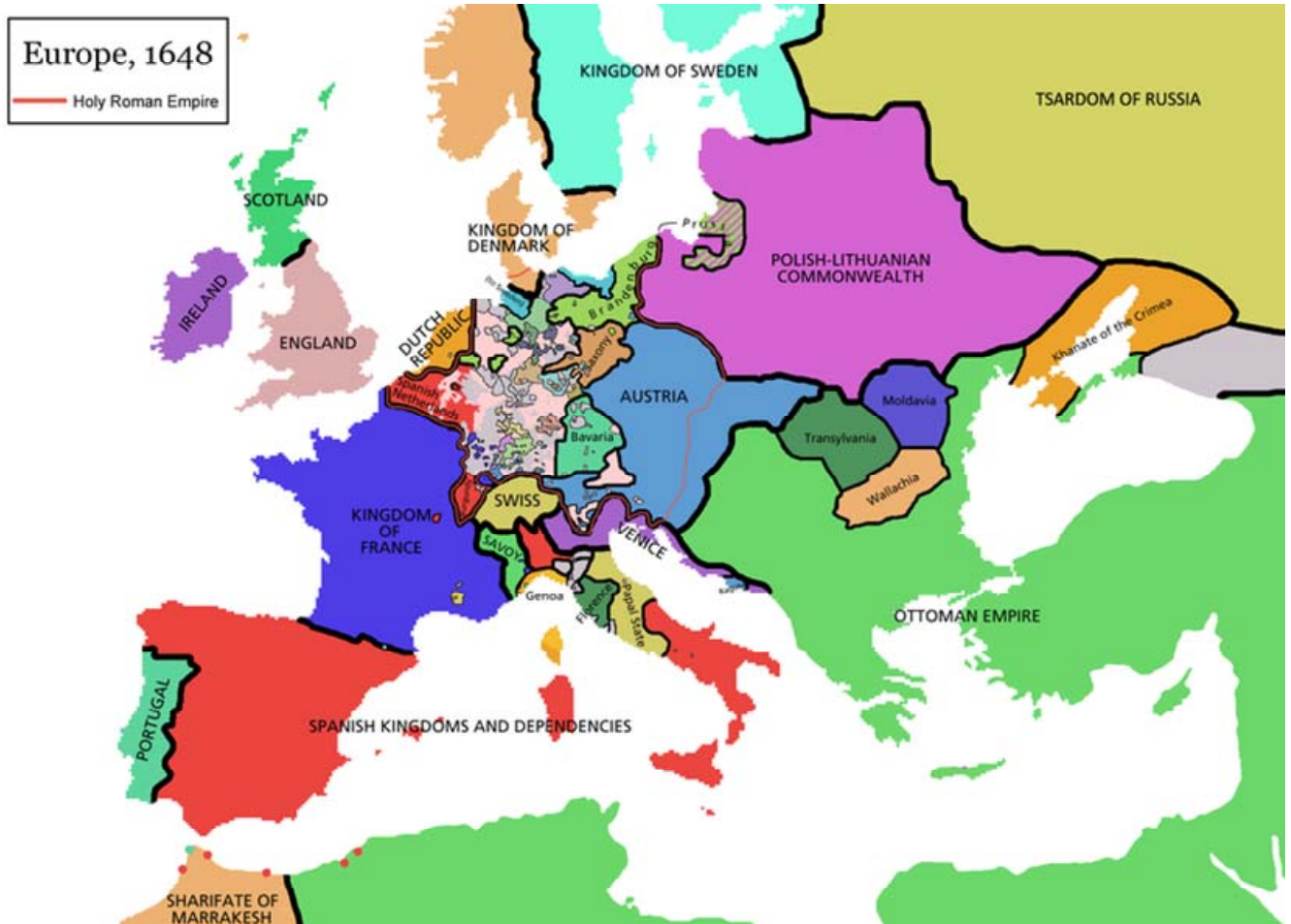
Since you among the 90% of the population who are dirt poor with no means to flee, you have no choice but to stay and comply and to watch your local education system become dismantled and you are forced to speak the new official language (German)--as your native Czech language, cultural customs, and religious practices are forced underground. Foreign armies pass through your large cities and plunder your monasteries, libraries and art collections and devastate life in your village as you know it. You men and your sons are conscripted to fight for the ruling party and forced to face your cousins in battle. And this is the life of your family for the next thirty years.

This article is the first in a series of articles on the last major religious war in Europe, the Thirty Year's War. To provide some context for this series, it is helpful to recall that our Czech ancestors (and our Polish ancestors from the Kingdom of Galicia) were once subjects of the Austrian Empire, which generally refers to:

The Austrian monarchy (Habsburg Monarchy) (1526–1867)

Austrian Empire (1804–1867)

Austria–Hungary (1867–1918)



1648 Map of Europe (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty_Years_War).

Although the Austrian empire established religious toleration by law in 1781/1782 and abolished serfdom in 1848, great suffering was endured in the lead-up to these much needed social laws and also during the time afterwards, as the practical acceptance and enforcement of these laws gradually became reality and rooted in the society of the Czech lands.

Despite those legal advances, however, the law of Primogeniture (Latin for ‘first born’) was still in effect. Primogeniture is the right, by law or custom, of the first-born to inherit the entire estate, to the exclusion of younger siblings; historically, the term implied male primogeniture, to the exclusion of females (Wikipedia). By this time, the rural areas of the Austrian empire (and Europe in general) were becoming increasingly over-populated. As a result there was very little economic opportunity to be had if you were not the first born male, especially in a large family full of siblings. And so by the mid 1850’s the stage was set for the first major wave of Czech immigrants to flee the Austrian Empire to places like Caledonia, Racine County, Wisconsin and Silver Lake, McLeod County, Minnesota.

THE LONGEST WAR IN CZECH HISTORY AND ITS EFFECTS—PART 1 of 4

By Miroslav Koudelka (*Naše Rodina*, March 2006 Vol. 18, No. 1, Page 7; Copyright 2006 CGSI, reproduction granted by permission of CGSI).

Great Father Czech, the legendary founder of the Czech nation brought his tribe in the early Middle Ages to an area poetically called The Heart of Europe. It is a great location right in the center of the continent from where it is not a long way to anywhere. On the other hand, there is one big disadvantage of this location---the relatively small but strategically situated area has always been an intersection of plenty of interests and most of the wars ever conducted in Europe have afflicted the country and its people.

The bitter truth undoubtedly refers to one of the most devastating wars in European history, generally known as the Thirty Years' War. It broke out in 1618, afflicted most of the nations on the Old Continent, namely its most developed and civilized areas, and lasted for thirty years indeed, up until 1648. It was the last big religious war in Europe, starting as the struggle between the Protestant and Catholic parties, but in the course of time, its character was changing and finally it became a fight of everyone against anyone, on all sides. An everlasting flight for territories, for profit, for power. All the parties kept on declaring their religious truths and highly honorable ideas, but that was nothing but an excuse for their actual greedy-of-gain aims. And for the Czech Lands, unfortunately, were one of the very important scenes for that stressful drama.

The long, three decades lasting war was launched in Prague and its first period, 1618-1620 is known as the Czech War. It actually was an anti-Hapsburg uprising of the Bohemian Estates to which soon joined the Estates of the other provinces of the Kingdom; Moravia, Silesia and Lusatia, and for some time even the Estates of Upper Austria and Lower Austria. Why an uprising? Around the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, a majority of Czech society was Protestant. As a matter of fact, the country was an island of religious liberty and toleration--Czech, German, Jewish and other people living here could officially profess as many as twelve denominations--Catholic, Old and New Ultraquist (their more moderate followers of Jan Hus), Brethren, Lutheran, Calvinist, Anabaptist, and so on. That was a rarity in the then Europe. But the pressure of Hapsburg rulers to cut down the role of Protestant churches and their representatives in public life and gradually re-Catholicize the country was stronger and stronger. And it called for a response.

Next Week: the Bohemian Revolt: imperial officials representing the pro-Hapsburg, Catholic party are thrown out of the windows of Prague Castle by the leaders of the Protestant party. . .

Směs (Miscellany)

The Silver Lake Creamery

Please send to me your recollections of your visits to the Silver Lake creamery, by email: tkadlec@gmail.com or call me: (651) 271-0422 or send your letters to my attention: 1408 Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105. Děkuji! Tony Kadlec