

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

THE LONGEST WAR IN CZECH HISTORY AND ITS EFFECTS—PART 2 of 4

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



Contemporary woodcut depicting the Second Defenestration of Prague (1618), which marked the beginning of the Bohemian Revolt, which began the first part of the Thirty Years War (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty_Years_War).

The uprising started on May 23, 1618 with the so called Prague defenestration when two hated imperial officials representing the pro-Hapsburg, Catholic party, Governors Jaroslav Borita of Martinice and Vilem Slavata of Chlum and Kosumberk were thrown out of the windows of Prague Castle by the leaders of the Protestant party. During the following two years, the General Diet of the Czech Kingdom dethroned the Hapsburg Emperor, Ferdinand II and elected a new king, Frederick Palatine. Calvinist by denomination and the leader of the

Protestant Union. And their army twice besieged Vienna. By a newly passed constitution, the country became a confederation of the historical provinces having equal rights, with an elected sovereign and securing religious toleration. However, the uprising was finally beaten in the ill-fated battle on the western outskirts of Prague of November 8, 1620, known as the Battle of the White Mountain (Bila Hora).



Contemporary painting showing the Battle of White Mountain (1620), where imperial forces under Johan Tzerclaes, Count of Tilly won a decisive victory (Schlacht am Weißen Berg, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thirty_Years_War).

The effects of the defeat came soon. Frederick and his court immediately fled Prague, leaving it defense-less before Ferdinand's army. Just a couple of following days were enough for the soldiers, most of which were mercenaries, to plunder the city. The most prominent commanders and political leaders of the uprising escaped for abroad. As we we'll see below, that was just the first wave of exile.

Those who had not left were imprisoned. And as an exemplary punishment, 27 representatives of the defeated party--3 lords, (highest rank of nobility), 7 knights (lower rank of nobility) and 17 burghers (representatives of cities)--were executed in Old-Town Square in Prague on June 21, 1621. There were distinguished personalities among them, such as an excellent traveler, writer and composer, Lord Krystof Harant of Polzice or a highly respected

philosopher and medic, the personal physician of two previous emperors and rector (president) of the Prague University (today known as Charles University), Dr. Jan Jesensky (a.k.a. Jessenius). A reprieve was not even granted to the oldest of them, Sir Kaspar Kaplir of Sulevice who was as much as 86 years old then. The execution and its site are nowadays commemorated in the pavement of the square, next to the Old-Town City hall with 27 white crosses and the date.

The public execution was a performance of terror. But the economic form of punishment had even more serious effects. The decade following the White Mountain may have been the biggest economic change in Czech history. At first, the properties of exiles and those who had been sentenced were confiscated. Anyone who had taken part in the "outrageous rebellion" was subject to the confiscation of either the whole estate or a fraction. Out of approximately 1,600 noble families living then in Bohemia, 680 lost all of their property, two thirds, a half or a third. And aside from a few exceptions (Ceske Budejovice, Pilsen who had not joined the uprising), most of the royal cities lost all of their fields, woods, vineyards, and other estates. Confiscated estates were purchased for ridiculous fractions of their actual cost by various adventurers and those who had been faithful to the Hapsburg Emperor. Some of them were actually given for free, just as an expression of thanks for their services.

These effects were multiplied by another important operation. A special consortium led by Prince Karl of Lichtenstein, Bishop Francis of Dietrichstein and commander Albrecht Eusebius of Wallenstein was entrusted with a monetary reform. In a year, the currency dropped to one tenth of its value and the country's economy went bankrupt. Just some became fabulously rich. Transfers of estates then continued in the 1630's, after Wallenstein's assassination. It is estimated that as much as about three quarters of real properties in Bohemia changed their owners in the years after the White Mountain. In Moravia the confiscations were not so brutal.

These social and economic steps were accompanied by measures in the field of religion and culture. Emperor's edicts expelled actually all non-Catholic priests from the country in the years 1621-1624. If we take into account that Catholics represented not more than a quarter of the country's population in the pre-war period, it means that out of approximately 1,400 Christian rectories existing then in Bohemia and Moravia, hundreds became vacant and a large number of people, and as a matter of fact, whole communities remained without spiritual support. And it was in the period when a support of this kind--owing to the war, its terror and a total moral derangement in the society was highly needed. With the breakdown of religious structure, the system of education was broken as well because most of the schools namely on the basic level had been bound to rectories and other bodies of particular churches. However, that was just a beginning. One of the measures, from 1624, forbade non-Catholic sermons, baptisms and marriages in private houses, as well as burials. Who would insult a Catholic priest or let non-Catholic rites take place in their homes, they would be punished by exile and property confiscation. Children could not become students or

apprentices without becoming Catholic. And those who would blasphemously speak about God, the Virgin Mary, saints, Catholic rites or--of course--His Grace Emperor and His family, they would lose their property or even their lives.

Next Week: find out what happens when constitution is changed to declare Catholicism as the only religion recognized by the state and mandatory for all. . .

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