

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

THE LONGEST WAR IN CZECH HISTORY AND ITS EFFECTS—PART 3 of 4

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

The ruling circles certainly did not have enough power, energy and possibilities to perform all of these measures immediately and completely. But the pressure escalated. Its formal culmination in Bohemia came in 1627 when Ferdinand issued his "renewed" land constitution. In Moravia it came into power a year later on. It was a constitution of absolutism. The Hapsburg family was declared as the hereditary dynasty in the country. This way the Diet definitely lost the power to elect a new king. The structure of the Diet was rebuilt--bishops and prelates became most powerful, while all the forty-eight royal cities of Bohemia and Moravia got just one vote--and a majority of its legal authorities were substantially reduced. The local system of jurisdiction actually lost its sovereignty because the supreme appeal authority was transferred to the monarch. The Czech Kingdom, its historical provinces and their institutions were not extinguished but the competence to make decisions in the substantial questions of politics and economy was transferred onto the central bodies in Vienna. When talking about the Kingdom, we should add that two of its lands, Upper Lusatia and Lower Lusatia were torn off in 1635 and granted Saxony for its support.



*À la fin ses Doleurs infames et perdus
Comme fruits malheureux à cet arbre pendus* *Monstrent bien que le crime horrible et noire vengeance
Est lui-même instrument de honte et de vengeance* *Et que c'est le Destin des hommes vicieux
De prouver tout ou tard la justice des Cieux*

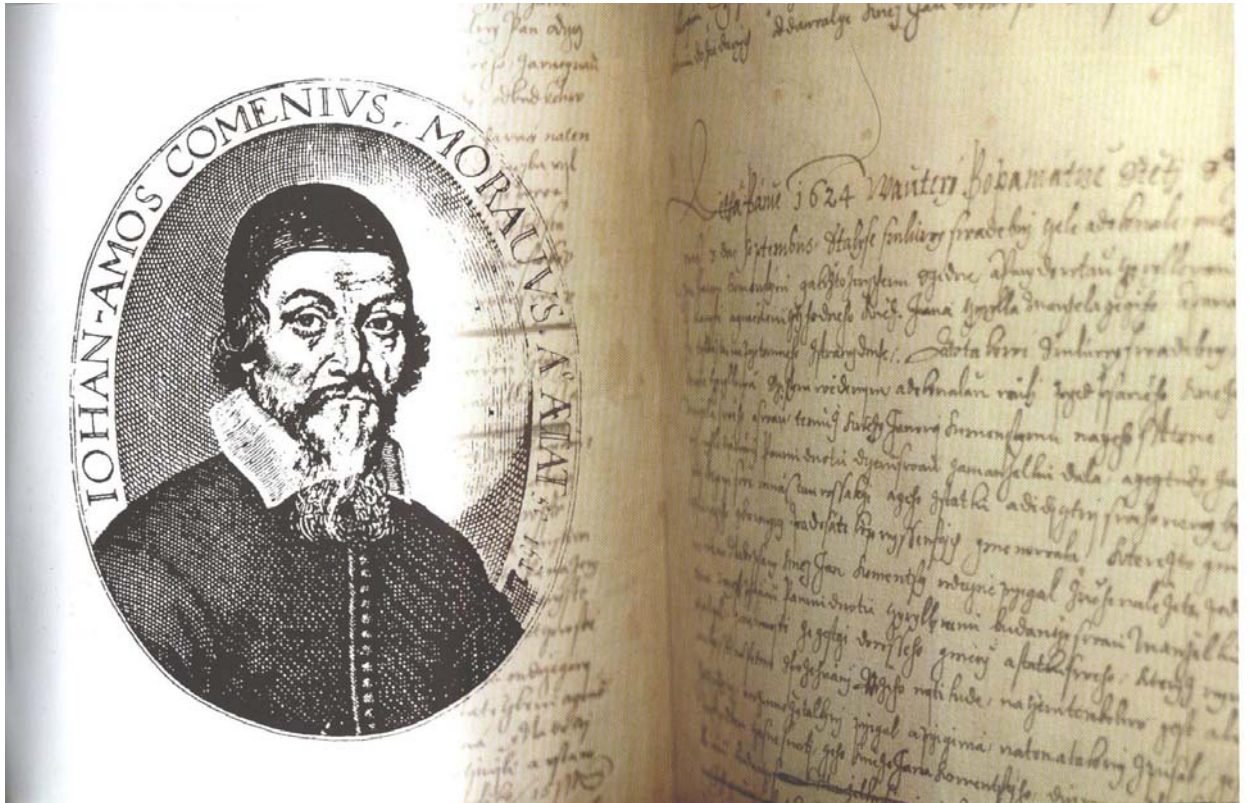
“La Pendaison (The Hanging)”, 1632; from “Les Grandes Misères de la guerre (The Large Miseries of War)” set of eighteen engravings by Jacques Callot (1592-1635)

The new constitution changed the cultural life in the Czech lands as well. In addition to Czech as the only official language in the country so far, it introduced German as formally equal. The principle became the basis for the future trend to gradually Germanize official life in the country, and eventually, its people, the whole heritage. This aspect was supported by the fact that Hapsburgs invited many feudal lords to come to the Czech lands and take over the

confiscated estates--and most of the "new" nobility coming from Germany, Italy or Spain were not willing to learn the language so strange to them. They used only the more international and fashionable German. Czech was step by step eliminated from the life of upper classes and it was surviving among the commons, namely in the country. A very good example of the equity of both the languages was given by the constitution itself. It was to be published in both German and Czech--but just the German version was declared as the authentic one. Besides, the official publication of the Czech edition was brought to the seventeenth fascicle--and never completed.

And finally, the constitution declared Catholicism as the only religion recognized by the state and mandatory for all. Non-Catholics were ordered either to convert within six months or to sell their properties (for the devaluated currency, let us repeat) and leave the country. Let me remind that the option was only given to those who were personally free (more or less just nobles and burghers), peasants subject to their feudal lords simply had just one choice, to follow--at least formally--the faith of the ruling circles. Many were even brought to the "correct" faith by violence.

As a result, some yielded to the pressure, of course. But many preferred their faith and morals and better decided to give up their homeland, with the hope that they would be able to come back one day. It is estimated that approximately one tenth of the population exiled. And many of them belonged among the most social, intellectual and moral personalities. The nation was deprived of its leaders. Readers of this article will most likely know at least one name--an excellent philosopher, educator, and theologian, Jan Amos Komensky (a.k.a. Comenius) the nickname of which is Teacher of Nations. He was even invited to become the first president of the oldest university in the New World, Harvard University in Massachusetts but he better stayed in Europe (Hungary, Poland, Sweden, Netherlands), hoping to return to the beloved motherland.



Jan Amos Komensky, aka “Comenius” (1592-1670), who was exiled during the Thirty Years War and would never return to his native land again.

Among those who had to leave the country were Pavel Stransky, a distinguished lawyer, writer and historian. Vaclav Hollar, a famous master of the graphic arts who eventually became royal draughtsman and engraver of the Court in London, and many others. Let us remember one more, the first famous Czech American, a native of Prague, Augustin Herman. He left for the Netherlands at first, undertook several business trips to America and finally, in 1644, decided to stay there. Herman lived in the colony then named New Amsterdam (present New York City) and later on as a rich landlord and merchant in Maryland owning 24,000 acres of the best land. He was engaged in diplomacy, to, and made the first map of Maryland and Virginia for which he was raised to the rank of lords by the English. Missing his homeland, he at least gave particular estates patriotic names, such as Three Bohemian Sisters or Bohemian Manor.

NEXT WEEK: The Thirty Years War comes to a destructive conclusion, but with a positive result for future genealogists. . .

If you have any contributions or suggestions for topics for future columns, please contact me 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