

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec**THE LONGEST WAR IN CZECH HISTORY AND ITS EFFECTS—PART 4 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 European war continued in the meantime, afflicted Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, the coasts of the Baltic and Northern Sea, simply the whole continent, and achieved its longest and most cruel stage. The armies of all the engaged countries adopted the principle that they had to be maintained by themselves. While the aim of the senseless struggle was more and more disappearing in the mist, various troops plundered the governed areas no matter whether on "their" side or in an enemy's country. And common people paid the bloody tax with repeated requisitions, forced drafts, epidemics, with their growing poverty, suffering and their lives.

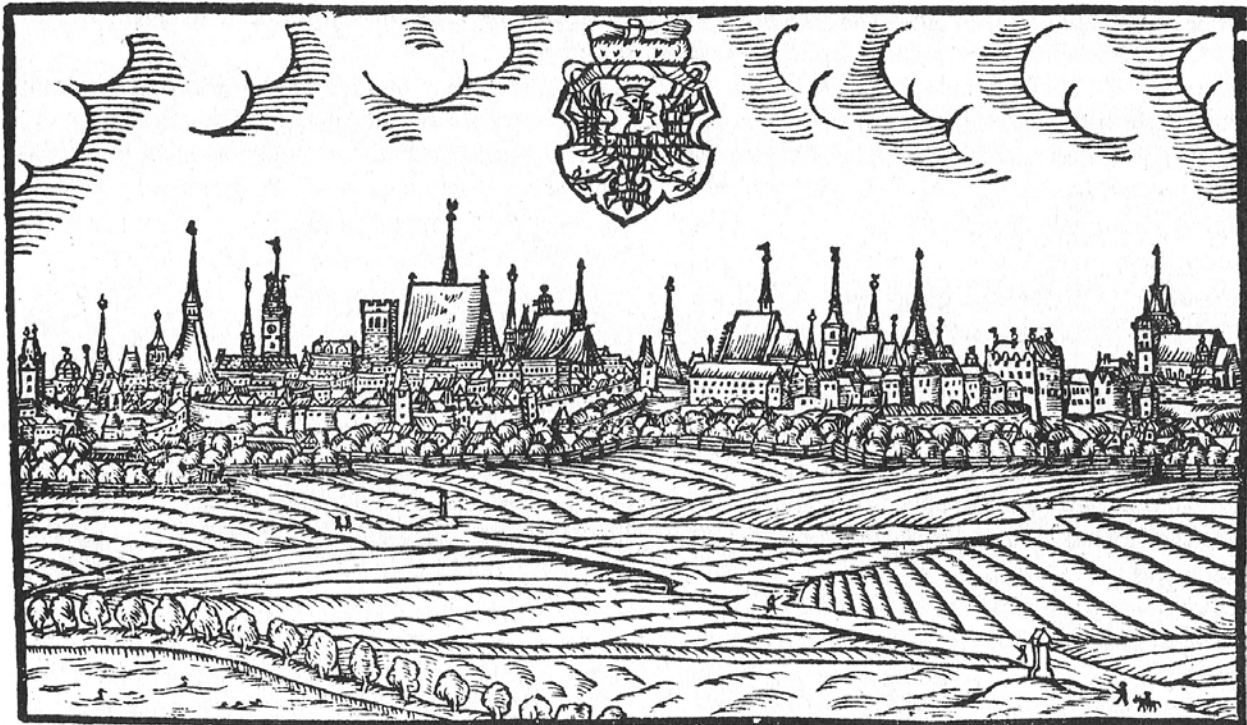


Illustration of Olomouc (made 1593 by Jan Willenberg (1642-1650)) before the City was destroyed by the Swedes over eight long years (Wikipedia)

Foreign armies several times flooded Bohemia and Moravia in the 1630's and 1640's. While protestant exiles cherished their hope to return with every victory of anti-Hapsburg armies, local people could hardly consider foreign troops as nothing but invaders. Just during the 1639 invasion of Swedish army to Bohemia, as many as 6,000 villages and towns were plundered and most of them burnt out. Olomouc, the capital of Moravia was occupied by the Swedes in 1642, they kept the city fortress up until 1650, and when they left, the city was literally eaten up and destroyed. There were even plans to discontinue it. The population of

Jihlava, another royal city dropped from the pre-war 13,000 to less than three hundred. Eighty-six out of 197 houses in the city of Caslav were destroyed so totally that it was impossible to determine where they had stood. Prague or at least its particular sections were several times occupied and fell prey to Barbarian, Saxon and Swedish troops. For example, out of approximately 600 pictures of the Castle collection, 427 were transferred to Stockholm. And in addition to 100 wagons of "regular" spoils from Olomouc, Swedes dispatched 40 more wagons of manuscripts and valuable ancient prints from the local University Library. Many rectories were burnt out; their registers were irretrievably lost.

The three decades of war ended with a compromise. All the engaged parties simply became absolutely exhausted to continue, so the peace treaties were signed in Munster and Osnabruck, Westphalia on October 24, 1648. The conditions in Europe were to be established on the situation as it had been on January 1, 1624. For Czech Protestants it was a bitter disillusion because that decision actually reconfirmed the Hapsburgs' absolutist rule over the Czech lands and the unified way of spiritual life.

The country was heavily devastated, its economy broken, some 150,000 - 200,000 persons escaped for exile, many more killed as the result of the war suffering both on the battlefields and in the rear. There was nothing similar to our present day statistics, however, it is estimated that the total population of Bohemia and Moravia fell to approximately 70% of the pre-war level.

A whole generation was brought up knowing nothing other than war conditions. As a matter of fact, the country lost a century in its development because the population of the early 1600's was again reached as late as around the year 1700. And the painful step backwards did not only refer to population. From the vivid trend towards political and economic liberalism, education and religious toleration, the country was thrown back to deep feudalism with its conservatism and steady conditions. Many of the newly arrived feudal lords did not have the sense of responsibility for their serfs; their only aim was to squeeze the poor farmers and profiteer as much as possible.



The awaking of the country was slow and hard. It turned as necessary to find out the actual state of affairs after the war. So the land visitation was performed in the early 1650's, listing the so-called rustical land and its owners (i.e. the land owned and farmed by peasants by themselves, not the so-called dominical land managed under the feudal lords' administration). The results were summed up in 1654 and are known as Tax Roll (Berni Rula). Most of the volumes of that unique and rich document were published in the 20th century and they represent the first list of tax payees, their names and social conditions not only in the Czech lands but actually the first European document of its kind at all.

The Berni Rula (“Tax Roll”) census, which enumerated the residents of Bohemia after the destruction of the Thirty Years War. CGSI has a copy of the Berni Rula in its collection housed at the Minnesota Genealogical Society (MGS) Library in South St. Paul, Minnesota.

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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