

Development of the Young Men's and Women's Christian Associations (YMCA and YWCA) in Czechoslovakia

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ABSTRACT

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and its later sister organization, focusing on care of girls (YWCA), have a long tradition dating back to 1844. They were targeted at young people aged between 12 and 18 years, trying to provide conditions for their overall development. In the Czech lands, the first organization was founded in 1886 as part of the Evangelical Church. In 1919, its American offshoot came to Bohemia along with returning legionnaires, and soon, a local association was formed, which was generously subsidized mainly from American sources. Many of these organizations then operated here mainly with their social and sports activities. Above all, American affiliates brought new methods of training and sports. YMCA and YWCA were abolished twice in 1943 and 1951.

KEYWORDS

Christian movement; youth organizations; sport history; physical education; student organizations

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INTRODUCTION

When you say YMCA, most people in the Czech Lands imagine the American YMCA, richly subsidised by its mother state and later by our own state, operating not only in the social field but also that of culture, and above all sports, bringing with it modern sport, a modern lifestyle and a modern world view. However, this is a great simplification that misses out the much older history both of the international YMCAs and of their more diverse activities. In addition to the organizations gathered in this YMCA, there were also other organizations that also considered themselves as “YMCA”, espoused its ideological basis and cooperated with each other. In addition, there were a number of other organizations that either originated in, or were inspired by, the YMCA movement. Many of them were based on the missionary

aspect of the work of Young Men's Christian Associations and worked mainly with students.

Internationally, these were mainly the British Colleges Christian Unions (BCCU), the Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC), the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and in particular the World Students' Christian Federation (WSCF), represented here by the Academic YMCA (AY). The World Council of Churches¹ and the International Federation of Democratic Women² emerged from this environment; the Czechoslovak YMCA and YWCA were also members of these. All these organizations were interconnected ideologically, and often in personnel terms, and worked closely together. International relations established with these associations were used by Czechoslovakia after 1950 to operate on the international scene even after the abolition of the YMCA and YWCA.

In the Czech environment, these were mainly organizations connected to the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren, such as the Czech Brethren Evangelical Youth Union (SČME), the Slovak Evangelical Youth Association (SEM) or the Chelčický Youth Union. Among the student organizations are mainly the Czechoslovak Students Revival Movement, the predecessor of the Academic YMCA, which also acknowledged allegiance to the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), and associations linked to it.

In inter-war Czechoslovakia YMCA and YWCA played an important role mainly in the field of sports and youth education. They contributed to building of new sport facilities, improvement of new training methods and general youth education through sports. In many sport disciplines their clubs here managed to keep an outstanding position and even got to Czechoslovak top. They have introduced new kinds of sports such as basketball and volleyball and organized summer camps of youth with physical education in nature.

Archive documents and literature about YMCA and YWCA

The present study relies mainly on materials stored in the National Archives and the Prague City Archives. Its aim is to provide basic information on the available material, pointing out its possibilities and the basic characteristics of organizations that identified as part of the YMCA movement and whose materials could be traced. Both archives whose materials were used, i.e. the National Archive of the Czech Republic and the Prague City Archive, are important in this regard because they store the materials of the central bodies of organizations that operate nationwide. In the case of the National Archive this is because it is within its competence as defined in law, in the case of the Prague City Archive it is because most of the central bodies operating nationwide in the Czech Lands were based in Prague. Only a few Czech-German organizations in the inter-war period had their headquarters elsewhere, mostly in Liberec. However, there were exceptions.³

¹ World Council of Churches (WCC).

² Fédération démocratique internationale des femmes, FDIF – a federation linking together women's organizations in the struggle for peace and equality. Est. 1945 in Paris; headquartered since 1948 in Berlin.

³ For example, the headquarters of the German National Social Youth was based in Ústí nad Labem.

Both archives contain two basic types of materials related to association activities. Above all, these are the associations' own materials as preserved. However, due to persecution during the Second World War and the changes following 1948, this material tends to be incomplete, indeed only rudimentary. The same applies to the collections of the national Czechoslovak YMCA headquarters⁴ and the YWCA Revival Movement of Czechoslovak Young Women, the female equivalent of the male Christian movement. Only the rump of two branches has been preserved in the Prague City Archive. On the other hand, the Prague City Archive stores materials kept by the authorities in respect of the associations.

The Association Act of 15 November 1867, "On the Right of Association", renewed by Decree of the President of the Republic of 25 September 1945 No. 81, "On Certain Measures in the Federal Area", imposed on newly established associations the duty of declaring to the provincial police authorities their name, purpose, articles of association, method of financing and members of the Board of Directors. The supervising authority was the district governor's office. In statutory cities, this function was performed by the municipal town hall.

The Prague City Archive stores the files of all the main YMCA associations.⁵ They contain basic data mainly on their origin and termination. A file usually begins with the notification of the constituent meeting and the articles of association as sent. Given that under the law the competent authority did not actually approve the establishment and articles of association, but only had the power to prohibit them, there is usually a formula that the competent authority, such as the Regional Political Administration, does not ban or prohibit the association. The file also contains notifications of all important events and the holding of general meetings. After each general meeting, an association announced a list of committee members with their functions, profession and place of residence. In some cases, police reports on the holding of certain events and the required political assessment of individual officials are also kept in the files. A file closes with the termination of the activities of an association, the decision on the settlement of assets and deletion from the Associations Cadastre.

Remnants of YMCA and YWCA registries are then stored in the National Archive.⁶ This is unprocessed material from 1919 to 1951 and 2003 respectively. Only provisional inventories from the 1950s and early 1960s have been compiled for these collections. The material is rudimentary, with most of it preserved from the period after 1945. The preserved collections include, in addition to brochures, almanacs and promotional materials, mainly annual reports, meeting minutes, budgets and financial reports, branch materials, inventories, circulars, guidelines and personnel files. Of particular interest are documents relating to foreign contacts, reports of war damage and domestic and foreign subsidies.

⁴ Czech official translation "Young Men's Christian Association".

⁵ City of Prague Archive (AMP), NAD 5/1 Prague City Hall II., Associations Cadastre (SK), file class marks II/35 Christlicher Verein deutscher junger Männer in Prague, II/97 Christian Youth Association in Bohemia, II/154 Christian Youth Association of the Unity of Brethren, II/330 Czech Brother, Christian Youth Association in Prague, II/511 YMCA, II/534 YWCA, II/840 Prague YMCA, X /352 Academic YMCA and XXVII/78 "Blahoslav" Young Men's Christian Association in Bohemia.

⁶ National Archive (NA), NAD 491 YMCA and NAD 626 YWCA collections.

There is little professional literature dealing with these materials. Until recently, there have been only a few references in works dealing with wider topics.⁷ Recently, however, there have been works attempting to map the history of Czechoslovak YMCA organizations.⁸ Memoir literature on this topic is not very numerous, but there are still significant works to be found. These include in particular the memoirs of Václav Havel, father of the later post-November president, who met with representatives of the YMCA as early as 1920 when chairman of the Union of Czechoslovak Students and then worked in the leading bodies of YMCA from its beginnings to its end in 1951.⁹

A second important book of memoirs is that by Josef First entitled *Shorter and Longer Paths*.¹⁰ Joe First was an important figure in the Czechoslovak YMCA. He worked there since its military beginnings, was sent to a sports school in Springfield, USA, and attended American camps there. There he also met the chairman of US summer camp directors, H. G. Gibson. He took advantage of his experience as the manager of the summer camp in Soběšín, one of the most important YMCA camps. He was also the CFO of YMCA until the end.¹¹ He and the secretary and later director of Prague YMCA F. M. Marek, also a graduate of the Springfield School, were prominent figures in inter-war Czechoslovak sport.

The rest of the YMCA literature is almanacs and promotional brochures from the time of the YMCA's activities. In particular, the titles "What the YMCA is and what it wants in Czechoslovakia", "YMCA in its first decade 1921–1931"¹² or "Where to go during the holidays".¹³

Establishment of youth organizations in the middle of the 19th century

The emergence of extracurricular youth organizations in the first decades of the twentieth century was the culmination of a long-term process that began in the middle of

⁷ E.g. Kössl, J., Štumbauer, J., Waic, M. *Selected Chapters from the History of Physical Culture*. Textbook from Prague: Karolinum, 2004, 137 p.

⁸ Helga Černá, *YMCA as a centre for the education of youth in Czechoslovakia 1919–1951*. Master's thesis. Faculty of Arts, Institute of History. České Budějovice: University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, 2009, 112 p.; Tomáš Tlustý, *The Building of national YMCA organizations in Czechoslovakia and Poland. Development of physical culture from 1918 to 1939*. Prague: Karolinum, 2017; Aleš Rosický, *Christian student movements in the 20th century*. Bachelor's thesis. Department of Church History, Protestant Theological Faculty. Prague: Charles University Prague, 2015, 85 p.

⁹ V. M. Havel, *My Memories*. Publ. Lidové noviny, Prague, 1993. 462 p. In addition, he was a founding member of the Revival Movement of Czechoslovak Students, which was considered part of the World Christian Student Federation (WSCF), and which was later incorporated in the Academic YMCA, which took its place on the international scene. It also reveals the interconnection of these organizations, the impact they had on each other, their joint projects and ties.

¹⁰ Josef A. First, *Shorter and Longer Paths*. Eknih. Beroun: nakl. Machart, 2012.

¹¹ As for sport, he was, among other things, an excellent archer and was one of the first in our country to write a handbook about this sport. Cf. J. A. First, *Archery*. YMCA, Prague, 1929.

¹² *What the YMCA is and what it wants in Czechoslovakia*. YMCA, Prague; *YMCA in its first decade 1921–1931*. YMCA, Prague.

¹³ *Where to go during the holidays*. YMCA, Prague, 1936.

the previous century.¹⁴ At its beginnings there was the deteriorating social position of young apprentices and workers in the period of the so-called industrial revolution, when large factory zones were created in which people lost any direct contact with nature. The unhealthy environment of the emerging large industrial agglomerations had a tragic impact on children in particular. Apart from living conditions, the breakdown of family ties also had a negative effect. In this situation, the first attempts were made to organize the free time of young people, albeit initially as a philanthropic activity. The establishment of the YMCA was thus directly related to the social and welfare situation of the time. It is no coincidence that in the Catholic environment a similar organization was established in northern Italy, which was a centre of the emerging industrial society similar to Britain.

In 1841 Don Bosko founded an oratory in Turin.¹⁵ He gathered around him poor working boys for whom he created a programme for Sunday, their only day off. After mass and Sunday school of course, he led them out on walks. They walked over hills, along rivers, visiting churches of the Virgin Mary. After a few years, several hundred boys regularly attended the oratory. He obtained a permanent residence for it with a free plot of land for games. Here he built a church, boarding dormitory and workshops. He founded other oratories with the same success. In 1859 the Society of St Francis de Sales was founded, which was to continue his work. Many later Salesians were also involved in scouting.¹⁶

Similarly, in 1844 George Williams founded the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in England. Their goal was to live according to the gospel. The founder wanted to lead young men to faith as opposed to a destructive lifestyle, thus avoiding the pitfalls of developing capitalism (crime, alcoholism, etc.) in the rapidly industrializing and dehumanizing cities. The aim of the new organization was to improve the spiritual state of young people involved in corporate business through the creation of Bible courses, family and social prayer meetings.¹⁷ From the beginning, the emphasis was on education, improving social conditions, meaningful use of leisure time, and the development of someone's entire personality. The YMCA created an environment which

¹⁴ Until 1908, there was a strict ban on assembly of school youth in the Austrian monarchy. Only school-related activities under the guidance of the relevant teachers were allowed. All other associations with youth care in their remit were primarily charitable. There may have been individual experiments with the activities of the so-called boys' clubs dealing with pre-military education, but these were not on a larger scale. Under the influence of the spread of English scouting of the Baden-Powell type, in 1909 the government established a commission to assess the organization of education in boys' after-school clubs and their relationship to general and municipal schools. Based on this commission's report, the aforementioned ban was rescinded, thus enabling the development of the youth movement. As a result, a number of organizations such as Wandervogel, Pfadfinder and the Czech scouting organizations such as Junák, Psohlavci, Children of Živěna and others arise in Bohemia. After the First World War, these organizations boomed. See Tomáš Jelínek, *The Beginnings of "Nature Education" in Bohemia*. In: *Yearbook of the ABS Scout Institute 2007–2008*, pp. 29–61.

¹⁵ Jan Bosco,* 16 August 1815 in Becchi near Turin, 31 January 1888 Turin. Catholic priest, founder of the Order of Salesians. Beatified in 1934.

¹⁶ Teresio Bosco, Don Bosko. Rome, 1989, 427 p.

¹⁷ YMCA Internacional – World Alliance of YMCAs. History [online]. 2013; Aleš Rosický, op. cit., p. 16.

succeeded in combining aspects that were both purely Christian and also universally shared by different cultures around the world. This environment arose because the YMCA's representatives wanted to promote tolerance, fraternity and openness instead of clear dogma. The movement sought to foster the harmonious development of all aspects of the personality, i.e. reason, body and spirit. This pattern was apparently derived from the teaching on the Trinity, and a triangle is also part of the YMCA logo. Because the YMCA avoided being incorporated into theology or the ideological tradition of Christian churches or movements, a universalism began to emerge in it that was increasingly well received. It tried to create an alternative environment and encourage participation in discussion. Its work was supposed to be not only in the social, but also in the civic-political and cultural fields. There is a rule within the YMCA that each national YMCA has responsibility for another national YMCA. The American YMCA had the Czechoslovak YMCA under its patronage.¹⁸

In 1851, the YMCA was established in Canada and the USA, and then spread to Scotland, Ireland, India, Australia, Ceylon, New Zealand and South Africa. The first association on the continent of Europe was established in 1852 in France.¹⁹ Creating a global movement with an international headquarters was the idea of Henry Dunant, Secretary of the YMCA in Geneva.²⁰ The first YMCA World Conference was held in August 1855. It was attended by 99 delegates from 9 countries. The conference passed a resolution adopting the Paris Basis for the Mission of the YMCA. An international commission was formed, which in 1878 received its own headquarters located in Geneva. At that time, the organization began to be called the World Alliance of YMCA's. The so-called Paris Basis gives YMCA organisations a clearly defined mission, to which all organizations associated within this world movement are committed:

“The Young Men's Christian Associations seek to unite those young men who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour, according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be his disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of his Kingdom amongst young men. Any differences of opinion on other subjects, however important in themselves, shall not interfere with the harmonious relations of the constituent members and associates of the World Alliance.”²¹

Czech YMCA

The oldest “Czech YMCA” was founded in 1886 under the name Christian Youth Association in Bohemia.²² At that time, YMCA was already known in Bohemia, since many Czechs, both students and apprentices, were involved in its activities in Vienna, where it had been operating since 1873. The immediate impulse for its creation was probably the visit of its founder George William to Prague in 1884 on the occasion of his travels

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

¹⁹ <http://hk.ymca.cz/historie.php>

²⁰ Henry Dunant, b. 8 May 1828 Geneva – d. 30 October 1910 Heiden. Swiss businessman and humanist, initiator and co-founder of International Red Cross, initiator Geneva Conventions and the first bearer of the Nobel Peace Prize from 1901.

²¹ <http://www.ymca.cz/info-o-ymca/poslani/prizska-baze/>

²² The association was recognised by the decree of the Czech governor dated 6 March 1886 No. 19.464 (2743 p.p.).

across Europe.²³ Those mainly involved in the foundation were Albert W. Clark, an American preacher, active at that time in Prague, and Czech preacher Alois Adlof.²⁴

The articles of association gave Prague as its registered seat²⁵ with the purpose of the association being to:

“To bring young people up in good character and to encourage them to a true Christian life and civic integrity and to help them prepare for a useful life.”²⁶

This means was to be achieved by organizing educational lectures, singing performances and teaching according to the needs and wishes of the members. Furthermore, association shelters, canteens, heated shelters and orphanages were to be set up. These institutions were to be accessible to all those in need, regardless of status, nationality or religion. Appropriate sections, including a women's section, were to be established for the work of the association, an association library was to be established, and the ideas of the association were also to be disseminated by publishing tracts, also including the establishment of a printing shop and bookshop. Similar philanthropic businesses were to be supported. The association was also supposed to cooperate with other associations with the same focus and also to establish its branches throughout Bohemia. In 1913 a point was added about the cultivation of physical education and camping in the wild.

The association also had in its name “Czech YMCA”, and this part of the ceased to be used when changing the articles in 1926, apparently in connection with the establishment of the so-called American YMCA in our country. This year, the Provincial Political Administration also verified the legal existence of the association.²⁷ Another change in the articles occurred just before the dissolution of the association in 1948.

From its beginning²⁸ the chairman was American preacher of the Free Reformed Church²⁹ Dr Albert W. Clark, Alois Adlof was elected secretary in 1888.³⁰ In 1917, the former vice-chair, dentist MUDr. Josef Straka became long-term chairman.³¹ The further social composition of the committee was varied – a bookbinder, a factory worker, a dental technician, a clerk, a student, a tailor, a businessman, and of course another preacher.³² In 1938, Jindřich Špaček, representative of the Bible Society was

²³ <http://tensingnachod.wz.cz/ymca.htm.html>

²⁴ Alois Adlof, b. 16 July 1861 in Hořice in Podkrkonoší, d. 25 March 1927 in Prague. A major preacher of the Free Reformed Church and of the Unity of Czech Brethren. Active in Prague from 1879. Involved in the founding of Czech YMCA.

²⁵ The association was based at Praha II, Soukenická 15.

²⁶ Prague City Archive (AMP), Prague II, City Hall, Association Cadastre (SK), class mark II/97.

²⁷ Provincial Political Administration, Decree dated 18 September 1926 No. 361.821 ai 26-2a-2151/1 ai 26 (15217 p II/26).

²⁸ I.e. since the introduction of the new register of the Association Cadastre. Previous data not available.

²⁹ Later the Church of the Czech Brethren.

³⁰ Alois Adlof, b. 16 July 1861 in Hořice in Podkrkonoší, d. 25 March 1927 in Prague. A preacher of the Free Reformed Church and of the Unity of Czech Brethren. Active in Prague from 1879.

³¹ MUDr. Josef Straka, Prague VII, Strossmayerovo nam. 2.

³² Secretary of the association Alois Adlof, resident at Prague II, Soukenická 15. The central treasurer of the committee also lived at the office of the association.

elected chairman,³³ with Dr Straka also continuing to serve as a vice-chairman on the committee. Quite new people appear on the board in 1946 – chairman Karel Toušek student of philosophy, executive Karel Sita student of theology, treasurer Vlastimil Štěrba student at the business school, and others. The only member of the board who was not a student was upholsterer Josef Jirásek, who was the librarian.³⁴

The association decided on its dissolution at a General Meeting held on 29 December 1948. In his final speech Dr Samuel Verner briefly described the history of the association from its inception to its end. He emphasized that the association was actually from the beginning part and a section of the Church of the Czech Brethren in Prague II and was therefore a church organization. He stated that the dissolution of the association was in keeping with the contemporary organization of society, which had to be respected following the events of February (1948). Furthermore, the attendees resolved that all the association property would go to the Church of the Unity of the Czech Brethren. The present acting vice-chairman of the Council of the Czech Brethren Unity then assured the General Meeting that the transferred property would serve exclusively Christian purposes, and especially the bookstore. The publishing house should continue to publish exclusively ecclesiastical works.

In the 1890s, a number of branches were established following the Prague model, for example in Plzeň, Brno and Čáslav. However, a larger expansion was prevented, inter alia, by the strict rules of the association life, which forbade dancing, amateur theatre, visits to rural festivals, fairs, trips and, of course, visits to inns. After 1898, however, there was a turnaround, and the whole concept of youth work started to accommodate the situation and needs of the times and of the Church.³⁵

We know practically nothing about the association's own activities, because its materials have not been preserved in the main archives. Only under the name YMCA Praha-Liběchov³⁶ has a manuscript entitled "Working with Working Youth (Arbeit unter Arbeiterjugend)" been retained in the Prague City Archive. It is a typewritten German text arising from the work of a committee at the YMCA International Meeting in Geneva in 1926. The document was based on a meeting of delegates from 50 countries around the world working on this topic. The typescript material was intended for possible publication. The foreword was written by Basil Mathews, a prominent official of YMCA and WSCF. In particular, the work characterizes the position of young working people on the various continents, emphasizing their diversity, and therefore the need for an individual approach in individual cases. It describes the organization and possible methods for work with young people. Examples include setting up libraries, organizing bible lessons and study courses, teaching foreign languages, organiz-

³³ Jindřich Špaček, resident at Prague XVI – Dejvice, Soborská 18.

³⁴ Composition of the committee elected on 29 March 1946:

Chairman: Karel Toušek, student of philosophy, Prague II, Soukenická 15.

Executive: Karel Sita, student of theology, Prague-Hloubětín, Za horou 9.

Treasurer: Vlastimil Štěrba, student of commerce, Prague II, Soukenicka 15.

Minute taker: Miroslav Valach, technical student, Prague II, Soukenická 15.

Room manager: Jan Laznický, student of medicine, Prague XIX, Na Piavě 13.

Librarian: Josef Jirásek, upholsterer, Prague XI, Grégrova 23.

³⁵ <http://tensingnachod.wz.cz/ymca.htm.html>

³⁶ Prague City Archive (AMP), NAD collection No. 2256.

ing literary societies and craft courses, conducting music activities, setting up chess, photo, scouting and other clubs. Among sports activities mentioned the main ones are football, cycling, boxing, swimming, athletics and hiking. In summer weekend trips, summer camps and long-distance trips were to be organized. The conclusion of the work focuses on the German *länder*.

Material has survived from only two of the branches of the Christian Youth Association. Unfortunately, this is again material from the Associations Cadastre, which mainly concerns official announcements of the associations.³⁷ The "Blahoslav" Christian Young Men's Association in Bohemia was founded in 1893 and was not forbidden by Governor's Decree No. 33,139 of 1893. According to its articles, the association was based in Královské Vinohrady and its purpose was to cultivate the evangelical-Christian life and the provision of charitable works. The association intended to achieve this by organizing lectures, social events and trips. Furthermore, a library was to be established, educational writings were to be published, and the association was supposed to provide members with an opportunity to be educated in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, in singing, in foreign languages, and so on. Ludvík Bohumil Kašpar, a Protestant reform pastor, as chairman and Josef Šimša, a Protestant reform vicar, as church leaders, were on the association board. Other members of the committee were František Polák, a railways clerk, and Antonín Auervek, a bookstore assistant. All were residents of Královské Vinohrady. By letter dated 7 December 1922, the Association informed the authorities that it had broken up during the war and that a church youth association had been formed following its demise, which had not worked according in line with the law on associations.

Christian Youth Association of the Czech Unity of Brethren Prague XVI – Smíchov served as a branch of the Christian Youth Association in Bohemia. The association was not forbidden by Governor's Decree No. 24,876 of 28 February 1896 (3464 p.p.) under the name of the Branch of the Christian Youth Association in Bohemia. In 1925 it was renamed the "Christian Youth Association" of the Unity of the Czech Brethren. Its purpose was initially to cultivate and disseminate humanity and education, to support the poor and further to educate young people in character and to encourage them to live a Christian and civic life of integrity and to help prepare them for a useful life. Otherwise, the purpose of the association and its articles were based on those of the parent association.³⁸ The association was again chaired by Dr A. W. Clark, preacher. After him, preacher Pavel Zelinka was elected chairman; he held this position until 1935. Other members of the association came more from the lower social strata – a shoemaker, pharmacist, plumber, worker and business assistant. From 1915 and 1917 the association was monitored by the police and the files contain police reports on the course of general meetings. It was stressed that no foreigners were present at the meetings.

From 1922, the association also had a women's section, chaired by the preacher's spouse Anna Zelinková. In 1936, the preacher P. Zelinka was replaced by Josef Cvrček, also a preacher, who led the association through the war years until 1944, when Timoteus Zelinka was elected. However, in October of the following year,

³⁷ AMP, Prague II, City Hall, SK II/154 Christian Youth Association of the Unity of Czech Brethren Prague XVI – Smíchov; SK XXII/78 "Blahoslav" Christian youth community in Bohemia.

³⁸ I.e. Prague City Archive, Prague II, Town Hall, SK II/97.

Josef Cvrček once more returned to the chair. In 1948 the association formed its own action committee,³⁹ however soon, on 12 January 1949, at an extraordinary general meeting, at the recommendation of the senior body of the Union of Christian Youth Associations (the Unity of Czech Brethren), the association terminated its activities and dispersed. One of the reasons for the break-up was that three-quarters of the members were over the age of 25, so joining the Czech Youth Union⁴⁰ was out of the question. Thanks to its fifty-year tradition, there were a number of fifty-, sixty- and seventy-year olds in the association. One lady member was as much as 91 years old.

The last association of this type was the “Czech Brother”, a Christian youth association in Bohemia.⁴¹ The association was founded in 1913 at Vyšehrad.⁴² Most of its members lived either in Vratislavova or Halkova Street. Only the chairman, a postman by profession, lived in Prague IV in Pohořelec. The purpose of the association was to cultivate and spread a life in the spirit of Christianity and to show charity. The association was to organize meetings, public lectures, social events and entertainments and excursions in keeping with the Christian spirit. Furthermore, an association library was to be set up, educational writings were to be published, Bible study hours and singing and language courses were organized. Charitable activities were also to be cultivated. By letter dated 15 April 1924, the police directorate was informed that the association was dissolved in 1920 through the founding of the “Czech Brother” association, a youth centre of the Unity of Brethren in Bohemia.

The Christian Young Germans’ Association in Prague,⁴³ founded in 1902, can be considered a typical German representative of this kind of association.⁴⁴ In 1914 and 1915 it was investigated and kept under surveillance by the police. One result was the expulsion of its preacher L.R. Kiepe⁴⁵ from Austria.⁴⁶ Anna Hauschild, who was a missionary, was expelled with him. One of the probable reasons was the discovery of brochures critical of the Catholic Church and the Papacy.

The chairman of the association was parish priest Dr Robert Zilchert.⁴⁷ Other members of the committee were more middle class.⁴⁸ From 1927, Richard Klier was in the

³⁹ Its members were:

Jan Cvrček – clerk,
František Bednář – joiner,
Josef Hala – bank manager.

⁴⁰ The Union of Czech Youth (SČM) was active from 1945 to 1949 and was supposed to bring together young people aged 14 to 29 years. On 23 April 1949 it was replaced by the Czechoslovak Youth Union (ČSM) at a merger conference.

⁴¹ Prague City Archive, Prague II, Town Hall, SK II/330.

⁴² The association was not prohibited by the governor’s decree of 4 May 1913 No. 8A 1314/116.147 ai 1913.

⁴³ AMP, Prague II, Town Hall, SK I/35 Christlicher Verein, deutscher junger Männer in Prag.

⁴⁴ The association was not prohibited by the governor’s decree of 15 December 1902 No. 255,003 (20015 pp).

⁴⁵ Ludwig Rudolf Kiepe, b. 11. 11. 1886. 7th Day Adventist preacher, living in Liberec, Lange Str. 16, married, native of Höringhausen, Frankenberg region, Hesse-Nasau.

⁴⁶ Decision of the Governor dated 27 June 1915 ref. no. Z1 2309.

⁴⁷ Dr. Robert Zilchert, Praha II, Gerbergasse 13.

⁴⁸ The committee elected in 1924 consisted of: Dr. Johannes Pfeifer – vicar, Max Weigelt – clerk, Karl Reiman – clerk, Heinz Tasler – bookseller, Anton Wirth – chief postal controller,

chair. A few years later, the association broke up at an extraordinary meeting held on 1 June 1933. The meeting was held in the building of the German Evangelical Community in Prague II, V Jirchářích 13. As the reason for the dissolution given in the notice to the police directorate it states that the association was breaking up due to lack of interest and the moving away of the majority of its members.⁴⁹

The most famous in the Czech Lands is the so-called American YMCA, which came here together with the legionnaire units after the First World War. Even this was actually a set of organizations, the most important of which was the central headquarters of YMCA, then the Prague YMCA, student Academic YMCA, which was preceded by the Association of the Revival Movement of Czechoslovak Students, and of course its female counterpart YWCA. Materials for these organizations are found mainly in the National Archive,⁵⁰ where the preserved remains of the YMCA and YWCA registries are kept. Other important documents can be found in the Prague City Archive in the Associations Cadastre.⁵¹

The YMCA in Czechoslovakia

After a phase of being active within the army, the YMCA civil organization was founded in 1921, when its establishment was acknowledged by Decree of the Ministry of the Interior dated 22 March 1921 No. 21,387/6-21 and Decree of the Provincial Political Administration of 26 April 1921 No. 2-A-3008-135-045 (11,302 p. II)⁵² under the name Czechoslovak YMCA, in Czech Křesťanské sdružení mladých mužů. In addition, American YMCA was supplied on letterhead. In 1923 this name was⁵³ changed to YMCA in Czechoslovakia and later in 1939 to Christian Youth Association (KSML),⁵⁴ which it then used until its demise in 1951.

The purpose of the association was to create a number of centres throughout the country to implement a four-fold programme for practical life, in terms of the physical, mental, moral and social, aimed at improving men and preparing them for the higher ideal of a selfless citizen with developed social feeling and a world outlook. This care was to include all men, young men and boys, regardless of status, employment, nationality, political beliefs, religion or confession. The association claimed itself to be international, non-political and non-denominational. The Czechoslovak YMCA was to apply the social principles of Christ contained in the New Testament in every city and village, referring to the legacy of J. Hus and J. A. Comenius as the source of the moral

Eduard Pilz – bank clerk, Rudolf Effenberger – clerk, Julius Kötritzsch – clerk, Heinrich Frank – teacher.

⁴⁹ The notice of dissolution was published in the Official Gazette on 4 June 1933.

⁵⁰ National Archive, collection NAD No. 491 YMCA, collection NAD No. 410 YWCA.

⁵¹ Prague City Archive, Prague II, Town Hall, SK II/15 YMCA, SK X/226 Revival Movement of Czechoslovak Students, SK II/534 YWCA, SK II/840 Prague YMCA, SK X/352 Academic YMCA.

⁵² The legal existence of the association was verified by the Ministry of the Interior on 12 October 1921 No. 75,289/6/21 (19,737 p. II).

⁵³ Amendment to the Articles of Association acknowledged by Decree of the Ministry of the Interior dated 14 February 1923 No. 8082/6-1923.

⁵⁴ The amendment to the Articles of Association was not prohibited by the Decree of the Ministry of the Interior dated 8 November 1939 No. 57,892/1939-6.

and spiritual power needed to realize these principles in the lives of individuals and nations. The association took up its work with a lively faith in God and in the brotherhood of all people proclaimed by God on earth. The intention to remain in close and beneficial contact with the World YMCA and to form part of that federation was also stated in the introduction to the articles.

As part of its activities, the Czechoslovak YMCA was to build community centres, preferably in its own buildings or in rented buildings and rooms. Furthermore, clubs, games rooms, singing rooms, writing studios, libraries, reading rooms and study rooms were to be established. Theatre was to be cultivated and educational lectures, academies, concerts, and film performances organized. Evening schools were to operate as part of the association, where principally languages and professional subjects such as accounting, etc., were to be taught. The religious nature of the association was shown mainly in the organization of Bible study hours and in its selection of magazine, book and brochure subscriptions.

Concerning entertainment, singing, music and especially sport were to be cultivated along with camping and outdoor activities. For these reasons, pools, gymnasias and bathrooms were also to be housed in association buildings. Playgrounds were to be set up for younger children.

The association was also to help mediate work and to build dormitories and canteens. Association cafés and restaurants were supposed to be cheap and alcohol-free. The revenue should only be such that expenditure was covered at least in part. Young volunteers were to assist in the implementation of the programme.

The list of committee members elected in 1921 was truly impressive:

Chairperson: PhDr. František Drtina – university professor.

Vice-chairman: PhDr. Emanuel Rádl – university professor.

Members: Jan Hála – member of Prague City Council; Appolo Růžička – Chief Executive Officer of Živnostenská banka; Anton Štefánek – Ministerial Council; MUDr. Vavro Šrobár – MP and minister; JUDr. František Veselý – senator and attorney; Silvestr Voda – Chairman of the Red Cross.

Another important function was held by the National Director, who was in charge the entire central agenda of the Czechoslovak YMCA, handled ordinary correspondence, prepared and implemented the Central Committee resolutions, organized and managed the implementation of the YMCA's ideological programme and practical activities by local YMCA associations, and was supposed to support their work by counsel and in deed. This position could also be remunerated. The salary and the service conditions were set by the Central Committee. Due to the massive subsidies for building of the facilities⁵⁵ and because of their own work, Americans were appointed as the first national directors. In the 1920s WW Gethmann and Howard B. Durke

⁵⁵ In the first two years alone, the American YMCA invested US \$ 100,000 in this country. The last big action of the Americans in this country was the building of the Na Poříčí headquarters, to which they donated \$ 800,000.

Helga Černá, op. cit., p. 39.

Václav Havel, op. cit., p. 203.

alternated in this position.⁵⁶ Ing. Václav Havel was the first Czech in this post from 1927 to 1931, and was in turn replaced by the American Joseph John Sommerville.⁵⁷ Czechs as national directors only appeared at the end of the thirties, when, due to political and wartime events, personnel changes also occurred in many other organizations.⁵⁸ In 1945, the YMCA secretary Václav Velkoborský was elected director; he was replaced by Jiří Horyna in 1947.⁵⁹ The last director was Ladislav Hejránek.

YMCA also had its German section, represented by four members on the Central Committee.⁶⁰

During its existence in the Czech Lands, YMCA was investigated twice for its state, political and national reliability. The first time was in 1930, mainly in connection with the activities of the Liberec branch. The investigation mainly concerned the leaders of the association. On chairman E. Radl the report states that he is a member of the "Human Rights" and "Aufruf" associations, vice-chairman of the "Böhmisch-mährisch-schlesischer Verband für Förderung des nationalen Friedens", vice-chairman of the Chelčický Peace Society and member of other cultural and humane corporations. YMCA vice-chairman Bedřich Jerie⁶¹ is characterized as a nationally aware person who does not participate in politics. Of central director Ing. Václav Havel it writes that he is a functionary of the Ethical Movement of Czechoslovak Students and a supporter of various physical education and cultural associations. Politically, he apparently does not appear in public and, according to confidential information, is an adherent to the direction of progressive parties. There is also a note that he is entered in the register of political problems. Most of the complaints concerned the Liberec branch, which was criticized for suppressing the Czech language. On the whole, however, nothing was found to raise doubts about political or national reliability.⁶²

The second investigation took place in 1950. Here it is stated that the association always announces its association activity as the YMCA in Czechoslovakia and uses an association stamp with this text. It is therefore concluded that it does not operate according to the most recently approved articles,⁶³ but according to the previous articles, under which it is a member of the international YMCA headquartered in the United States and thus under the influence of a foreign organization, which could be misused

⁵⁶ WW Gethmann, resident at 1993-II, 1921-1924, 1925-1926; Howard B. Durke, resident at Prague IV, Badeniho 191, 1924-1925, 1926-1927.

⁵⁷ Joseph John Somerville, resident at Dejvice, Pelléova 29, 1931-1933; Followed by Lewis Brackett in 1933, resident at Prague VII, Čechova 15.

⁵⁸ The following worked in this position: Ing. Václav Havel in 1937, Ing. František Písař in 1937-1938; Dr. Miroslav Kozák in 1938-1939; Václav Velkoborský in 1939; Dr. Miroslav Kohák in 1939-1943.

⁵⁹ Jiří Horyna, resident at Prague II, Na Poříčí 12.

⁶⁰ In 1926 these were JUDr. F. L. Štěpánek, Huszt; PhC. R. Arnold, Prague, Opatovicka 32; MUDr. R. Krumbholz, Znojmo and A. Lux, editor-in-chief, Liberec.

⁶¹ Bedřich Jerie, b. 5. 1. 1885 Nové Veselí, d. 27. 10. 1965 Ústí n. Labem. Evangelical pastor and writer. During his time in Prague he influenced the later philosopher Ladislav Hejránek.

⁶² Prague City Archive, Prague II, Town Hall, SK II/115.

⁶³ The 1939 articles according to which the association should use the name "Christian Youth Association" (KSML).

for anti-state activities. However, this is excluded because the organization has been under national administration since 1 April 1948. According to a query from the Ministry of the Interior, the association's action committee recommended its liquidation before the end of 1950.

The association was mainly active in the social and cultural field, with its headquarters and many of its branches having their own modern and luxuriously equipped buildings. Its work among young people and in the field of physical education and sport was particularly notable.⁶⁴ The YMCA was abolished for the first time in 1943; since 1940 its assets had been used by the Nazi youth organization Hitlerjugend. The Association Registry was first handed over to the Czechoslovak Youth Union, which in 1960 handed it over in turn to the State Central Archive. Despite the rump nature of the information, it is possible to form a picture of the activities of the organization in our country, its management and international relations.

The Prague YMCA⁶⁵ was established in 1930 as a special organization of the Prague headquarters.⁶⁶ Its articles were derived from those of the parent organization. The headquarters was in the headquarters building in Nove Mesto, Na Poříčí 12. Ing. Václav Havel and Ing. Václav Jelen alternated as chairman until 1941.⁶⁷ Then they were replaced by JUDr. Viktor Zedníček. After 1945 the lawyer Jaroslav Cebe was in this post, followed after 1946 by Bohumil Pour. After February 1948 a twelve-member action committee, led by Dr. J. Řepa, was appointed. Despite an overall positive assessment by the Central National Committee of the City of Prague, the association was liquidated in 1952.

Academic YMCA

The Revival Movement of Czechoslovak Students⁶⁸ was based on the international missionary work of the YMCA and its related organizations among students. According to one of the founding members, the immediate impetus for the establishment of the organization was the speech of the President of the Republic T. G. Masaryk at the Castle on his birthday on 7 March 1920.⁶⁹ However, the articles of the association were initially because of some uncertainties, such as representation of the association externally, the method for electing certain bodies, etc.⁷⁰ Later, however, the amended articles were accepted and the existence of the association was acknowledged on

⁶⁴ See aforementioned student work.

⁶⁵ Prague City Archive, Prague II, Town Hall, SK II/840.

⁶⁶ The association was not forbidden by the Decree of the Land Office dated 26. 3. 1930 No. 119,509 and 30: 9A.1100ai 30 (9553 S II/30).

⁶⁷ Ing. Václav Havel, resident of Prague II, Vodičkova street Lucerna in 1930–1935 and 1938–1939, 1941; Ing. Václav Jelen, Prague XIX, Nicola Tesly 17, from 1935 to 1938 and from 1939 to 1941 (he also acted as an important scout official).

⁶⁸ Prague City Archive, Prague II, Town Hall, SK X/266.

⁶⁹ The president then apparently said: "I wish we had a lot of men in all disciplines who could observe and think, and only such a 'public mafia' cooperation, I would say, will ensure successful development."

Václav Havel, op. cit., p. 128.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Letter of the Ministry of the Interior dated 6 June 1921 No. 42,331/1921.

27 August 1921 by the Ministry of the Interior.⁷¹ At the time of its establishment, the movement had 29 registered members.

The purpose of the association was:

“To bring together Czechoslovak students, especially students and graduates of Czechoslovak universities, to work and strive for a revival of life on a religious basis.”

The movement then participated in the construction of the Na Slupi and Letná student dormitories and organized a series of lectures on political and educational topics.⁷² The lecturers were recruited from the whole political spectrum from the left (communists, social democrats) to the right (the People's Party, the national democrats). In 1926, the association split and the more religiously oriented part joined an organization set up for this purpose, the Academic YMCA. The remainder founded the aforementioned Ethical Movement of Czechoslovak Students.⁷³

The Academic YMCA in Czechoslovakia – the Christian Student Association (by its official name) was founded in the spring of 1927.⁷⁴ According to its articles of association, it was to act as a Christian academic association, which was to strive to spread Christian ideals, moral esteem and honesty in life. It was supposed to educate its members for a life in society in which there is also a place for social and global sensitivity and to care for nobility in sport and physical education. The spiritual basis was to be the same as the ideas of other Czechoslovak YMCA associations and the world YMCA. It was to take care of academics, and male and female students regardless of nationality, political beliefs and religious confession. The association was supposed to be non-political and non-denominational.

University professor J. L. Hromádka was elected chairman. He worked in this position with short breaks until 1947. The last chairman, as at the headquarters of YMCA, was Ladislav Hejdiánek.⁷⁵ In 1950, the association and its branches operated and cooperated with the Czechoslovak Youth Union and the bodies of the people's administration.⁷⁶ Its end is unclear and is not noted in the association records.

The YWCA in Czechoslovakia

The female counterpart of the Young Men's Christian Association was the YWCA,⁷⁷ which had, however, a greater emphasis on social activities; the pursuit of recreational,

⁷¹ Decree of the Ministry of the Interior dated 27 August 1921. The existence of the association was confirmed by Decree of the Regional Political Administration dated 22 September 1921 No. 2A 3682/3-294.536 (18.172 p. II).

⁷² The movement was supported initially both financially and organizationally by YMCA and WSCF.

⁷³ The Association broke up by resolution of a General Meeting held on 10 July 1927. Its assets were transferred to the Academic YMCA.

⁷⁴ In this association also the first version of the articles was rejected for lack of clarity, this time of a political nature. The formation of the association was noted by Decree of the Ministry of the Interior dated 4 April 1927 No. 16.334//27/6, and then by Decree of the Provincial Political Administration of 19 May 1927 No. 202.513-2A-1122/1 ai 1927 (11365 p. II/27).

⁷⁵ Ladislav Hejdiánek, resident at Prague XII, Chodská 5.

⁷⁶ Prague City Archive, Prague II, Town Hall, SK X/352 Report of the District national Committee for Prague 3 Central National Committee for Prague dated 20 October 1950.

⁷⁷ Young Women's Christian Association.

sporting and sports activities did not play such a role in it. Its official title “Revival Movement of Czechoslovak Young Women, YWCA section”⁷⁸ already suggested more space for moral and humanities work and a lesser interest in natural physicality than in their male counterpart. The organization was founded almost at the same time as its male equivalent in the autumn of 1921.⁷⁹

The purpose of the association under the statutes was to:

- “1. Work to consolidate the health, develop the education and refine the nature of young women, regardless of status, nationality, religious confession and political beliefs, so that they can best serve each other, their homeland and the world.
2. To raise them to an awareness of true womanhood and to teach them to work with other women to build a better social order.”

The emblem of the guild was a blue triangle with the corner turned down and a YWCA inscription ribbon. Marie Záhořová-Němcová was elected the first chair-woman.⁸⁰

The association was mainly involved in building shelters for girls. For this purpose, it obtained permission for a number of collections. The German section of the organization was particularly active in this respect, receiving large subsidies from major German financial institutions such as the Böhmisches Union-Bank, the Böhmisches Es-kompte-Bank und Credit-Anstalt, the Bank für Handel und Industrie (formerly the Länderbank), the Allgemeiner Böhmischer Bank-Verein and others, such as Petschek and Co. The section acted as a club of German women and girls under the name of the “Deutscher Klub der Prager YWCA”. Its main task was to address only German sponsors. Otherwise it was controlled by the Prague YWCA, because according to the articles there could be only one YWCA in the Czechoslovak Republic.

Like the YMCA, the YWCA was abolished by decision of the Reich Protector in 1943.⁸¹ In July 1945, the association resumed its activities under its 1939 name of “Christian Association of Czech Women, Headquarters in Prague”, but soon returned to its original name.

The main activity at that time was the operation of hostels for girls and social work. In this regard, the YWCA cooperated with the international CARE organiza-

⁷⁸ National Archive, NAD collection No. 410; Prague City Archive, Prague II, Town Hall, SK II/534.

⁷⁹ The first version of the articles was rejected by letter of the Ministry of the Interior dated 6 October 1921 No. 72304/21. This time it was uncertainties over the title, where it was not clear whether the organization was independent or simply a branch of a foreign organization. In fact the international YWCA organization had no legal remit to operate in Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, the designation of the executive body as a ‘national committee’ was criticized; this was inadmissible because, in contemporary terminology, the term was reserved for pan-national organizations of political significance. The articles then had to be corrected in line with these comments.

The association was acknowledged by Decree of the Ministry of the Interior dated 28 November 1921 No. 89.574/6-1921 and Decree of the Provincial Political Administration of 2 December 1921 No. 2A-4254/4-390.591 (22678 p. II).

⁸⁰ Marie Záhořová-Němcová resident at Prague VII, reg. No. 1116.

⁸¹ Decision of the Reich Protector of 18 June 1943 No. II/762 70 A-4, No. II/764 70 A-4 and No. II / 763 70 A-4.

tion (Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe, Inc.). This was the distribution of gifts from American citizens, which could either be addressed to specific people or legal entities, or could be unaddressed and distributed to people according to need.⁸²

After 1948 the association began to have problems. In February of the following year, the association premises in Prague II, Žitná 12, were searched, where anti-state printed materials and a quantity of illegal goods were seized. In addition, there was testimony from the cleaning staff that the girls in the boarding house “negatively criticized political developments after February 1948 and did not conceal their warm affection for the West”. Although the organization continued to operate, it was temporarily in a legally uncertain and unclear position. However, in the absence of any further measure, the association continued and its legal existence was not called into question.

On 6 April 1949, the Ministry of Social Care placed the association under national administration. Bohumila Suchánková was appointed administrator, but was replaced by Vlasta Krejčová-Hrubá in June of the same year.

The decision to dissolve the association was taken at a meeting held on 1 February 1951. At the opening, the chairwoman Mrs. Kalousková recommended a resolution for the liquidation of the association.⁸³ According to a subsequent explanation, the chairwoman of the YWCA Action Committee, Mrs. Friedländer made this decision in agreement with the YMCA at a joint meeting.⁸⁴ The reason was given that most of the functions of the association had been taken over by the state and national organizations, mainly in the social field. In the area of morals, the churches were to continue to operate, mainly the evangelical church, which had always been very close to the spiritual basis of both associations (YMCA, YWCA). The association's assets were transferred to the Czechoslovak Youth Union.

CONCLUSION

Although this work provides only a basic mapping of the material, which would require much more space and time to elaborate more thoroughly, it can be stated that the issue cannot be narrowed merely to the organizational network of associations connected to the US headquarters in Prague. The ideological, religious, political and social aspects reach much further and are part of international movements. While at first it was primarily an evangelical apostolic mission, due to its massive financial endowment, a tendency towards a non-ecclesiastical organization was established; this, however, promoted a certain way of thinking, lifestyle and world view. The difference between the original evangelical organizations and the later American ones is clearly

⁸² National Archive, NAD collection No. 410, box 5, file 410-5-1.

⁸³ The preliminary liquidation decision was made on 30 November 1950 at an unofficial meeting of YWCA branch representatives; National Archive NAD collection No. 410, box No. 4, file 410-4-1.

⁸⁴ The following were present at the meeting; chairs of action committees: prof. Hromádka (YMCA), Mrs. Friedländer (YWCA); association chairs: senior Klouček, Mrs. Kalousková; central directors: Velkoborský, Fraňková; for the Academic YMCA Mr. Drapák, for Prague YMCA Apl. Hušek; Finance Director First.

evident not only in the financial background, but also in the immense differences in the social status of the representatives of both currents. The American YMCA was primarily to promote the American spirit in Europe – “The Gospel of Americanism” – and this it certainly did. Europe was and is under the influence of Americanization, and even in the Czech Lands, the great popularity of American culture, thought and the hierarchy of values was already manifest in the inter-war period. In practice, this was reflected not only in the YMCA’s reputation which persists to this day, but also in spontaneous manifestations such as the hiking movement.

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