

Monsieur le Président,  
My Lords,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was with special pleasure that I accepted the invitation of Lord Lloyd to come here to-day to perform the opening ceremony of this national centre which the British Council has established for Czechoslovaks in Britain.

The work which the British Council is doing at the present time has the whole-hearted approval and support of His Majesty's Government. The Council's task is nothing less than to ensure that the British way of life is made known to foreign peoples, and that thus the benefit of war-time co-operation between Britain and her Allies is continued beyond the war by a mutual comprehension of our respective cultures. This work will now be extended to our friends and allies of Czechoslovakia.

Britain and her Allies are fighting for the freedom of Europe. It is a fight which has gone on now for hundreds of years, for there have always been tyrants and oppressors who have wished to enslave their smaller neighbours. In that long struggle no people has a finer record than yours. You have retained your national identity, your own culture and your love of freedom during three hundred years of foreign rule.

In 1918, Czechoslovakia became once more a free nation. Now again her land is in the clutches of a tyrant - but this time it will not be so long before that tyrant is utterly overthrown.

Under the wise and inspiring rule of a very great statesman, Thomas Masaryk, Czechoslovakia became not only a happy nation and a free nation, but a hard nation; and Czechoslovaks are fighting now side by side with the forces of Britain and Poland and the other Allies with the fire and determination of men who will never endure bondage.

Moreover, the Czechoslovaks at home are continuing, with such means as they have, to wage the war with us. Their courage and their spirit is unbroken, and from time to time I am greatly moved and encouraged by the news of some noble act of opposition by those gallant Czechoslovaks who have now to suffer the rule of Hitler's Gestapo.

This Institute will be, I know, a valuable centre for the Czechoslovak community in Britain, which now numbers

2  
W.A.

some fifteen thousand men and women. But I hope that it will be something more than that; it will be the means by which British people may gain an ever-increasing knowledge and understanding of the Czechoslovak people and culture.

We are not ignorant here of the Czechoslovak contribution to civilization. The names of Hus and Comenius, of Smetana and Dvorak, of Karel Capek, who created in his Robots the first Nazis long before Hitler came to the fore, and above all of Masaryk, that great statesman who was also a great philosopher - these names are famous not only in Britain but through the civilised world. They are but representatives of that national culture for which this Czechoslovak Institute stands.

I should like to recall this afternoon a letter which the Chairman of the British Council, Lord Lloyd, wrote a little over two years ago to the "Times" newspaper. It was a letter in which he expressed the gratitude of Britain to Czechoslovakia in that time of crisis. The behaviour of the Czechoslovak people, he said "must command the admiration and respect of any civilised nation"; and he contrasted that behaviour with what he called "the arrogance and rage of their chief adversary".

It is in that spirit that the British Council offers this Institute to the Czechoslovak people; and it is with a deep sense of the comradeship uniting our two countries that I now declare the Institute open.

W  
# 2  
# 3  
# 4  
# 5

6.4"

Mr. John Greenwood





M. JAN MASARYK'S SPEECH,  
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE  
CZECHOSLOVAK INSTITUTE, 'JANUARY 21st 1941.

President Benes, Mr. Eden, My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I was seldom more pleased and honoured than when my Government chose me to express our thanks to the British Council, to His Majesty's Government and to Mr. Anthony Eden, His Majesty's principal Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

Before I do say thank you, I wish to say on behalf of all of us that we are very sorry that Lord Lloyd, whose able, energetic and unceasing activities as Chairman of the British Council are so well-known and appreciated, is unable to be present with us to-day. His speedy recovery is our unanimous wish. I also miss Mr. Bruce Lockhart, an old friend of Czechoslovakia, whose not easy task it is to be the very able liason between the British and the Czechoslovak Governments.

I wish to thank most especially Sir John Chancellor for his friendly and unceasing interest, and besides him, Mr. Braden, Mr. O'Brien, Mr. Steel and Mr. Mann, and many others connected with the British Council whom I cannot enumerate, whose selfless labours made this event possible. I wish to greet our Belgian, Norwegian, Polish friends and Allies. I am looking forward to an opening of a great Anglo-Czechoslovak and a Polish-Czechoslovak Institute in Prague after the war.

The relations between England and Czechoslovakia, former Bohemia, are very old. The ancient and noble University of Prague, founded in 1348 by King Charles IV and closed in 1939 by Hitler, has been in constant touch with Oxford ever since the end of the 14th century. The daughter of this great king, Ann, married your king Richard II. Then your Wyclif and our John Huss. And the great Czech artist, Hollar, whose classical etchings and engravings made during his lengthy stay in England, are well-known and treasured by every Czech; and it is a picture by Hollar which, I believe, is the only one to show us what London looked like before the Great Fire of 1666. You have mentioned Dvorak, Sir. This year is the hundredth anniversary of his birth and in every musical centre in Great Britain he is being remembered. Dvorak came to England nine times and always had a magnificent reception. Capek, the most humanitarian of our modern authors in the best sense of the word, whom your people like so well, because the British culture is the most humanitarian of all. And it is this culture which it is the noble task of the British Council to propagate on the Continent of Europe.

The influence of English literature and philosophy in Czechoslovakia is tremendous. The Czech translation of Milton's "Paradise Lost" is one of our literary treasures. A whole generation of Czech romantics were under the deep influence of Lord Byron, and for centuries there was not one literary generation in Bohemia, who would not have a go at translating Shakespeare. *Laughter!*

I would not do justice to my task to-day if I did not mention the first President of the Czechoslovak Republic, who all his life was in closest possible contact with English philosophy and literature. John Stewart Mill, Hume, Spencer and others were household names in his family circle. Over a book of an English philosopher did he meet his wife.

Charlotte Bronte, Elizabeth Browning were long his favourite authors, Galsworth, G.B. Shaw and H.G. Wells, personal friends, Walpole, Konrad, Swinerton, Houghton and many, many others part of the Masaryk atmosphere. These are just a few examples and proofs of the cultural,

religious, scientific and personal Anglo-Czechoslovak friendships which we are continuing and which it is our firm resolve to increase and deepen, once the world is rid of Hitler's vulgar gangsterism.

You have mentioned, Sir, the struggle of our people at home against their Nazi oppressors. They deserve your praise and they will not fail you; and may I say on behalf of the Czechoslovaks who are present in this room to-day and who are present in these islands at this time, that we are proud to have the opportunity of witnessing this greatest struggle ever waged for a righteous cause in the history of our civilisation. May I say, Sir, that we never for one minute doubted the outcome of it. Our airmen, together with the magnificent R.A.F. are doing their little bit to bring the day of victory nearer, and they are glad to give their young lives for this noblest of purposes. Our soldiers are ready to be put in when or where your Army chiefs decide. To be able to help, however humbly, in Great Britain's fight to preserve the decencies of life should be the main political, moral and religious preoccupation of every Czechoslovak.

Before I sit down may I mention another aspect which adds such importance to to-day's ceremony. It is not only culture, the air, and the field of battle which unites us at this moment, it is also the human relationship which is so important. It is not easy to be a refugee, and the fact that this house will be open to Czechoslovaks so that they can meet their British fellow-beings and occasionally get a pat on the back, that fact, Sir, fills me with deep gratitude and for that I thank the British Council especially warmly. And while I have touched the human chord, let me finish on it.

Two men who are intimately connected with to-day's ceremony, stand out in my grateful memory of the hardest days of my life. Needless to say that I speak of the autumn of 1938. There were a great many others, but these two I wish to mention to-day. One is the Chairman of the British Council, Lord Lloyd, and the other is Mr. Anthony Eden. They both came to me then and gave me that all important pat on the back which every child of God needs when in terrible trouble. For that kind deed I shall never cease being grateful.

I wish the Czechoslovak Institute God-speed for its necessary and lovely activities. I wish the British Council God-speed and expansion. I wish His Majesty's Government strength and health for the near future which is certainly not going to be altogether easy. When it was necessary for Lord Halifax to start on his historic mission to the great Western democracy I somehow had no doubt who was going to be the new head of the Foreign Office. During your tenure of office as War Minister, Sir, the great victory of His Majesty's forces in Africa was prepared and started. May it please Providence to give you the same and even greater success in your new high office into which you re-entered surrounded by the good wishes of all believers in decent, disciplined, cultures and civilised democracy.