

Ukrainian Scientific Centre in Prague within Soviet Occupation in Spring 1945

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Abstract

The Ukrainian scientific center in Prague was the main representative of Ukrainian science and education in Europe from 1921 until 1945. In time of Soviet occupation of Ukraine Prague became the only possible city for free investigations in history, ethnology, language, law, economics, politics and other sciences. This center was fully recognized as the Ukrainian Free University that provided educational and scientific work. A lot of Ukrainian scholars came to the university from USSR as well as European countries. Unlike other Ukrainian cultural and scientific centers, it was one of a few in educational sphere.

The timeline of the article lies in distinguishing changes for the Ukrainian Free University after Soviet occupation, supposing the idea of moving to another country. It is described the University had a long history and could not be closed. Having got the support of President Tomas Masaryk the university left for Prague from Vienna. For almost 25 years the university had been the main scientific and educational center of Ukrainians in Europe and passed through different periods in its history. Together with the Museum of National Struggle for Liberation, the Ukrainian Technical Husbandry Institute and other scientific organizations the university could represent Ukrainian science and culture abroad. The novelty of the article lies in chronological changes for the university showing how the situation changed when Prague was occupied by the Soviet Army and was involved into soviet military repressions.

Results prove that none of the institutions was not left for another country and continued working till Soviet occupation. The other problem can be found in the article lies in realizing how some of the institutions could work in Bavaria. It is proved staying in cities was dangerous and some of scholars decided to move to any other country. After the decision of the Senate the university continued working in Prague. All the property of the university, a lot of librarian and archive materials were taken to the Soviet Union. The professors who stayed in Prague were arrested and imprisoned in the Soviet Union. Bavaria could be reached by some professors who intended to leave the city. These professors began to find the university in no connection to the administration in Prague.

Keywords: Ukrainian Free University, Ukrainian Husbandry Technical Institute, Museum of National Struggle for Liberty, Prague

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Український науковий центр у Празі під час радянської окупації навесні 1945 року

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Анотація

Український науковий центр у Празі був основним представником української науки і освіти в Європі з 1921 по 1945. У час радянської окупації України Прага стала єдиним можливим містом для вільних досліджень історії, етнології, української мови, права, економіки, політики та інших наук. Освітні і наукові студії зазначених наук були пов'язані з Українським вільним університетом. Багато українських науковців, які працювали в цих галузях, приїхали до університету з СРСР і з європейських країн. На відміну від інших українських культурних і наукових центрів університет був одним з небагатьох, які здійснювали освітню діяльність.

Відтак, мета дослідження полягає у тому, щоб прослідкувати зміни наукового життя університету після радянської окупації Праги, акцентуючи на проблемі переміщення вищої школи до іншої країни. Така проблема впливала з потреби збереження наукового центру, що діяв у Чехословаччині. Варто згадати, що отримавши підтримку президента Томаша Масарика, університет переїхав до Праги з Відня. Протягом майже двадцяти п'яти років університет був основним науковим і освітнім центром українців у Європі і пройшов різні періоди історії. Разом з Музеєм національно-визвольної боротьби, Українським технічно-господарським інститутом та іншими науковими організаціями, університет міг представляти українську культуру і науку закордоном.

Новизна дослідження впливає зі спроби виокремити основні пропозиції щодо діяльності університету навесні 1945 року – залишитися чи покинути чеську столицю з аналізом подальшої долі українського наукового центру. Результати дослідження доводять, що університет не було перенесено до Баварії, а чеську столицю залишала частина науковців. За рішенням сенату університет продовжив працювати у Празі. Усе майно університету після окупації, більшість матеріалів архіву і бібліотеки були вивезені до СРСР. Професори, які залишилися у місті були заарештовані і ув'язнені в радянських тюрмах. До Баварії могли дістатися кілька професорів, що почали відновлювати університет без зв'язку до Праги.

Ключові слова: Український вільний університет, Український технічно-господарський інститут, Музей національно-визвольної боротьби, Прага

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Introduction

History of the Ukrainian scientific center in Prague began in 1921 when the Ukrainian Free University began to work there. Being the first Ukrainian educational institution abroad the university was founded on January 17, 1921 in Vienna by the Ukrainian Journalists and Writers Union, Association of Advocates of Education and Ukrainian Sociology Institute. Due to financial problems of the Ukrainian Journalists and Writers Union, the university was left for Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia. In spite of the official ceremony on October 23 the first lessons took place in the baroque complexes of Charles University, Clementinum and Carolinum, on September 16, 1921.

Having different historical periods, the university got financial support of Tomas Masaryk and the Czechoslovakian government, risked to be closed in 1930-ies, according to close political ties between Czechoslovakia and Soviet Union, had a possibility to be left for Uzhhorod or Khust and met with new reality in Nazi occupation. Since 1939, the university was controlled by Nazi administration. It is been found that professors had to approve their Aryan origin. Taking this fact into consideration, we can understand why the university worked on and was not closed as many other educational and scientific institutions. Moreover, the university got financial dotation and was in responsibility of the mandatory for Slavic institutions (Kokosh, 2021, 32-34).

The problem of the university in Prague within Soviet occupation is not studied enough in modern historiography.

The Prague period of the university was described in works of contemporaries. Here we should mention *Ukrainian Emigre. Cultural Work of Ukrainian Emigre at Interwar* by Symon Narizhny published in 1942. It gives main information about the structure of the university and its main activity in educational and scientific sphere as well as relations with Czechoslovakian authorities. However, taking into consideration time this work was written we should emphasize there is no information about the university in 1945 (Narizhny, 1942, 367). The next work describing the university in Prague is the article by Nataliia Polonska-Vasylenko *Storinky Spohadiv* published in *Ukrainsky Istoryk* journal in 1965. This is the only article describing how the group of Ukrainian professors left for Bavaria in spring 1945 and how they could reach Germany at time of issues with transport (Polonska-Vasylenko, 1965, 39-47). Later, the author wrote more articles about the university, but taking into consideration archive materials, we can say some aspects of the history there are not correct. However, Polonska-Vasylenko was not the only professor writing about the university. Some information of its history was given in works by Ivan Mirtschuk, Andrii Jakovliv, Roman Holiat etc. Ivan Mirtschuk had written the short chapters about the history of the Ukrainian Free University in the

miscellany in 1948 and 1956 with lack of information of the Prague period. Moreover, the author did not explain how the university began to work in Munich. Some years later, in 1964 Roman Holiat published *Short History of the Ukrainian Free University* talking about the university since its formation in Vienna till current period. However, this book contained some not correct pieces of information and did not explain what changed for the university in 1945. This book, though, gives more information about Munich period particularly the funding of the university from the USA and Canada (Holiat, 1964, 32). One of those describing the activity of the university in Prague was the book written by Stepan Vidniansky. Showing the educational and scientific process, the author described the formation of the university and its regulations (Vidniansky, 1994, 81).

Researched these papers and modern paid to the university we cannot explain why the university moved to Munich. Having no clear understanding of the university in 1945 we need to realize if it was left for Bavaria or continued working in Prague till the occupation. To answer this question, the author refers to his previous works. The problem of the Ukrainian Free University was described in the article *Ukrainian Higher School in Bavaria. The Ukrainian Free University and the Ukrainian Technical Husbandry Institute* (Kokosh, 2018, 129-137). That article was the first attempt to find roots of these institutions in Munich in 1945. Having got enough archive materials the author has published the book *Institutional Formation of the Ukrainian Free University in Bavaria in 1945-1950*. Written for the hundred anniversary of the university, the book explained the process of formation the university in Bavaria with detailed description of its structure, educational process and relations with Bavarian officials to get the Decree of the Ministry for education and religion recognizing the master and doctor scientific decrees (Kokosh, 2021, 204).

This article is an attempt to simplify the picture of the Ukrainian scientific center in Prague in 1945, describing main changes for Ukrainian institutions and scholars with Soviet occupation.

The main purpose of the article is to explain the problem of the Ukrainian scientific center in Prague in spring 1945. Distinguishing Ukrainian scientific institutions and academic staff, the author tries to prove that all of the institutions continued working till Soviet occupation. Trying to highlight the process of closing the Ukrainian Free University and the Museum of National Struggle for Liberty the article describes arresting and repressions Ukrainian scholars.

The Ukrainian scientific center in 1945.

A new page of history for the university began in 1945. The events of World War II did not pass Prague. In the first decade of 1945 soviet military troops moved from eastern direction. In January the 2d Belarusian front defeated the 2d German Army to the North of Warsaw and on January 17 the city was occupied. At the same

time the 1st Ukrainian and the 1st Belarusian Fronts moved to General Government of Polish lands from Warsaw to Jaslo. In the late January this army got to the Oder. On February, 24 the Soviet Army took the control in Pomerania and Silesia and in March moved through Slovakia (Natkiel, 1985, 162). On May 8 the Soviet Army got to the city and reality of beautiful architectural Prague had changed. The city was destroyed with no light or communications. German soldiers moved in the suburbs of Prague to reach countries controlled by allies in hope for just court. All roads leading to the city were blocked and streets were full of people who with different emotions reacted at the Soviet Army. Soviet agents showed their nature and robbed or killed citizens, blaming them in cooperation with Nazis.

In the war atmosphere Ukrainian professors made up their mind to move to another city. Those professors who remembered living in cities of Soviet Ukraine decided to leave for Bavaria. In April professors of the Philosophy Department propose to the Senate to leave Prague in full academic staff as well as the library, archive and all the university to the nearest country. Neither the Senate, nor the Law Department supported the plan and insisted on working on in Prague. Among the scientists who decided to leave for Bavaria were rector Andriy Iakovliv and the dean of the Philosophy Department, professor Vadym Shcherbakivsky, taking it into account, the Senate agreed to allow to leave Prague for professors but not in the full staff. The university stayed in Prague with a new board. Priest Augustyn Voloshyn became the rector of the university, Vadym Shcherbakivsky was changed by a famous Ukrainian ethnologist Ivan Pankevych and a new dean of the Law Department became a lawyer Oleksandr Haimanivsky. The professors leaving the university got financial support and had to be back when the university could continue teaching students (Polonska-Vasylenko, 1965, 22).

Taking into consideration the decision of the Senate we can prove that the Ukrainian Free University was not fully left for Bavaria. It continued working in Prague till Soviet occupation in 1945. It allows to realize why all the archives' materials from Prague are not saved in the archive of the Ukrainian Free University nowadays. Also, this fact adds the history of the university and allows to understand what happened to the Rector and Deans in 1945, explaining why the university began to work in Bavaria.

Those professors who stayed in Prague could leave the city by carriages of the Ukrainian Technical Husbandry Institute. On April 13, 1945, the Senate of the Institute made the decision to leave Podiebrad to any safe place in Czechia. On April 23 the staff left the city in two carriages and went through Prague to Domazlice. In Prague these scientists were joined by Kornii Nishchemenko and others decided to stay in the city or have already left it. This route was not taken into consideration by the Rector of the Ukrainian Free University Monsignor Augustyn Voloshyn and on April 26 the train went to Gorazdovice.

After American jet striking the station one of the carriages was burnt and the other was robbed at night. All the trains at the station were ruined and the staff had to reach the city. On May 16 those scientists got to Plzeň and met their professor Andriy Iakovliv, previous Rector, and the dean of the Law Department Lev Shramchenko (Ukrainsky Tekhnichno-Hospodarsky Instytut, 1962, 50-52).

Live of those professors who decided to stay in the city changes when the Soviet army began looking for Ukrainian scientists. On May 14, Soviet agents arrested the rector Monsignor Augustyn Voloshyn and closed the university. The former President of Carpathian Ukraine was one of those whom the Soviet Army wanted to imprison. His decision to stay in Prague led to his being taken to the prison of Lefortovo on May 21. After this arrest, Soviet agents imprisoned other professors of the Ukrainian Free University and the Ukrainian Technical Husbandry Institute. Among them were Valentyn Sadovsky, Maksym Slavinsky, Mykola Dobrylovsky, Ivan Pankevych, Oleksandr Haimanivsky, etc. (Prokhoda, 1972, 324). Moreover, the library and banking account of the university were arrested.

A few days before, on May 4, the commissar for internal affairs of Ukrainian SSR Valentyn Riasny wrote to the commissar for internal affairs of the Soviet Union Lavrenti Beria about archive materials in Troppau and Berlin taken there during the war and institutions of Ukrainian and German nationalists in Berlin, Prague and other cities. In July, 1945 the archive searching team went to Czechoslovakia (Boriak, 2011, 163). The team consisted of Pavlo Pavliuk, the Director of the Main Archive Department of NKVD USSR, Hordi Pshenychny, the Director of the Central State Film and Photo Archive, and Hryhori Neklesa, the Director of the Archive Department in Lviv region. We can suppose that the archive of the university was taken to the Soviet Union in summer 1945 with archives of the Ukrainian Husbandry Technical Institute from Podiebrad, Ukrainian National Association, Russian Historical Archive and Ukrainian Historical Cabinet working there since 1925 (Kokosh, 2021, 44-45).

A lot of Ukrainians knew Soviet nature but made up their mind to stay in Prague. Trying to understand their decision, we can offer some reasons that Ukrainian scientists did not leave the city. Some of them could not leave for any other city due to their family reasons. Such was the couple of Kateryna and Dmytro Antonovych. The professor was ill and had no possibility to move to another city searching transport or walking long distance. Others did not think about going to another country not believing that previous Czech traditional life could be changed. Due to communist propaganda in 1945, they did not believe that new regime can hurt scholars. Such as Valentyn and Lidia Sadovsky, Maksym and Maria Slavinsky, Yuri and Mykola Dobrylovsky refused to leave Czech territories and continued to live there in spite of Soviet army that reached the city.

Five days later the university was closed, soviet regime closed the Museum of National Struggle for Liberation which was founded in 1925 in Prague. The building of the Museum was partly destroyed on May 14 by allies' military jets. Therefore museum's materials were taken to the house of Ivan Pankevych and other places, later almost a million of those museum units were taken to the National and University Libraries in Clementinum and Ministry of Internal Affairs. Trying to appeal the decision of confiscation the Director of the Museum Symon Narizhny sent a letter to Stalin that was an attempt to explain the Museum was a scientific institution with no financial support of the state government. Referring to the international law, the Director proved allies' property could not be contribution and taken to Soviet Union. As a result, Soviet Military Mission in Prague received an order to lift the arrest (Mushynka, 2005, 23-24). On September 24 the commission made a report about giving the museum materials to the National and University libraries in Prague. Symon Narizhny did not agree with the decision to give the Ukrainian inheritance to Czechs and in his second letter to Stalin the scientist demanded to give the materials to Association "Ukrainian Museum". On November 6 all the materials were given to the Ukrainians. However, later all the materials were taken off and the Director could do nothing to change the decision.

A group of professors Vadym Shcherbakivsky, Natalia Polonska-Vasylenko, Oleksandr Morhun, Oleksandr Ohloblyn, Panteleimon Kovaliv, Svitozar Drahomanov and Volodymyr Miiakovsky were trying to find a possibility to leave Prague. In spring 1945, when roads and railway were destroyed, it was a real issue. Volodymyr Miiakovsky offered to use service of a student promising to help leave the country for cigarettes that were specific 'currency'. A day before the planned trip the student refused to help, and the professors should have looked for new possibility to move to Bavaria. Cigarettes, they could find, were exchanged to a carriage. Finally, to the trip the professors could take all the necessary and had to leave their scientific papers in Prague. As a result, in April 1945 these professors could leave the city going through Vimperk to Augsburg.

A way of these professors to Vimperk took nine days instead of eight hours. Getting there, the scholars had to

hide in areas at time of air bombing and to wait for the carriage to be hitched to a train. When those scientists reached the city the railway was ruined and the professors had to look for a possibility to leave Vimperk. Having no chance to find the transport the professors spent May in the city and at last finding a truck the scholars got to Trsfelden village near Passau (Kokosh, 2021, 37-38).

Conclusion

With Soviet occupation of Prague, all of the Ukrainian institutions were closed. The Ukrainian Free University and the Ukrainian Technical Husbandry Institute could begin working in Bavaria some months later due to their academic groups of professors who leaved the city and got to Bavaria. Trying to answer the question about activity of the Ukrainian scientific center in Prague in spring 1945 one should understand how Ukrainian scientific and educational institutions were opened in Bavaria if there was no evacuation in general. The Senate of the university did not agree to leave for another country in full staff and the Ukrainian Free University continued to work in Prague till May 14, 1945. This fact shows that the university could work even within Soviet occupation and was not left for Bavaria before Soviet Army got to Prague. Also, the main opportunities to leave the city were described and the possibility to move from Prague with professors at the Ukrainian Technical Husbandry Institute allows to emphasize these institutions were united in their national scientific thought. Finding main reasons some scientists did not leave Prague or other cities the author could explain why Ukrainian professors stayed in Czechia. Those who decided to stay in Prague believed that the university would continue its educational work and the Soviet Army should not have repressed the professors. Mistaken thoughts of possible life conditions in occupation led to missing the opportunity to evacuate to any other country. As a result, Bavaria could be reached by some professors who intended to leave the city and these professors began to found Ukrainian center in new reality in the post-war Munich. Having the status of displaced persons Ukrainian professors had to unite themselves for Ukrainian science. Since that time the Ukrainian Free University and the Ukrainian Technical Husbandry Institute worked in Germany and their educational and scientific work continued the history of Ukrainian scientific center in Czechoslovakia.

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