

# THE ROYAL BOHEMIAN SOCIETY OF LEARNING: ITS PLACE IN THE STATE, IN THE NATION AND IN THE PUBLIC

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The Royal Bohemian Society of Learning<sup>19</sup>, (RBSL) an institution with a history of one hundred and eighty years, was basically formed as the first academy of science in the multi-national Austrian empire in the last third of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and its activities were ended only in 1952.

The Royal Bohemian Society of Learning was formed in 1769-1784 and was based on the enlightened traditions of its time, which included associations of scientists, which were also typical for Prague.<sup>20</sup> Learned discussions have been held over the years as of the exact date of founding of the Society<sup>21</sup>; however, no one doubts that the Knight Ignác Born was chiefly responsible for its establishment. The year 1771 was an important fixed date in the history of the emerging Prague scientific community, when the first edition of the periodical *Prager gelehrte Nachrichten*, consisting of reviews, was published. However, a different periodical, published under the name *Abhandlungen einer Privatgesellschaft in Böhmen zur Aufnahme der Mathematik, vaterländischen Geschichte und der Naturgeschichte*, was more closely connected with the activities of the Society;

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<sup>19</sup> During the first fifteen years of its activities, RBSL had three different names: The Private Society of Learning, the Czech Society of Learning and the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning. The designation „Royal“ appeared in the name of the society in 1790, when „königl.“ appeared in response to the request that the first volume of the new series of its *Abhandlungen* be dedicated to the new Emperor Leopold II. The representatives of the Society accepted this probably accidental information as official confirmation of elevation of the society to the level of a royal institution. After almost half a century, when attention was drawn to this discrepancy, the adjective „Royal“ was properly confirmed in documents as having been „held“ over the years. More information is given in Antonín KOSTLÁN, *The Royal Bohemian Society of Learning and the beginnings of a new tolerance*, in: *Between the times - Culture and the arts in the Czech lands around the year 1800*, Prague 2000, p. 98-105; Josef KALOUSEK, *The history of the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning with a critical review of its publications in the fields of philosophy, history and philology*, Prague 1885, p. 143.

<sup>20</sup> Older works from the beginnings of the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning, in addition to the already-cited work of J. Kalousek, include particularly Jaroslav PROKEŠ, *The beginnings of the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning to the end of the XVIII century*, Part I, 1774 -1789, Prague 1938; other works on the history of RBSL are listed below.

<sup>21</sup> The basic arguments and the literature were summarized by Jiří BERAN, *Eighty years of discussion on the establishing of the Private Society of Learning*, *History of science and technology* 1, 1968, pp. 237-250.

its first six volumes were published in 1775-1784. The persons contributing to this periodical were considered to be the first members of the Society.<sup>22</sup>

The society of these few outstanding representatives of the individual fields of science met in the environment of aristocratic salons, especially of the Nostic and Fürstenberk families, interwoven with the ideas of the Freemasonry and local patriotism, and was in close contact with the university library and several other centres of learning in Prague. Through its periodicals, the Society readily made contacts with foci of science within the monarchy and outside of it, as language Utraquism remained its character-istic feature throughout its existence.

The Learned Society published the specific results of its creative activities and attempted to obtain official state approval for its existence in a way similar to scientific societies in German lands, France, Britain and elsewhere, that would bring both prestige and material provision for its future activities. However, the attitude of the Austrian monarchs to establishing the academy was reserved or even disapproving<sup>23</sup>. But representatives of the Society refused to be deterred and, when they were able to obtain a private audience with Emperor Josef II during his stay in Prague on September 20, 1784, they submitted their application for recognition together with a request that they be allocated premises and financial assistance.

The reaction of Josef II was an unpleasant surprise for the members of the Society. Not only did the Emperor refuse to officially confirm the existence of the Society, thus refusing it material assistance from the state in the future, but he also explicitly stated that the time had not yet arrived for establishing a “real” academy of sciences in Austria. The immediate consequence of the audience for the Learned Society thus remained the allocation of an unused room in the Carolinum. One of the self-sacrificing organizers of the Society, Jan Mayer, felt so insulted by the Emperor’s decision that he wanted to thank the monarch and refuse this „patronage“. However, the other learned men convinced him that the Emperor’s standpoint could be explained in a much more favourable way and they decided to establish the Society on the basis of its prepared Articles, which were published by the end of 1784 (*Einrichtung und Gesetze der böhm. Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften*). The Articles prescribed the conditions for membership and specified that the Society would be concerned with all the sciences with the exception of theology, the „positive“ legal sciences, and the „beautiful sciences“. (EXCURSUS I)

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<sup>22</sup> Specifically, these were the mathematician Jan Tesánek, astronomer Antonín Strnad, Count František Arnošt Šafgoč, historian František Martin Pelcl, historian and philologist Gelasius Dobner, Slavic scholar Josef Dobrovský and the physician Jan Mayer.

<sup>23</sup> More information can be found in Jiří KOŘALKA, *The Austrian State and the Academy of Sciences*, in: *The Czech Academy of Sciences and the Arts, 1891 - 1991*. Prepared by Jan Novotný and Jiří Pokorný, Prague 1993, pp. 55-64.

On December 4, 1784, at the first meeting following the audience with the Emperor, members of the Learned Society elected as its president Prince Karel Egon Fürstenberk, who held the position of supreme land burgrave, and Count Evžen of Vrbno was elected honorary president. However, the actual running of the Society remained in the hands of the directors and permanent secretaries, who were elected from amongst scientists. Initially, they rotated in short intervals, occasionally only half a year long. Physician Jan Mayer, mentioned above, was the first secretary of the Society, followed by the less hard-working statistician Jan Antonín Riegger, then the Slavic scholar Josef Dobrovský, astronomer Antonín Strnad and Tobiáš Gruber. (EXCURSUS 2)

The specific practical activities of the Learned Society soon indicated the necessity for organizing according to the individual fields of science. Members of the Society began to meet on the basis of the similarity of their scientific interests (e.g., the physics, mathematics and history groups mentioned earlier); however, all the lectures were given at joint meetings. The organization of the Learned Society was affected by a revision of the Articles in 1791, according to which the Society was divided into only two groups, mathematics and patriotism-history groups. However, the organizational scheme changed several times over the prolonged history of RBSL and became fixed only in 1868; thus, to the end of its existence the Society worked in two groups: philosophy-history-philology and mathematics-natural sciences.

The beginnings of the activities of RBSL - investigated in greatest detail from a historiographic standpoint - were characterized by enthusiastic activity. The Society collected sources and prepared the Czech-Moravian Collection of Historical Documents<sup>24</sup> for publication and also organized a renowned natural science expedition to the Giant (Krkonoše) Mountains. A natural science orientation was characteristic for the beginnings of the activity of the Society.<sup>25</sup> Almost annually, RBSL also awarded rewards for answering questions of science that were important for progress in science and also for practical life. The answers to these „valuable“ questions were understandably at various levels. And some weren't answered at all.<sup>26</sup>

The visit of another ruler, Josef's successor Leopold II, was of great importance for the position of the Learned Society when he honoured the Society by his presence at its meeting on September 25, 1791. The president of the Society at that time, Prokop Count Lažanský first read an address on the purpose and

<sup>24</sup> Zdeněk ŠIMEČEK, *Českomoravský diplomatář v programu České společnosti nauk*, RBSL Bulletin, Philosophy-history-philology group No. II, Prague 1952.

<sup>25</sup> Mikuláš TEICH, Royal Bohemian Society of Learning and the beginnings of scientific research on nature in Bohemia, *Rozpravy Československé akademie věd (Discussions of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences)* 1959, Vol. 4.

<sup>26</sup> This subject is discussed in greater detail in J. KALOUSEK, *History of the Czech Learned Society*, *passim*.

usefulness of learned societies in general and especially on establishing the Czech society. Lažanský's speech was followed by a discourse by Josef Antonín Rieger on the conditions of monarchical power in Bohemia, Jáchym Count Šternberk carried out an experiment that attempted to burn diamond in oxygen, Antonín Strnad demonstrated a type of eclipse of the moon and Jiří Procházka described his observations of insects and animals. The meeting was closed by Josef Dobrovský, a respected scientist and convinced Josephinist, with an ingeniously composed speech, "On Constant Loyalty," through which the Slavic nation has remained with the Austrian monarchy throughout time. He explained the importance of the Austrian Empire for the development of Slavic nations, but did not omit mentioning the fact that Slavs formed a considerable part of this Empire, which also depended on them for its accomplishments. Dobrovský's address culminated in a request that the Emperor be so good as to „protect the Czech nationality with its mother tongue, this valuable heritage from their ancestors, against hasty actions and arrogant pressures.”<sup>27</sup>

Emperor Leopold II was so pleased with the progress of his visit that he donated the sum of 6,000 gold pieces to the Learned Society (at that time, its treasury contained less than 50 gold pieces), so that it „would be able to continue in useful ways, experiments and topical descriptions“. These 6,000 gold pieces were the first sum of money that the Society had at its disposal. It used this money mostly to purchase mathematical and meteorological instruments (1,700 gold pieces), invested 300 gold pieces into travel (and mapping) in Northern Bohemia, paid 100 gold pieces for preparations to one of its members, J. Procházka, who was leaving Prague, and returned 500 gold pieces to members who had long kept the Society functioning through their contributions. The remaining amount of this sum (1,000 gold pieces) enabled Josef Dobrovský to embark on his legendary study trip to Sweden<sup>28</sup>, from where he then went to Russia.

The first years of increasing importance, hope and success of the Learned Society were followed by apparent stagnation during the Napoleonic Wars and the subsequent period. Pressure from the state administration increased during the years of the war, foreign literature was less readily available and, in addition, it was subject to considerable censorship. Furthermore, at that time, the members of RBSL, unless they were also professors at a university, did not have free access to all the scientific literature. Emperor Franz was not a great supporter of science

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<sup>27</sup> Litterarische Nachrichten von einer auf Veranlassung der Königl. böhmischen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Im Jahre 1792 unternommenen Reise nach Schweden (und Russland). Published in 1795 in the Discussions and then a year later, cf.: V. A. FRANCEV, The speech of Josef Dobrovský presented on September 25, 1791 at the Bohemian Learned Society, Prague 1926.

<sup>28</sup> For the last time, see Zdeněk HOJDA, Dobrovský's trip for Swedish prey, *Dějiny a současnost* XXV, 2003, No. 5, p. 10-13.

and his statement, which he made during a visit to the lyceum in Ljubljana in 1821 is frequently cited: „... I don't need any learned men, but good, loyal citizens. ... He who serves me must learn what I order: he who is not capable or he who comes to me with new ideas can leave, or I will remove him myself.“

Nonetheless, RBSL continued in its work, with personages of contemporary science such as the philosopher Bernard Bolzano, and the physicist and mathematician, Christian Doppler, who was then residing in Prague. If Josef Dobrovský symbolized the first period of activity of the Society, the succeeding period can justifiably be termed the era of František Palacký. The circumstance that the patriarch of Czech Slavic studies died in 1829, when Palacký became a member of RBSL on the basis of his important work describing the contribution of older Czech historians, can be considered as a symbolic „passing on of the sceptre“. In addition, it was František Palacký who undertook the task of writing the obituary of Josef Dobrovský, of which one of his later publishers, F. M. Bartoš, stated that „it is always a pleasure to listen when a great man speaks of a great man“.<sup>29</sup>

Palacký was a personage endowed with great scope and exceptional scientific and organizational talents. At that time, from the beginning of the thirties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, his first fundamental works were written, including the concept for the monumental *History of the Czech Nation*, and his study trips also occurred during this period.<sup>30</sup> Indefatigable Palacký was simultaneously an active member of the Society of the Patriotic Museum in Bohemia and of the editorial board of its journal and, from 1839, also secretary and moving force of RBSL. According to Bernard Bolzano, Palacký „breathed life into its dead body“ as, in contrast to his predecessors, he was able to obtain broader support for his ideas. In particular, Palacký managed to ensure that the Society was far more active. He gave emphasis to regular meetings, promoted renewal of lectures and a change in the previous structure of RBSL in connection with the emergence of specialized fields<sup>31</sup>, amongst which philology, Slavic studies and history were most successful. He was also responsible for a considerable increase in the number of members, especially through expanding the number of extraordinary members (to 12) and honorary members. The representatives of the patriotic society, including P. J. Šafařík, were elected to RBSL, and members were also derived from the

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<sup>29</sup> František PALACKÝ, *Život a vědecké působení Josefa Dobrovského (The life and scientific work of Josef Dobrovský)*, ed. F. M. Bartoš, Prague 1939, p. 3

<sup>30</sup> For more information on the work of František Palacký, see Jiří KOŘALKA, *František Palacký*, Prague 1999, esp. p. 79-87.

<sup>31</sup> In 1840, RBSL was divided into four fields, the fields of mathematics, the natural sciences, history and Czech-philology; a further change occurred in 1841, when a fifth field was established for philosophy, headed by Bernard Bolzano (similar to the field of classical philology). In 1845, the fields of mathematics and philosophy coalesced to form a single field.

bourgeoisie.<sup>32</sup> Palacký also proposed and ensured that new members included personages that could contribute to RBSL both through their scientific erudition and also through their influence at the centre of the Monarchy (e.g., the Viennese archivist Josef Chmel in 1839, the statistician and ethnographer Karel Czoernig in 1840 and the orientalist Josef Hammer-Purgstall in 1843), as well through their position in Prague, for example, the Director of the Public and University Library, Antonín Spirko. Palacký was not always successful in his proposals. For example, he did not manage to implement his idea that RBSL be the organizer of scientific work in the country, and he failed to win approval of his innovative plan to allow non-members to attend meetings of RBSL. Fears of the consequences of the latter suggestion were expressed at the time both by some of Palacký's colleagues in RBSL and also by some representatives of the state. As late as 1846/47, as is documented in the archives of police offices, on the instructions of the emperor, consideration was given to the possibility of limiting the number of meetings of natural scientists and other branches of science in the territory of the monarchy, as well as the participation of domestic scientists in similar meetings abroad.

The revolutionary years 1848/9 also brought changes for RBSL. Prestigious confirmation of the results of their work meant that members of the Learned Society were allowed to lecture at the university. However, it was soon demonstrated on the example of I. J. Hanuš that this privilege was not always respected (it was officially abolished in 1872). However, the following months and years brought more fundamental consequences for the activities of the Society. The defeat of the revolution, the exposé of the „May conspiracy“ in May 1849 and, in this connection, the declaration of a state of siege in Prague, which lasted until 1853, meant a general increase in political pressure. In addition, the end of the forties and beginning of the fifties brought about a fundamental change for RBSL in its funding (see Excursus 3 below). The decrease in activities in the fifties was exacerbated by the fact that Palacký withdrew from public life and did not even attend meetings of the Society. In relation to its unfortunate financial situation, RBSL attempted to elect, as members, persons that it hoped could have influence in high places. Thus, in 1857, Minister Alexander Bach became a member of RBSL and, in connection with the necessity for a contact with the Land assembly, Earl Jiří of Lobkovice became a member in 1857. Important representatives of the state administration, high Austrian officials or ambassadors were always amongst the members of RBSL and there were more than ten of them at that time. Some worked at the Ministry of Justice (e.g., Antonín Jaroslav Beck), others were employed by the Ministry of Culture and Education (e.g., Gustav Heider,

<sup>32</sup> For illustration, the regular members were extended to include, e.g., F. L. Čelakovský, K. J. Erben, J. E. Purkyně, Antonín Strobach, W. W. Tomek and Jan E. Wocel, and the extraordinary members included, e.g., Josef Čejka, František Doucha, V. K. Klicpera, F. St. Kodým, J. P. Koubek, V. B. Nebeský, K. B. Štorch, Václav Staněk, J. Sl. Tomíček, Josef Wenzig and K. V. Zap.

Josef Alexandr Helfert and later, e.g., Antha Leopold Hasner). Police Director Sacher-Masoch of Kronenthal was elected a member of RBSL in 1852 and Karel Mecséry von Tschóor, Vice-Regent in Bohemia, was elected in 1858.

The activities of RBSL, similar to the life of society as a whole, had been rejuvenated in the sixties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; e.g., the Articles were reviewed in 1867 and Palacký was re-elected President of RBSL a year later. The official position of RBSL changed only formally after issuing of the federal law in 1867: de iure it was at the level of a private association, but de facto it remained on the list of institutions supported by the government in Vienna and by the land committee. (EXCURSUS 3)

However, at the beginning of the sixties, RBSL was in a different situation than in the past from another point of view - the freer social atmosphere after adoption of the October Diploma in 1860 soon led to establishment of a number of associations and societies in scientific and professional life (amongst others the Všeohrd Legal Association and the Union of Czech Philologists in Prague in 1868, the Union of Czech Mathematicians and Physicists in 1869 and the Historical Club in 1872). RBSL retained its traditional scope during this period. Primarily, it remained a bilingual society, to which domestic Germans were also elected, although their activities and numbers became less important from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The coexistence of Czech and German scientists in scientific and university institutions was first terminated in 1869 at the Institute of Technology and the Karlo-Ferdinand University was also divided in 1882. The immediate result of this was that, in addition to the internationally renowned physicist Ernst Mach, Heinrich Jacob, Karl Durége, Gustav Karl Laube and Moriz Willkomm also resigned their membership in RBSL. The philologist Alfred Ludwig remained a loyal and diligent member of RBSL. After 1882, with only a few exceptions, Germans were not elected as members of RBSL, including the most important representatives of the German University. The period between the World Wars in independent Czechoslovakia meant practically the end of statutory Utraquism, although there were always a few German scientists amongst members of the Society until 1945.

After obtaining a university in their national language and with its increasing self-confidence, the Society of Learning began attempts to establish a national scientific institution, the Academy of Sciences. Jan Evangelista Purkyně had already outlined its possible form in the sixties. While his ideas were not realized, the future architects of the Czech Academy and its organizers were always aware of them. For some time, it seemed that RBSL had the greatest prospects of success in creating this academy.<sup>33</sup> Josef Jireček, Minister of Culture and Education

<sup>33</sup> The latest work on this aspect is Jiří POKORNÝ, *Odkaz Josefa Hlávky (The Heritage of Josef Hlávka)*, in press. Older works include Jiří BERAN, *Vznik České akademie věd a umění v dokumentech (The Formation of the Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts in Documents)*, Prague 1989.

(1871) in the Government of Count Karl Hohenwart, preparing the Czech settlement, was the first to start negotiations to this end. This was at a time when it seemed possible to attain the goal for a separate Czech state. However, the lack of success of this attempt also decided the fate of Jireček's initiative to establish the academy. Jireček attempted to change the position of RBSL nine years later when, as president of RBSL, he requested that Emperor Franz Josef I grant the Society the character of a public corporation, which could rely on regular state subsidies. However, this attempt was also not successful. The Minister of Culture and Education at that time rejected his proposal in deference to the standpoint of the Viennese Academy of Sciences and that the Czech Vice-Regent that RBSL was concerned only with nationalistic and not scientific goals. Both attempts to reform RBSL were thus unsuccessful, although they were made at a time when relations between the Czech nation and the monarchy were quite favourable.

Discussions of the character and future of RBSL soon arose again. T. G. Masaryk, one of the first professors at the Czech University in Prague, whose experience and scope of knowledge certainly exceeded those of his colleagues, suggested that a second university be established. However, he especially emphasized that an „academy of sciences, truly Czech“ be established to support scientific work and for Czech students, that would „be an instrument of our scientific aspirations. Thus, the Academy would not be concerned only with publishing works (mainly monographs) that are not extensively purchased in any nation, but would also ensure that the Czech public and especially students would obtain the necessary instructive books as soon as possible... Let us make no mistake: Czech universities are impossible without a Czech Academy.“<sup>34</sup>

The historian Antonín Rezek basically supported Masaryk's ideas, but modified them substantially in one respect. He explained that it is not possible to expect that a Czech Academy could be established on the basis of a national collection or donations from patrons. And the state will also not support its establishment. Under these circumstances, because we must have an Academy, he fully agreed with Masaryk in this respect, that the only option is to create it from the RBSL.<sup>35</sup>

The discussion on the character and future of RBSL was renewed following an external impulse related to the magnanimous patronage activities of Josef Hlávka.<sup>36</sup> After going through a difficult period in his life, once and again completely active and fully aware, this former successful builder and architect, who was active in conservative political circles, was once a substantial force in Czech

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<sup>34</sup> T. G. MASARYK, *Jak zvelebovati naši literaturu naukovou? (How to improve our instructive literature?)*, Athenaeum. Listy pro literaturu a kritiku 2, 1884/1885, 270-275.

<sup>35</sup> Antonín REZEK, *Jak zvelebovati naši literaturu naukovou? (How to improve our instructive literature)*, Athenaeum. Listy pro literaturu a kritiku 3, 1884/1886, 41-46.

<sup>36</sup> A basic monograph was published by Alois LODR, *Josef Hlávka*, Prague 1988.

scientific and artistic life. He basically became the executor of his own last will and testament, which he had already written, and decided to implement in his own behalf what he had expected, during his serious illness, would be carried out by others.

Josef Hlávka first tried to modify RBSL. In connection with the anniversary of this institution in 1884, he donated 20,000 gold pieces for the establishment of the Jubilee Fund for Czech scientific literature, which he increased by 5,000 gold pieces in each of the subsequent three years. Similar to his other patronage activities, Hlávka assumed that he would have successors, other patrons. In this respect, he was disappointed as he was followed only by the highest land Earl, Prince Jiří of Lobkovice, who donated 2,000 gold pieces. RBSL did not react to Hlávka's exceptionally generous gift by changing either its program or its priorities. Hlávka's activities also increased with the approach of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coronation of Emperor Franz Josef I (1888). In cooperation with the political elite and through his own economic strength, Hlávka purposefully and confidently attempted to implement his plans, i.e., to establish a Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts (CASA).

In these negotiations, the relationship to the already existing and, in the Articles, clearly defined profile of RBSL was long left unresolved. Hlávka first considered incorporating it into the future Academy, and thus accelerated the process of its becoming purely Czech. Later, he proposed that RBSL merge with the Academy itself as its Classes I. and II. Hlávka's proposal for the Articles of the Academy of Sciences in March 1889 was supported by respected scientists, representatives of RBSL František Josef Studnička, Josef Kalousek and Josef Emler, who then invited Václav Vladivoj Tomek and Karel Kořistka. They expressed their opinion on the Articles only as professionals, and not as members of RBSL because, according to an older resolution of October 1888, RBSL was not to interfere in these matters. Discussions were held for a long time on the relationship of RBSL and the new Academy - Hlávka's initiative was almost thwarted by these aspects. Hlávka feared that, if RBSL did not join the new Academy, it could be lost for Czech science, as the Government could see it as an institution that formed a German counterpart to its Academy. Finally, the concept of ignoring RBSL in considerations on the establishment of the new Academy was adopted. Then, from 1891 (when the Czech Academy of Emperor Franz Josef I for Science, Literature and the Arts began its activities), the two institutions existed side by side.

From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the activities of RBSL were regularly characterized in annual reports in that „it only rarely turns away from calm, intensive work, but does not avoid agreeable obligations, consisting either in pleasant participation in the celebration of important moments in scientific collectives, with which it has long been in friendly contact, or honouring the memories of men contributing to science“.

There were several kinds of foreign contacts of RBSL; members from abroad were elected to RBSL, and publications were exchanged<sup>37</sup>; later a new phenomenon emerged, *viz.*, the publishing of periodicals of articles in foreign languages. RBSL especially emphasized exchange of publications, justifiably boasted of this and referred to it when its independent existence was endangered. Contacts of the library of RBSL began in 1816, when it began to exchange publications with the Moravian Patriotic-Economic Society. Its contacts with foreign institutions increased to 1952 and it finally maintained contacts with more than 560 institutions in about 50 countries around the world. It was thus said figuratively the „the sun never set“ on the publications of RBSL: for example, in 1938, its publications were sent to probably all the countries of Europe and also to Japan, many places in the USA, to La Plata and Montevideo in South America, to Mexico, Bermuda and to Sydney in Australia. (EXCURSUS 4)

A new stage in the activities of RBSL began after establishment of the independent Czechoslovak Republic in 1918. RBSL immediately supported the newly formed state; however, under the new social conditions, it was faced by increasing competition in its activities, *i.e.*, with newly formed universities and higher institutes of learning, as well as institutions outside of universities. These included the Masaryk Labour Academy, the Czechoslovak Scientific Committee, the Slavic Institute and the Oriental Institute. RBSL defined itself in this newly delimited space: „Again now, our society proudly and loyally supports international and national work, as it wishes to be a scientific society that is Czech from the inside and not Utraquistic as to date, but it simultaneously wishes to retain what was in the past and remains its significant and joint proud possession, and thus, next to the Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts, the reason for its further existence, its internationality. In addition, the purely Czech functioning RBSL - this historically proven name, which is far from all political tendencies, will hopefully be fully applicable in the future - it wishes to continue to be a reliable mediator between the learned domestic environment and that around the world and, in its publications, intends to continue to provide space in the future to written works in one of the international languages, including Latin or in one of the Slavic languages“.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> In this respect, see Jiří BERAN, *Foreign Relation of the Royal Bohemian Society of Science and the Czech Academy of Science and Arts from 1851 to 1914*, Acta historiae rerum naturalium necnon technicarum Special Issue 7, Prague 1974, cont. Special Issue 9, Prague 1977, pp. 49-86; see also Magdaléna POKORNÁ, *Zahraniční kontakty České akademie věd a umění (Foreign contacts of the Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts)*, in: The Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts, Prague 1993, pp 65 - 89.

<sup>38</sup> Report of activities for 1918.

A specific manifestation of this effort on the part of RBSL was publication of *Revue des Travaux scientifiques tchécoslovaques*. In cooperation with the Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts, the Revue was intended to provide a foreign-language resume of Czech scientific work, in two series according to its classes. It was not a simple matter to establish a new periodical and in the end it was unsuccessful because of lack of finances at the time of the economic crisis at the beginning of the thirties. The Collection of Czechoslovak Chemical Communications was a similar project but with a narrow scientific emphasis. Under the editorship of the experienced and internationally respected scientists, Emil Votoček and Jaroslav Heyrovský, it was intended to provide the results of Czech chemists to the international professional public in French and English.

In the period between the Wars, a new type of work appeared or became more important in the work of RBSL, viz., work in commissions. The first of these, in whose activities the Society participated, was the Commission for Publication of the Czech Archives, established in 1886. However, the Commission for Evaluation and Publication of the Scientific Works of Bernard Bolzano was more emphatic and yielded better results in 1924. The Commission for Publication of the Works of Josef Dobrovský was established in 1930 thanks to the great jubilee donation of T.G. Masaryk of one million CZK.<sup>39</sup> This extensive project was all set to begin in 1930 and anticipated the printing of the scientific works of Josef Dobrovský and his correspondence. It was apparent that the project could not be finished in less than ten years and thus consideration was given to the idea that it could be completed on the anniversary of Josef Dobrovský's death, i.e., in 1953. The scope of the work, the lack of time of individual editors, the events of the war and later also the reorganization of scientific life in Czechoslovakia combined to preclude the completion of this extensive project by the anticipated deadline, as frequently happens with projects of this type. In spite of all the problems and difficulties, a total of twenty volumes emerged from the original proposal (the last was published after termination of the activities of RBSL as a publication of the newly established institutions of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences).

The occupation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany also had consequences for RBSL. Membership in it was terminated by the Nürnberg laws, e.g., for Arnošt Kraus and Emil Schönbaum. Bedřich Mendl avoided this ignominy only by committing suicide. RBSL minimized its activities, similar to institutions of a comparable type. It did not even publish its regular Reports on Activities; it is paradoxical that the regularly updated Report on Activities in 1945-1952 was never published and remains in manuscript form to the present day.

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<sup>39</sup> For more information see Magdaléna POKORNÁ, *Josef Dobrovský a Královská česká společnost nauk (Josef Dobrovský and the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning)*, in press.

After 1945, RBSL attempted to renew its activities according to the pre-War traditions. It supplemented and revised its membership and attempted to renew its publication activities. However, it encountered financial problems; its finances remained in „bound“ deposits. Its members - university teachers - were also overworked. It was also not a simple matter to renew contacts with its long-established foreign partners. It was a prolonged and complicated matter to resolve the aspect of paying customs duties on books arriving from abroad as gifts, which was beyond the resources of the Society.<sup>40</sup>

A further decrease in the activities of RBSL occurred after February 1948, when the newly established foreign contacts, which played a key role in the activities of RBSL, were blocked; once again negotiations were held on establishing of a new type of scientific institution. The idea that science in Czechoslovakia should be organized on different principles arose immediately after 1945 and reappeared in the Construction Program of the Czechoslovak Government in 1946, but remained unimplemented for various reasons.<sup>41</sup> Specific preparations for establishing of new scientific institutions began to be implemented later, from the end of 1950, both according to the party line, and in the framework of the Ministry of Education, Science and the Arts.<sup>42</sup>

Preparations for establishment of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences progressed intensively from the end of 1951, when the Government Commission for creating CSAS was established. The activities of RBSL, similar to other existing scientific institutions that felt threatened by the prepared steps, were greatly stimulated at this time. RBSL and CASA, which coincidentally commemorated the commencing of their activities in 1951, presented their history both through exhibitions for the general public and also through reports for the Ministry; RBSL also presented a cycle of lectures (later published).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See also Alena MÍŠKOVÁ, *Publikace ČSAV v mezinárodní výměně informací (Publications of CSAS in international exchange of information) (1952-1961)*, in: *Work from the history of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences*, Prague 1987, pp. 9 -64.

<sup>41</sup> For more details, see Magdaléna POKORNÁ, *Tři pokusy o reorganizaci vědeckých institucí v letech 1945 – 1948 (Three attempts to reorganize scientific institutions in 1945 - 1948)*, in: *Work from the history of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences*, Prague 1992, pp. 84 -103.

<sup>42</sup> For more details, see Jiří BERAN, *Předúnorová vědní politika KSČ a otázka zřízení ČSAV (The pre-February scientific policy of the Czech Communist Party and aspects of establishment of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences)*, *Československý časopis historický* 33, 1985, pp. 212-241.

<sup>43</sup> Bohumil NĚMEC, *Royal Bohemian Society of Learning and the Natural Sciences*, RBSL Bulletin, philosophy-history-philology group 1951, No. 8, 10 pages; Bohumil RYBA, *Royal Bohemian Society of Learning and the Social Sciences*, *ibid*; Václav VOJTÍŠEK, *180 years of RBSL*, *ibid*.

The danger to the very existence of RBSL provided an impetus for increased activity of its members in the summer of 1951.<sup>44</sup> The answers to the questionnaire contained phrases and great words, moving recollections of one's own scientific careers and concrete suggestions. For example, František Bednář insisted that RBSL be preserved, which he justified by the parallel with conditions at universities where there is also not just one school. F. K. Studnička saw a solution in divided competence: CASA should be concerned with the domestic sphere, while RBSL would prepare publications for journals abroad. Josef Mohr suggested that RBSL be responsible for regional research in the natural sciences. Otto Jírovec proposed that RBSL carry out research in the natural sciences, while CASA be concerned with history and philology. Václav Vaněček suggested that RBSL be preserved through emphasis on aspects of the Czech lands or, even better, on the subject of Prague and the Prague region. The idea of simplification of institutional structures was generally received favourably. On the other hand, there were objections to abandoning the membership system or *numerus clausus* (restricted number) in election of members.

Other scientific societies reacted similarly, as they were also concerned with defending traditions, the ability to publish works, publisher's rights, and international exchange of experience and books. The individual members, not surprisingly, feared isolation and were probably also concerned with their future economic security.

Under the pressure of events, the representatives of scientific societies decided to hold a meeting at which they would present their position on reorganization of scientific life. They came to an agreement in the middle of April 1952 and formulated a joint Proposal for Reorganization of Czechoslovak Scientific Life. They agreed on the necessity of reorganizing scientific life. Their joint approach is admirable in that they insisted on the principles of scientific freedom and self-administration of scientific institutions. In this, they based their considerations on the self-evident assumption that scientific research must be free. They also supported „establishing a Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and a Czechoslovak Academy of the Arts by splitting the Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts, where the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning, the Czechoslovak National Research Council and the Masaryk Labour Academy would be incorporated into this Academy“.

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<sup>44</sup> Similar actions were held in other societies, in the Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts and in the Czech National Research Council; for more details, with specific references to archive materials, see Magdaléna POKORNÁ, *Sjednocením proti jednotě (Unification against unity). Dispute over the form of the new Academy of Sciences* in: *Věda v Československu (Science in Czechoslovakia) 1945-1953. Conference Proceedings*, Prague 1999, pp. 105-121.

This jointly issued memorandum did not remain internal material as, without the knowledge of Zdeněk Nejedlý, the President of the Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts at that time, the signatories sent it not only to the highest state functionaries, but also to the members of their societies. The sharp reaction of Nejedlý lacked any diplomatic formulation whatsoever: „We plan and we must work according to these plans; this is the case, but not the fact of whether someone likes it or not. If, when industry was nationalized, we asked industrialists what they say to nationalization or what they suggest, we wouldn't get very far ...and here, a simply representative society, which we don't need, is converted into an executive working academy...”<sup>45</sup>

Thus, the approach of the individual scientific societies was rejected and there was no further change in the standpoint of the Government Commission, without regard to subsequent, less bold, individual steps of the scientific societies. On October 29, 1952, the National Assembly adopted a law on the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, which was established, as is explicitly stated, through rebuilding the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning and the Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts.

The representatives of RBSL, similar to other scientific societies that participated in the discussion on the future form of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, came into conflict with the Government Commission but, with only a few exceptions (one of these being Viktor Trkal, a functionary in CASA), they were not personally harmed by further developments. In addition, none of those addressed refused membership in the newly formed Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences immediately after its creation.<sup>46</sup>

For many of its former members, RBSL remained a reminder of the beginnings of their own scientific work, a renowned institution with extensive international contacts, with regular publication activity and unquestionable competence and tradition. It lost nothing of this respect amongst Czech scientists even after its abolishment and, on the first possible occasion - in the spring of 1968 - in a protest appeal of April 25, 1968, the surviving members of RBSL (and CASA) attempted to remind the public of it. The Learned Society had to wait for renewal under the new conditions until May 1994.

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<sup>45</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Government Commission, A AS CR, f. Government Commission, Volume Commission Plenum, meetings and materials from the individual meetings, carton 2. However, the relationship of Z. Nejedlý to RBSL was more complex, as follows from his evaluation in his work *Creating the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences*, Var, February 15, 1952, No. 4.

<sup>46</sup> For more details on this aspect, see Alena MIŠKOVÁ, CASA and CSAS: Aspects of continuity and discontinuity II. (Creation of the group of members of CSAS and its relation to the membership base of CASA and RBSL), in: *The Czech Academy of the Sciences and the Arts 1891-1991*, pp. 101-123.

## ***Excursus 1: Membership base***

*Initially, the Learned Society consisted of a free association of scientists, who contributed to Abhandlungen, and only after preparation of the Articles did it achieve a more fixed order and the members began to be elected. They were elected by ballotage (i.e., using black and white balls); the criteria for election were modified and were finally established so that regular members were elected by a two-thirds majority, while a simple majority was sufficient for extraordinary members. The Articles ensured equality of members, but length of membership was sometimes a symbol of prestige. The category of regular members was most important from the standpoint of the actual work of the Society; the first Articles specified 18 members, and this number increased to thirty in 1909. The category of regular members always had numerus clausus, but the other categories did not. The condition for membership consisted in contributions to science, recommendation by two regular members and residence in Prague or its immediate vicinity. In addition to regular members, extraordinary members were also elected, although only rarely prior to 1840. If the career of a regular member took him elsewhere, he was transferred to the category of external (foreign) members or, from 1849, corresponding members. Thus, the regular and extraordinary members, elected from amongst scientists residing in Prague and its immediate vicinity, corresponded to the category of external and corresponding members, elected from amongst scientists outside of Prague, regardless of whether they came from the Hapsburg monarchy or elsewhere. In addition to these categories, honorary membership was also differentiated. During its history, RBSL had a total of 1200 members. At the beginning, it was an association of individuals and its numbers could sometimes be counted on the fingers of the hands. The number of members began to increase rapidly from the beginning of the forties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (the influence of Palacký); there were only 48 in 1836, and this number had increased to 54 in 1840 and 84 in 1850. At the beginning of the sixties, the members consisted of 144 men, and this number did not change much over the next years. It varied between 170 and 180 in the eighties and exceeded 190 for the first time in 1897; it continued to increase to 245 in 1904 and the number of RBSL members towards the end of the twenties was more than 278 men and women. This number exceeded three hundred for the first time in 1930 and was slightly less than 400 in 1939.*

*Jaroslav Heyrovský had already become an extraordinary member in 1926; he was later awarded the Nobel Prize (1959) for polarography and to this day remains the only Czech scientist to receive this award. The members of RBSL also included, e.g., natural scientists Eduard Babák, Ladislav Čelakovský, Bohumil Němec, and František Vejdovský, radiologist František Běhounek, polyhistor Josef Dobrovský, mathematician and philosopher Bernard Bolzano, historians František Palacký and Jaroslav Goll, philologists Jan Gebauer, Josef Král, Roman*

*Jacobson, Jan Mukařovský, and Bohumil Ryba, aestheticist Otakar Hostinský, philosopher Josef Král, orientalist Vincenc Lesný and egyptologist František Lexa, mathematician Václav Hlavatý, chemists Bohuslav Brauner and Bohuslav Raýman, writers Josef Jungmann, F. L. Čelakovský, and K. J. Erben, and a great many scientists whose life work was in the field of politics or who later served the Czechoslovak Republic in its diplomatic services, e.g., F. L. Rieger, Josef Jireček, Kamil Krofta, Vlastimil Kybal and Jan Opočenský. Foreign members of RBSL over the years included, e.g., Johann Bernoulli, Marie Curie, Ernst Denis, Christian Doppler, Vatroslav Jagič and Alexander Humboldt, etc.*

*The membership base underwent substantial changes following the Second World War as a consequence of events during the war, examined by the members in May and June 1945. The number of members was then supplemented in elections in July 1945. From 1947, no elections were held, in connection with the planned radical change in the Articles, according to which there was to be a substantial increase in the powers of extraordinary members. However, February of 1948 disrupted these plans and the activities of the action committees meant that membership ended for a number of members (amongst domestic members, mention should be made of Karel Absolon, Jan Bělehrádek, Josef Borovička, Karel Domin, Zdeněk Kalista, Vlastimil Kybal (in 1950), Otakar Machotka, Jaroslav Prokeš, Cyril Stejskal, Zdeněk Ullrich, while Miloslav Hýsek and Jiří Král resigned their membership.*

## **Excursus 2: Functionaries**

*More than a hundred persons have held positions in RBSL over its history and a great many of them held several positions during their membership in RBSL. Initially, the Presidents were aristocrats (Karel Egon Prince Fürstenberg, Prokop Count Lažanský, Franz Count Hartig, Jan Rudolf Count Chotek, František Antonín Count Kolovrat –Libštejský). All the members alternated in the position of Director (initially seen as the presiding member during the elective term), and the position of secretary existed simultaneously; the latter position was initially held in turn by the above-mentioned first members of the Society and then, from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by Martin Alois David, from the thirties by Matyáš Kalina Knight of Jäthenstein, František Palacký, František Exner (by proxy), Karel Kreil, Jan E. Vocel, Vilém Weitenweber and again Jan E. Vocel. From 1868, this position was again held by Jan E. Vocel and then Karel Kořistka. RBSL also elected agents (secretaries) for the individual groups and a chief secretary, librarian (from 1833) and treasurer (only the latter two were paid positions after the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century).*

*From 1868, RBSL was headed by a chairman, following a change in the Articles, with a Vice-Chairman to act in his absence. The position of chairman was held by the historians František Palacký (1868-1875), Josef Jireček (1875-*

1888) and V. V. Tomek (1888-1905), later by the mineralogist Karel Vrba (1905-1914), philologist Josef Král (1914-1917), botanist František Vejdovský (1917-1932), Germanist Josef Janko (1932-1945) and the last chairman was the mathematician Bohumil Bydžovský (1945/46-1952).

### **Excursus 3: Financing**

Following the unique (extraordinary) gift of Emperor Leopold II in 1791, the main source of financing for RBSL remained profit from the privilege of publishing the statistical yearbook *Schematism of the Bohemian Monarchy*. It was granted this privilege in 1799 and it was prolonged each decade and ended at the end of the forties of the 19th century. The end of profits from publishing the *Schematism* at the beginning of the fifties was not compensated in any way, so that RBSL was in a very tight position (was strapped for funds.) In 1857, it turned to the Ministry of Culture and Education with a request for state subsidies. Following long negotiations, it obtained a land subsidy in 1859, in the inadequate amount of 1,000 gold pieces, which was increased to 3,000 gold pieces in 1866 and to 4,000 gold pieces in 1871. Further income for the Society consisted in a (again single) donation of 6,000 gold pieces from Emperor Franz Josef I in 1866. RBSL obtained the first state subsidies as late as 1885 in the amount of 5,000 gold pieces, but „for many years, the height of state subsidies was related to the lowness of land subsidies“. The financial situation did not improve much even after 1918, when the currency was also devalued by war loans and inflation. State subsidies were decreased even further during the crisis at the beginning of the thirties, so that in 1934 they equalled only one half of the previous amount – 75,000 CZK. Land subsidies were not reduced (40,000 CZK), but the overall low budget meant a substantial limitation to the publication activities of RBSL, which were the mainstay of its activities. In addition to its basic capital, RBSL also had several supporting funds, of which the most important was the fund established in 1884 by Josef Hlávka and the fund of Jiří of Lobkovice (also in 1884). Other funds were, e.g., as bequests from Aleš Hrdlička and his wife Marie, Marie Kykalová and Tomáš Čapek. In the last period of the activities of RBSL, these included the funds of Radim Nováček, Miloslav Pelíček and Františka Štátníková, whose (RBSL's?) activities could no longer be carried out. The funds of Bernard Bolzano and Josef Dobrovský, mentioned above, had exceptional positions and specific purposes.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> On the aspect of financing, for the last time, Alena MÍŠKOVÁ, *Local and state subsidies for the three main scientific societies in Bohemia to 1910*, *Dějiny vědy a techniky* 27, 1994, p. 65-79

#### **Excursus 4: Publication and lecture activities**

*RBSL published the above-mentioned Abhandlungen in German, which, in addition to scientific works, also contained reviews of its activities, obituaries of members and, from 1840, reports of the meetings of the individual sections. Abhandlungen was published from the beginning of the eighties as Pojednání (Transactions) and, in the middle of the eighties, the name was changed to Rozpravy (Discussions). They were abolished shortly thereafter and their function was taken over by the Věstník (Bulletin). The Discussions were briefly renewed under the first Czechoslovak Republic. The Sitzungsberichte were established for independent reports in 1859, with the Czech name Zprávy o zasedání (Reports of Meetings) from 1873, changed in 1876 to Věstník.; the full texts of lectures were printed there. RBSL published a separate annual report from 1876 to the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>48</sup>*

*Lectures were an obvious part of the activities of RBSL at the beginning and became important again under Palacký, remaining a mainstay of the activities of RBSL to the First World War. A lecture before the plenum of the group constituted a condition for acceptance of a text for the Bulletin and thus it is not surprising that it frequently happened in the meeting hall that the lecturer lectured to the chairman of his group, the clerk and the administrator of the building, who had to lock the building after the lecture was over. From the beginning of the twenties, the activities of RBSL declined in this respect, to the chagrin of its functionaries, and the number of meetings in the groups dwindled, so that we can read in the Report on activities for 1920 that: „The number of meetings decreased again in 1920. And nonetheless I think that, especially now when everything is so expensive and there is a lack of printed matter, it would be useful if new research and works were to be communicated to professionals and the general public interested in science through this means and that, as suitable, priorities be emphasized in this way, especially timely things should be lectured when the interest or disputes on them are topical and not confused.“ Conditions did not improve in this respect, complaints gradually diminished and things that seemed quite out of order at the beginning of the twenties became quite normal in the following decade. In any case, the publication activities of RBSL were of considerable benefit to Czech science and mediated in its contacts with the rest of the world.*

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<sup>48</sup> General index to the written papers on the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning 1784-1884. Prepared by Jiří WEGNER, Prague 1884; General index to the written papers on the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning 1884-1904. Prepared by Jiří WEGNER, Prague 1905; General index to the written papers on the Royal Bohemian Society of Learning 1905-19354, Prague 1938.