

Václav Beneš

The death of Václav Beneš on December 6, 1972, after twenty-two years of distinguished service, leaves a gap in the university community that cannot be easily filled. Indiana University has lost a scholar and teacher of the first rank. But in important ways, the loss we have suffered goes beyond one institution; with the passing of Václav Beneš we are witnessing the end of one of history's greatest transfers of talent between two continents—the migration of scholars from Europe to America in the wake of the great totalitarian regimes. His coming to the United States following the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948 constituted a final phase of a migration which began, in part, just after the end of World War I.

Playing an integral role in the emergence of an independent, democratic Czechoslovakia, Beneš was destined to spend fully half his sixty-two years in political exile, witnessing from afar the agony of his native country embroiled in the conflicts of powerful neighbors indifferent to its fate. During the First World War he went to public school in the United States, where his father, in collaboration with Tomáš G. Masaryk, played a prominent role in organizing the movement for Czech independence. After the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany in March, 1939, he escaped to England, where, under the leadership of his uncle Eduard Beneš, president of Czechoslovakia, he was a member of the government in exile.

In 1934 Beneš was granted the degree of Doctor of Law by the Juridical Faculty of Charles University in Prague. His training in law, combined with proficiency in English, French, and German, led in 1937 to employment in the ministry of foreign affairs, where he worked in the legal and League of Nations departments. He was a member of the Czech delegation to the League Assembly in 1938, and in 1945 he represented his government at the Conference of Jurists held in Washington to prepare the basic statute of the International Court of Justice; subsequently he was a member of the Czech delegation at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco. Having served as chief of the fledgling Legal Department of the United Nations during the period of the Preparatory Commission in London, he was recalled early in 1946 to the ministry of foreign affairs in Prague to be head of the United Nations and International Organization Department.

In 1948 Beneš and his family found refuge in Canada, where he enrolled as a student in McGill University, from which he received a degree of Master of Civil Law. In 1950 he joined the faculty of the

department of political science at Indiana University just in time to make an important contribution to the rapid rise to distinction of Indiana's Russian and East European Program.

The most spectacular results of the migration which brought Beneš to America were contributions by composers, musicians, novelists, singers, actors, men of genius, such as Einstein, and of creative talent, such as the men of the *Bauhaus*. But there were also less spectacular benefits which accrued to the new homeland of these refugees. Many of them, like Beneš, accepted positions at universities, and their total number was such that they added a new dimension to these universities and colleges. It was not just that they provided a cosmopolitan touch to mid-American campuses—colorful characters who spoke English in a most curious manner. More importantly, they brought to the American academy a breadth of learning and a humanistic tradition that enriched and enlarged the horizons of their students as well as their colleagues.

This is the sort of contribution Václav Beneš made to Indiana University. It is a contribution that goes beyond his scholarship in Eastern European politics and his courses in international law, totalitarianism, and related subjects. He brought to his work the humane qualities of a widely educated person, the compassion of one who had himself suffered persecution and dislocation, and a breadth of mind which saw the problems of the political order as requiring the application of both social science and humanistic perspectives. This is the essence of the contribution the European refugee scholars have made to the American university—and it is because of these gifts that we will miss Václav Beneš in the years to come.

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