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# Anarchism in Czechoslovakia

Ryan Robert Mitchell

2009

Czech anarchism is characterized by the development of two distinct strands, independently formed in the 1880s.

The first was the anarchosyndicalism of the radical trade unionist movement of the North Bohemian miners and industry workers. Centered around editor Johann Most's journal *Die Freiheit* (*Freedom*), these working-class anarchists believed the trade union was not simply to be used as an instrument in the greater anarchist struggle, but was to be seen as the model of a future classless society. Premised around direct action and the organization of labor, the radical labor movement was uncoordinated as a whole until 1903 with the formation of the Severočeská Hornická Federace (Northern Bohemian Federation of Miners).

The second strain of Czech anarchism grew out of the secret student societies and radical reading circles of the 1880s and was further articulated by the more philosophical individualist anarchism of the radical intelligentsia and artists of the 1890s. Centered upon such literary journals as *Omladina* (*Youth*) and *Nový Kult* (*New Cult*), and in lieu of an actual anarchist organization representing the educated intelligentsia, these journals were intended as vehicles for theorizing, agitating, and organizing.

By the end of the 1890s the two tendencies began to overlap with each other. One of the first attempts to align the two complementary strands of Czech anarchism was the anarchist journal *Moderní Revue* (Modern Review), which by the end of the 1890s expanded beyond its discussion of the manifestations of literary and artistic anarchism into a concern with the workers' movement and broader anarchist struggles.

In 1904 these efforts culminated in the formation of the *Česká federace všech odborů* (Czech Federation of All Unions, *ČFVO*) and the *Česká anarchistická federace* (Czech Anarchist Federation, *CAF*), which, according to Stanislav Kostka Neumann (1875–1947), editor of the *Nový Kult* journal, were to be the “fists” and the “brains” of the Czech anarchist movement, respectively. This alliance would not last for long, however, because in 1908 the Austro-Hungarian authorities, fearing its influence on the railway workers, outlawed the *ČFVO* – a blow the radical labor movement never recovered from. This left the *CAF* as the main anarchist group in Czechoslovakia.

World War I and its aftermath brought radical changes to the Czech political landscape. With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire many within the *CAF* (like S. K. Neumann, who would later hold a seat in parliament) began to support the idea of an anarchist “party” that would work with the new Czechoslovakian republic. Others, like Michal Kácha (1874–1940), opposed the idea and saw the threat of engaging in parliamentary politics. With the dilution of anarchism and the lack of a strong extra-parliamentary anarchist group as an alternative, many on the radical left placed their support behind the increasingly authoritarian Czech Communist Party. These events effectively ended the “classical” period of Czech anarchism.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, Czech anarchism experienced a rebirth. Much like in the classical era, the new Czech anarchism was centered around two journals that were founded in 1991, *A-Kontra* and *Autonomie*. The new Czech anarchists found

early success combating neo-Nazi skinheads and the far right in the early 1990s and then later success with the organization of counter-demonstrations at the 2000 IMF meeting in Prague.

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