



# ***C.I.H.S. BULLETIN***

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**The Newsletter of the Canadian Immigration Historical Society**

## **Czech Mates: Introduction to this special edition of the CIHS Bulletin**

Late last fall a couple of us got to reminiscing about the months we had spent in Vienna during the Czechoslovakian refugee movement in 1968 and the idea of pulling together a few people's memories for the Bulletin came up. The fact that face discussion moved to the internet and eventually we had enough material for a full bulletin and more. The story unfolds with Joe Bissett's account of being called in one weekend to write up instructions based on a decision by a couple of Ministers (no Cabinet consideration) to start accepting refugees from the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia.

We have accounts by the Program Manager, John Zawisza and his deputy, David Bullock, and the remembrances of a number of the front line officers and a couple of bedazzled trainees. And as a special treat, we close with the testimony of the parents and friend of a serving immigration officer, who brought her to Canada as a child of three, one of the younger refugees. We hope you enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Thanks to all who contributed to this edition, and very special thanks to John Zawisza for a contribution "over and above the call of duty".

.....Mike Molloy

**Joe Bissett**

## **THE CZECHOSLOVAKIAN REFUGEE MOVEMENT 1968**

### **1: BACKGROUND**

Few Canadians were aware at the time that the election in January 1968 of Alexander Dubcek, a relatively unknown Slovakian, as First Secretary of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party, would rapidly lead to a liberalization of the country and cause serious repercussions throughout the Soviet Bloc. Dubcek's abortive attempts to give communism a "human face" would also present Canada with its largest refugee programme since the Hungarian refugee movement a little more than ten years before.

The reforms introduced by Dubcek, which included the lifting of censorship and travel restrictions were considered unacceptable by his bosses in Moscow who believed liberalization in Prague would result in similar demands

throughout the Soviet empire. Consequently, on the night of August 20/21, 1968, over two hundred thousand Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovakian army did not resist, although the people carried out widespread acts of passive resistance. Thousands of others fled the country by crossing over the unguarded border to Austria. Eventually, approximately twelve thousand of these would be accepted by Canada as refugees.

### **2: IMMIGRATION HEADQUARTERS STRUCTURE**

The year 1968 had been a turbulent one for Immigration people. The year before Jean Marchand and his new Deputy Minister, Tom Kent had pushed through by Order-In-Council new non-discriminatory and universal Immigration Regulations making it possible for anyone in the world to apply for immigration to Canada. A new point system had been introduced to assess the qualifications of applicants destined to enter the labour force. An independent Immigration Appeal Board had been established to review deportation cases. The Immigration Branch was hard pressed to meet these new challenges and as usual there was little forthcoming in the way of additional financial or personnel resources to help carry out the new programmes.

Accompanying this major change and adding to the pressures was a major reorganization in the fall of 1967 which involved the creation of a new Department consisting of elements of the National Employment Service and the Immigration Branch of the former Department of Citizenship and Immigration. The new Department was named the Department of Manpower and Immigration. In addition, in the early summer of 1968, a new Minister and Deputy Minister had replaced the Marchand / Kent team. Alan Macheachen had become the new Minister and Lou Couillard was his Deputy Minister.

The new organization appeared to many immigration officers as a loss of identity and prestige. Immigration was no longer a stand alone Department with its own Minister and reporting relationship with Parliament. Instead it was now buried within a powerful new Department responsible for the Canadian labour force. Confirmation of the suspected minor role of immigration seemed to be confirmed when the restructuring placed all of immigration finance, administration and personnel functions at the Departmental level. Only the Immigration Foreign Branch was left with its own support services.

Immigration also lost significant control of its own operations when all Departmental operations except those of Foreign

Branch became the responsibility of the Departmental Assistant Deputy Minister of Operations. The Regional Directors of Immigration in the Canadian field who had previously reported to Immigration Branch Headquarters now reported to their new bosses the Regional Directors of Manpower and Immigration. In theory Immigration policy functions were also removed to the Departmental Programme Development Service and the word "policy" was removed from the former Policy and Planning Branch of Immigration Headquarters.

A further cause for concern was the removal from the Immigration Service of its Settlement function. The Settlement Branch of Immigration was moved to the Manpower side of the Department. Ironically for many years there was a rivalry between the placement services of the National Employment Service and the Immigration Settlement officers. The latter were convinced that they provided a more personal and therefore more effective employment service to immigrant newcomers. Now the rivals were to come together but many of the immigration people felt the merger was accomplished - on "Manpower" terms.

Immigration employees, however, were not unaccustomed to reorganization or restructuring and therefore despite misgivings they accepted the inevitable and moved on.

The Immigration headquarters organization established by the restructuring was as follows: an Assistant Deputy Minister [ADM] supported by a small Secretariat. Reporting to the ADM were three Branches: Home Branch which included the admissions and enforcement activities; Foreign Branch responsible for all activities outside of Canada; Programme and Procedures Branch responsible for the design of programmes and immigration procedures; [theoretically not responsible for policy development but in practice fully engaged in doing so.]

Consequently when the Czechoslovak refugee crisis erupted at the end of August 1968 the Immigration Service was struggling with internal problems of reorganization, a loss of prestige, new Immigration Regulations, a new Minister and Deputy Minister and insufficient resources to carry out its expanded mandate. As its long history has demonstrated, however, the people in the Immigration Service put aside these difficulties and met this new humanitarian challenge as they always had done previously - with professionalism and compassion.

### 3: HEADQUARTERS RESPONSE [A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION BY JOE BISSETT]

At the beginning of 1968 I had been moved by the Deputy, Tom Kent, from my position as Chief Enforcement to become the Chief of Operations of the Foreign Branch reporting to Benoit Godbout. I was still settling in to my new job when the Czechoslovakian crisis began.

In early August our Officer - in - Charge in Vienna, John Zawisza, had began to report an increasing number of Czechoslovakians appearing at our Embassy either to submit immigration applications or to make enquiries about doing so. These applicants did not seem in any rush. They assumed that their newly won right to travel across the border would continue. The invasion of their country on the night of August 20/21 changed that attitude very quickly and many hundreds of people then began to stream across the border into Austria.

The Austrian authorities received these people openly as they had traditionally done as a country of first asylum for those fleeing the Soviet Bloc. In the first few weeks after the invasion the border remained relatively open and it was not unusual for applicants to submit their application at the Embassy and then drive back to Prague or Bratislava to await a decision. When the Soviets had consolidated their position the border was then sealed and the flow of people across the Austrian border was halted.

Interestingly enough a number of refugees were still able to get out to Yugoslavia and our officer in Belgrade, Art Moore, arranged quietly to put many of them on the train to Vienna. In fact he personally escorted the first group to the checkpoint and negotiated their travel with Yugoslav authorities who closed their eyes to the absence of proper documents. Tito, it seemed, was appalled by the Soviet invasion and deeply sympathetic to the new face of socialism that had been emerging in Czechoslovakia.

The Department of External Affairs was monitoring the situation as it was unfolding in Czechoslovakia and our Government shared the concern that armed conflict might break out and destabilize all of Eastern Europe. While NATO military intervention was ruled out of the question there was nevertheless an added atmosphere of tension in Western capitals. Some pundits attributed the daring and ruthlessness of the Soviet invasion to the deepening involvement of United States military forces in Viet Nam.

Nevertheless, despite the obvious build up of tension because of events in Czechoslovakia, on the Friday, August 31, I along with thousands of other public servants in the Capitol region went home happily looking forward to the long Labour Day weekend.

Monday September 3, Labour Day was a warm and sunny day. At breakfast my wife suggested the weather was so fine that it was a good time for me to paint the fence in our back yard. Since I had been avoiding this task all summer, I felt obliged to get at the job and do it before the cold weather set in. I had just about completed the painting around ten in the morning when I was called to the phone. It was someone from the East Block telling me I was to attend an important meeting there as quickly as possible. I changed my clothes, left my wife to finish painting the fence and drove to the East Block.

When I arrived I was directed to a large conference room. Seated around the table was an array of officers from External

Affairs and one other individual who greeted me and introduced me to the assembled gathering. This officer was my Assistant Deputy Minister, Byrnes Curry.

The Chairman of the meeting, a senior Foreign Affairs official, whose name I never did find out, explained that the situation in Czechoslovakia was deteriorating and his Minister, Mitchell Sharp, felt it essential that Canada should do something to relieve the pressure on Austria caused by the sudden influx of thousands of Czechoslovakian refugees.

There was a general discussion and, as frequently happens at such meetings, the discussion did not seem to be reaching any conclusion. Finally, Byrnes Curry intervened and said that since it was obvious the Minister of External Affairs had decided that Canada should be doing something he suggested that a press release be drafted announcing that Canada would begin to accept refugees fleeing Czechoslovakia. The Chairman readily agreed.

Mr. Curry then said there was no need for the meeting to continue and he recommended that Mr. Bissett of his staff and an External Affairs officer be asked to remain and draft an appropriate press release for Mr. Sharp's signature. Thus I found myself stuck in a room in the East Block on a beautiful autumn day drafting a press release for the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

I was not very happy about this for two reasons. First I believed this announcement should more properly be made by the Minister of Manpower and Immigration. Secondly I felt signing off on the press release was more properly a responsibility to be taken by the ADM who had made the decision. Even more irritating was the knowledge that Byrnes Curry was a fanatic Ottawa football fan and that afternoon the Rough Riders were playing at Lansdown Park. Byrnes Curry did not want to be stuck in a meeting in the East Block when his beloved Rough Riders were in action a few blocks away. In any event I remained and drafted the press release that was signed off by Mitchell Sharp and the next day the Czechoslovak refugee movement was underway.

Looking back on this episode it is interesting to note that there was no cabinet memorandum, nor indeed any discussion among Ministers. Mitchell Sharp made the decision and I can only assume made his peace with the Prime Minister and Mr. Macheachen after the fact. The following day I drafted the operational directive to our overseas offices outlining how they were to proceed to process Czechoslovak refugees.

Although Canada had been a signatory to the 1952 United Nations Refugee Convention we had never established the definition in legislation. The word refugee did not appear in the Immigration Act until the 1976 Act. This had not prevented us from selecting refugees for resettlement in Canada as we had been doing since the end of the Second World War. The regulations introducing the new point system of selection did not apply to refugees but the nine factors of selection were to be used as a guideline for the selecting of

refugees. This gave our selection officers a good deal of discretionary power and in the weeks ahead our officers in Vienna and elsewhere made good use of this power in the choice of refugees for Canada.

The first several weeks were busy ones at Headquarters. The first issue was to get additional officers to Vienna to help John Zawisza. This was done by seconding visa officers from other European posts on temporary duty. By good fortune Roger St. Vincent one of our most experienced officers was holidaying in Vienna and he did not need to be asked to remain there to help out. He had reported to the office on his own initiative to help out. Two other young officers at the time were doing their overseas training in Vienna and I informed Zawisza that these two were to remain there until further notice. These officers were Doug Dunnington and Mike Molloy.

It was also essential to ensure that the post was reinforced with additional officers from the security agency and medical doctors from National Health and Welfare. I spent many an hour on the telephone and at emergency meetings to negotiate these arrangements. The most pressing question was of course who was going to pay. I could only stress that action had to be taken at once and that eventually a memorandum to the Treasury Board would settle the cost problem. Fortunately I received the full and eager cooperation from these two agencies.

Another pressing issue was transportation. Commercial flights simply were not available to fly thousands of refugees to Canada. Initially it was necessary to use Department of National Defense aircraft and this required many hours of negotiating because again Immigration had no authority to charter aircraft or to use military aircraft without the financial means of payment. I recall signing off on a number of the initial Charter flights despite no Treasury Board authority. Eventually of course that authority was forthcoming and all the bills were paid.

I had been in the middle of my cross – Canada tour when the Hungarian Refugee movement had started and was ordered to remain in Toronto in the placement section to temporarily help out. I remained there for six months before resuming my tour. The Hungarian experience had taught the Immigration Service two major lessons that were to prove particularly helpful in dealing with the Czechoslovakian movement.

The first lesson was that all the Hungarian refugees- with the exception of the forestry faculty of a Hungarian university adopted by a university in British Columbia – were placed in any employment available. These jobs were usually at the low end of the unskilled labour market. Consequently a great many talented and professional refugees ended up doing menial jobs much below their capabilities. The problem was language and no facilities existed at the time for large scale language training nor was there any suggestion by our service that language training might be a useful thing.

The second lesson Immigration learned from the Hungarian movement was that it was not useful to lodge the refugees in hostels. This had been done with the Hungarians and it frequently inhibited and delayed their early adaptation into the labour force and Canadian society. Lodging refugees in hostels also tended in many cases to perpetuate a "camp" philosophy, creating an attitude of dependency and loss of self reliance.

The refugees from Czechoslovakia were dealt with in a different fashion. Many were afforded language training upon arrival and none were housed in hostels. They were settled in private accommodation: motels, rooming houses, apartments and encouraged to as quickly as possible establish themselves on their own. A special effort was made by the Department's placement officers to find the refugees employment in their own trade or profession.

The recognition of professional qualifications was then, as it is today, a serious problem. One of the first messages sent to John Zawisza from Headquarters was to ensure that every refugee with professional qualifications was warned their qualifications were unlikely to be accepted in Canada. This warning was not only to be transmitted orally but also in writing. Of course this instruction [like all instructions sent to John Zawisza] was carried out to the letter and fortunately so.

Shortly after refugees began to arrive a group of Czechoslovakian dentists complained they had not been told they would be unable to practice their profession in Canada. The media made an issue of this complaint but we were able to obtain from Vienna copies of the statement the dentists had signed and the charges were withdrawn. The incident, however, did draw attention to the plight of the dentists and the Ontario Dentist Association agreed to accelerate the training of these dentists so they might qualify for professional status.

The Czechoslovakian Refugee movement was a highly successful undertaking by the new Department of Manpower and Immigration. It was, in effect, the Department's first high profile challenge and it was a challenge well met. The immigration settlement officers who had been absorbed into the Manpower side performed well along side of their old NES rivals and each won the other's respect. The new organizational structure and chain of command functioned effectively. Finally, the new Minister was never embarrassed in the House of Commons – always a good standard of bureaucratic accomplishment.

Canada gained much from the skills and talent of the refugees from Czechoslovakia. They adapted quickly and soon began to contribute positively to Canadian society. The movement although small in total numbers – 12,000 refugees- reflected well on Canada. It demonstrated to our allies and to the United Nations that Canada could be counted on to play its role in contributing to the solution of international refugee problems. It was a challenge well met.

John Zawisza

### Processing of the Czechoslovakian Refugee Movement Vienna, Austria (Sep-Nov, 1968)

Soviet tanks and Warsaw Pact troops invaded Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968, resulting in an immediate flood of Czech Refugees into neighbouring countries and into Austria in particular. Many Czechs were already 'temporarily' in the West at the time the invasion because the government of Alexandre Dubcek had for some time, been gradually "liberalising" conditions of travel to the West for study, artistic endeavours and business. As soon as the invasion started, this already tacitly accepted cross-border flow, to which the authorities on both sides had become accustomed, grew exponentially. Since remaining in Austria was not an option for most, many took this opportunity to find out what future existed for them abroad. Large numbers came to the Canadian Immigration Office, centrally situated, on Dr Karl Luegerring. Within a short time the Visa Office was besieged. Police assistance was needed to control the lines of Czechs queuing around the block.

Anticipating the flood of applications for Canada, I telexed, our Regional Director, Dudley McWilliam in Geneva, the Director General Foreign Service and the Director of Operations Foreign Service in Ottawa Immigration HQ, as soon as the Soviet tanks had moved in. I advised them all of the exponentially growing queue outside our office and of my urgent need for clear instructions and appropriate reinforcements to implement whatever action Canada decided to take.

The Immigration Office in Vienna at the time consisted of an Officer-In-Charge, 2 Counselling Officers (i.e. visa officers), a Medical Doctor, an RCMP Security Service Officer, six local support staff and two interpreters. One of the two visa officer positions had not been filled. We were already experiencing difficulties in processing our normal movement which consisted of assorted Eastern European Refugees temporarily in asylum in Austria while they awaited permanent resettlement in the West. There were also a few well-qualified, industrious and highly adaptable Austrians, many of whom were themselves former refugees. Although I no longer have the data, I am under the impression that in the previous year Vienna had processed an average of 85 immigrant cases per month (plus a reasonably steady number of Visitor Visas).

Almost immediately I began to receive phone calls from journalists, Canadian and otherwise, asking what Canada's intentions were and how we were going to cope with the massive demand. There was little I could tell them until eventually Geneva called to say the Department was taking the appropriate steps, and that soon I would receive both my instructions and "some" additional staff, which was already in

the process of being co-opted for "Temporary Duty(TD)" at the Vienna office.

The avalanche of new applications from the Czechs made it very clear that I could not wait for decisions from Ottawa. I had to implement some local solutions as fast as possible. I realized that the only way to go was to develop a "Case Processing Plan" to handle the applications we were receiving as rapidly as possible. The main difficulty to be resolved was communication, since most applicants spoke only Czech. This could be achieved most effectively by distributing a "dummy" Czech translation together with the French and English versions of the Immigrant Application Form, enabling the applicant to understand what the form required of him. . Medical and "Stage B"(security) would add their own separate sheets, listing in Czech any supplementary questions. Answers to these questions accelerated their separate interviews and provided a backdrop for specific probing. A copy of "The Case Processing Plan", in Czech, was included in the Immigration Application Kit so as to provide each refugee with an overview of the process and of the progress of their application as it made its way to final decision and in most cases, the issuance of a visa.

In planning for a simple high volume process, the issue of space was critical. The Medical and "Stage B" Sections already had room for some growth within the allocations previously dedicated to them. They would have to gear up in tandem with the expansion of the Immigration operation streamlining wherever possible to produce early results without compromising health standards or national security. For the immigration process, the maximum extension of the area available for the screening of applications interviewing and visa issuing would accommodate at best, an additional 13 visa officers in addition to the 2 already on staff in Vienna office.

We put together a processing plan that provided for preliminary screening of the paper applications by 2 Visa Officers sharing the Secretary's office; selection interviews were to be done by 2 VO's + interpreters in the 2 existing Interview rooms ; 4 VO's would interview simultaneously in the large Waiting Room, supported by a "shared" Interpreter plus a perfectly fluent ex-Czech veteran VO working independently. 2 VO's would work full time issuing Visas in the "spare office", usually kept available for the use of departmental visitors and Canadian employers; 1 VO would dispense Application Kits stationed at a table situated in the Entrance Hall; and 3 easily "interchangeable" VO's would manage the operation from the Officer-in Charge's office. Of these, one was responsible for the smooth running of the daily processing flow including trouble shooting case problems while another took care of all matters pertaining to the "exterior" aspects of the operation ,such as ordering/controlling supplies, coordination with Airport Services, Charter Flight Embarkation, Queue Control by Austrian Police, coordination of Volunteer Group inputs , etc. The third VO, the Officer-in Charge would be responsible for the entire operation, handling whatever needed urgent

attention.

To avoid any expensive misunderstandings, I therefore advised the Director in Geneva by telex that a total.13 additional VO's was the maximum number of bodies that my office space could accommodate for a total of 15VO's present staff included.

The telexed" instructions" we received from Geneva raised more questions than answers. How many additional officers could we accommodate in our limited office space? What supplementary funds were needed? What transportation arrangements to take the refugees to Canada were we making etc.. On reviewing these instructions it became clear to me that HQ expected Vienna to solve locally any problems it might be facing. Above all, we were to "proceed judiciously" without giving anyone especially journalists, External Affairs, the Czechoslovakian lobby in Canada or any one else grounds for criticizing the Department. Although left unsaid, it was clear to me, that we in Vienna were likely to be blamed in the event of a "disaster".

It was only at that juncture that I was able to inform the Ambassador who had phoned repeatedly to find out whether I had received any instructions by phone, of this recent news from Geneva. I also alerted him that there would be a need for a great deal of administrative support from the Embassy.

For two weeks, the two of us were alone and we did not stop! The only other Visa Officer on staff continued to field regular business and to draft/edit the information material being urgently translated into Czech by our two very capable and experienced interpreters. I regularly contacted my foreign colleagues to find out what attitude their "Principals" were adopting towards the Czech Refugee Movement. I was also regularly visited the Border Police and in the Driekirchen Refugee Facility headed by Dr.Kriczek who were the best informed about the situation that prevailed. I also kept in touch with various Voluntary Groups, Air Canada's Representative for Eastern Europe, Mr Hucl, an ex-Czech Canadian, and the other representatives of countries of resettlement including the Americans, Australians and South Africans.

Transportation appeared to me to be a crucial issue. My question to Foreign Service Headquarters in this regard had not been answered, while the clock kept ticking! As soon as processing moved into high gear, we would be filling imaginary seats on non-existing aircraft. Before long we would start choking on our production.

Air Canada's Representative for Eastern Europe, Mr. Hucl had the solution to my problem. ! Air Canada happened to be "ferrying" a number of empty passenger aircraft from Europe to Canada each week. They could easily be re-routed to Vienna to pick up our refugees. The cost of this would be a lot cheaper than a regular fare, or even a charter fare. The problem was, I had to tentatively reserve these flights immediately or risk losing them. I asked Mr Hucl whether I would be able to back out if my "Principals" refused to



support me. He was confident that I could not be held responsible and drafted the contract to my best advantage. I signed because of the need to solve my looming transportation problem, hoping that I had not made the "mistake of my life". In the end it work out superbly and our production line filled a minimum of one aircraft per day and some weeks, 6 !

Until help arrived, the two of us tried to minimize the accumulating "backlog" by staying on top of the screening of the daily intake of Applications.

Meanwhile, the Reception and Registry were very busy pre-numbering a large stock of "new files" and made arrangements for the urgent "offset" printing of the Building Passes, ID Certificates (in lieu of passports), information pieces and "unofficial forms" ( for the other 2 Sections ) which were also being prepared by our interpreters.

A Vienna policeman presided over the sidewalk queue which wound around the block. The policeman gradually gave prospective applicants access to the office. Once in the building hallway, they were given an application kit and information sheets which read something like this:

**Steps to follow when applying for Immigration to Canada as member of the Czechoslovakian Refugee Movement in Vienna**

- 1 - Please complete the Application Form (in French or English), check for completeness,

Sign. (do not attach any additional information)  
When completed, please return to Canadian Embassy Visa Section in pre-addressed envelope (included)

Please wait 3 complete consecutive working days before contacting the Visa Section again.

- 2 - On the 4th day (after submitting your Application) return to the Visa Section (Reception) to be given your Appointment (on the next available date) for the Immigration interviews, including Settlement, Medical and Selection. On this occasion you may wish to bring with you all potentially supportive Documents whose pertinence you would like to check with the Receptionist.

You will also be given an Interview Appointment Confirmation, which will admit you into the building without having to queue.

On the occasion of this visit you may wish to attend an Information briefing on Immigration to Canada conducted in the Waiting Room at 1300-1400 daily. At the end of this presentation in Czech there is brief Question Period where a limited number of clear, straight forward (i.e. well prepared) questions) will be answered in Czech.

- 3 - On the Appointment Date, please bring with you, 10 minutes before the appointed hour, all dependents (listed on your Application + those you have numbered to accord with specific questions). You may, as well, if you wish, bring your own interpreter, but the interpreter must arrive with you and must await your turn with you.

**WARNING:** Arriving late for the interview will necessitate the re-scheduling of a new Appointment at a

later date.

- 4 - The Settlement segment of the interview lasts up to 30 minutes. It is conducted by an Officer attempting to establish what, and how much help you will need initially to be successfully absorbed into the Canadian Labour Market. (Please bring, for each adult, all documents pertaining to Education, Training, Employment and Experience.

For the subsequent two segments each person will need to bring all medical reports (and prescriptions) they may have. While all pertinent Civil Registration and

Identity Documents are essential, experience shows that others can be most useful, if not crucial, to an application or initial steps in Canada. The presence of a "dedicated" interpreter has often proved useful in clarifying potential problem areas. The interpreter's usefulness ends at the conclusion of the Settlement Interview. At which point he/she should be encouraged to leave.

- 5 - After a waiting period (of variable duration, depending on the progress of preceding interviews) in

a Waiting Area you will be called to either one. Of the two remaining segments.

Only the person called should "go forward". (The interviewer, alone, will decide who is to be interviewed and who waits or can depart.

- 6 - The 2nd of the 3 interview segments is followed by another waiting period in a Waiting Area, until you are called again. Only the person called should go forward.

NB. At the conclusion of the last (third) interview segment you may be requested to deposit ALL your Travel Documents (In exchange for Temporary ID's, issued by the Canadian Embassy)

- 7 - After the conclusion of the 3 Immigration Interviews segments, please wait 3 complete consecutive working days before going in person to the Canadian Immigration Office to enquire at the "Reception" regarding the status of your Application.

- 8 - You will be given a sealed envelope containing the "Decision", either

A ) In the event of a Positive Decision "Canadian Immigration Visa Granted" you will be requested to sign an "Undertaking to Repay" the cost of your one-way transportation to Canada by "Charter" (special Government rate). By signing this document you agree to repay the cost of your transportation to Canada once you are established and financially able to do so. You must also leave a contact telephone number, as well as a local telegraphic address at which the

Visa Section can be sure to reach you in the event of urgency.

B ) In the event of a Negative Decision "Canadian Immigration Visa Refused" no reason will be given. NB. A negative decision is FINAL, and cannot be "appealed"

- 9 - At that point you will have reached the "Pre-Departure Stage" of your application. In accordance with existing International Regulations "Charter Flight passengers are only allowed to transport a totla of .....lbs/ .....Kgs per person, which may be contained in packages no

*larger than .....inches  
or .....cms.*

***NB Please take into consideration that it is you yourself  
who will have to  
"move / carry" your belongings.***

***-10 - The Visa Section will confirm your Pre-Arranged  
Charter Departure 24 hrs before.***

***Do not come to the "Reception" unless you have  
heard from the Visa Section 24 hrs before Departure Time.***

On 4 September (15 days after the Invasion) the first TD officer arrived. The other 12, gathered from all over Europe arrived gradually. As far as I remember they were a mix of experienced VO's and Trainees, from the following posts:

Paris 3 ;Rome 3; The Hague 2 ;Ottawa 4 ; Kingston,  
Jamaica 1 =Sub-Total 13+ Vienna 2 = Grand Total 15

Because the Administrative Section of the Embassy had been forewarned, it managed to provide the large number of new arrivals with the support they needed, within a reasonable delay. Surprisingly all seemed satisfied with the arrangements.

As they arrived, the VO's were integrated into the Processing Plan. There were teething problems in contacting some applicants who had returned home while awaiting word from the Embassy. The deteriorating security situation in Czechoslovakia quickly changed that and contact was resumed.

The overall quality of the Czech Movement was excellent. Applicants were mainly experienced, well trained skilled workers and technicians with formal training. The refusal rate was very low. Even though they were involuntary migrants with few choices about where to go, the decision to leave was still difficult. The gradual liberalisation achieved by Dubcek. had significantly improved living in Czechoslovakia.s. Many of our applicants wondered how hard would the hardening be which would follow the Invasion? While we have no records of how many of the undecided ultimately chose to remain in their own country, it has been well established that most Czech Refugees who did accept the opportunity to resettle in Canada have been successful. The longitudinal surveys confirm that by and large, they have integrated well, and are today proud and very active Canadian citizens !

Apart from the processing a huge numbers of applications without much direction or assistance from Headquarters, I encountered more unsolicited helpfulness on the Public Relations front from Ottawa which did nothing to ease the work situation. When External Affairs Minister .Mitchell Sharp enunciated Canada's position on the Invasion of Czechoslovakia at the UN Assembly and our willingness to receive some of the refugees, all sorts of Interest Groups

appeared and tried to become actively involved in facilitating individuals or groups of interest to them. Rather than being supportive of a responsive program, most seemed to try capitalizing on various opportunities the situation presented. The Department made no effort to deflect any of these initiatives but simply passed them on to us in Vienna pointing out the various "needs" of these Groups which were usually peripheral our main objective of rapidly processing the Czech Refugees who presented themselves at our office.

Each Interest Group was the subject of a separate telex, providing minimum background, often hazy objectives and, understandably, no suggestion with regard to implementation. HQ directed us to make sure that we were clearly seen by Canadian journalists to be helpful. Early on, we were made aware that the a Senator was being sent to Vienna to assess the situation and evaluate the Department's response. Typically, we were instructed to open all doors as may be required

In a separate initiative, the Arts Council of Canada had requested the Deputy Minister's office to "facilitate" the intake of "any "renowned Artists and Authors". Canadian Universities were eager to welcome their share of reputed Czech professors and Intellectuals instructing in detail, how to submit the CV's of potential candidates for unspecified positions. The most helpful of all of these intervenors was the Canadian Jewish Congress through its immigrant assisting arm, JIAS , definitely the most pragmatic, best organized and confidence inspiring group) was guarantying to provide for the initial integration in Canada of all Jewish Refugees.

Although most of the traffic on Public Relations and political interest was coming to us through the Embassy communications centre (not telexes on Immigration issues, which came to us directly) ,not once was I contacted by the Ambassador, or Section Heads in the Embassy, offering a helping hand in satisfying all these demands, which for us were quite unusual. We must have enjoyed their entire confidence !

There electronic messages were quickly followed by a constant trickle of more or less demanding /aggressive visitors from Canada.

- First to arrive was the Senator, who wanted a detailed "crammer course" on Immigration! To assess the situation, he felt it necessary to become an expert ! We spent many evening hours together, mainly me being "grilled" by him ! I was relieved when he wanted to meet my contacts who must have, opened new vistas for him because he soon left ,to assess the Czech Refugee Movement from London and from Rome (to Australia !) He only returned to Vienna shortly before the closing of the Movement, to "return Home" on the last Charter Flight! Later, I was impressed to read his Report to the Senate in Hansard and gratified to note the depth of his expertise on Immigration related issues in general, especially Czech Refugees!! He had learnt his lesson well and I was proud of him !

-Canadian journalists gave full coverage to what Canada was doing to help the Czechs in their moment of need. They tended to overlook the majority of our clients who were well dressed and showing no signs of hardship in order to concentrate stories that would dramatize the refugee experience and provide human interest stories, highlighting the deficiencies of "life in Czechoslovakia, the sadness of parting from relatives and friends

-Our visitor from the Deputy Minister's Office who had been sent "Head Hunting" for prominent Artists and Intellectuals, affirmed that, although the Americans had "commanded" the best talent, due to the sort of conditions they offered, Canada had been chosen by some highly qualified persons who apparently preferred our lower key approach. As I was made aware of the various special interest groups and expected their representatives to arrive soon, eager to have me "open the right doors", I took advantage of my being a member of the recently inaugurated Vienna Diplomatic Club to contact whoever I could in order to be able to provide, if not "valid contacts", at least some likely and potentially useful "referrals".

-The emissary of the Arts Council of Canada did not feel that the doors we had offered to open were at a "sufficiently high level", and disappeared to do "his thing". We did not hear from or about him again !

-In the course of this exceptionally hectic period, we had an unprecedented number of Management visitors, more or less interested / involved in "the action". We welcomed the Director for Europe with his Operations Assistant who eventually replaced me at the end of my tour. We also received and his very capable Public Relations journalist. A Public Relations expert from the Deputy Minister's Office who came looking for professors for Canadian universities left empty handed because we did not have any such applicant. We also had visits from several prospective employers, who seemed to know exactly what and who they needed. Obviously, they had carefully prepared themselves. These businessmen had known the right time to arrive with the right offers, enabling them to recruit apparently very promising people.

Worthy of note was the organization and discipline of JIAS in this movement. From the beginning some of the Jewish applicants pushed for special treatment, longer interviewing hours, and faster file processing and decisions. In a number of instances they became quite antagonistic towards other Czech applicants. Fearing the disruption of our operation, I appraised the representative of the Canadian Jewish Congress (in Vienna) who asked me to assign to her Group, half a day /week of interviews so that they did not feel that they were competing for our services with the other applicants! We agreed that each Wednesday from 1400-1800 we would make available 48 interview slots for her Group. After that we no longer experienced any

problems. All application forms clearly marked "CJC" that were screened for interview were routed by the Registry to the CJC Office which was then responsible for their distribution, notification of interviewees and their transport. Their Organization was impeccable !

"Stage B" Section initially was staffed by 1 resident Corporal who was assisted later in the movement by a TD Officer from Cologne. At the very end of the Movement the RCMP added a Sergeant who contributed no perceptible value to the operation. We were not sorry to see him leave, no doubt for some more challenging and sensitive assignment. Of course, he spoke not a word of Czech or German.

"Medical" Section, was increased from the very beginning of the Movement, till its conclusion by a very efficient and obviously capable 2nd Canadian Doctor.

During these 3 months our Guest Book shows that we had each TD CO once to dinner, as well as to a Thanksgiving Buffet, attended by assorted visiting Management. At the conclusion of the Movement, we had a Farewell Staff Cocktail / Buffet at the Office attended by both Canadian and Local (including interpreters) Staff. The Ambassador had been pleased to officially "Close the Movement"

Although I am certain that the Czech Refugee Movement "closed" in the last week of November 1968, Allen MacEachen the then very busy Minister of Manpower and Immigration, only found the time to write me an unsolicited "letter of appreciation" at the end of June 1969 when I was getting ready to experience my next challenge, the riots in front of the Port of Spain Visa Office, on the occasion of the "Sir George Williams Affaire" in Montreal, followed by the "en masse" desertion of the T & T Army. But that's another story.

### **The Czechoslovak Refugee Movement of 1968 Some Personal Reminiscences - - (David Bullock)**

In the late summer of 1968, while the social and political problems which had manifested themselves by riots in various countries, but especially in France, were no longer such a burning issue, more by suppression than by solution. People were no longer looking with amazement at Czechoslovakia where Alexander Dubcek's liberalization seemed to be gaining stability. In other words, it was August, and holidays were everyone's priority in most of western Europe until the 21st when news came from Prague that Soviet and Warsaw Pact tanks rumbled in to occupy Czechoslovakia. The collective breath was held as many feared a bloodbath but nothing much happened. Even the borders remained open with travellers moving freely through empty crossing points. Indeed, those who saw the tanks as the threat they were took off like a shot.



The Canadian government made special efforts to deal with the exodus of Czechoslovaks to neighbouring countries in the face of the occupation by Warsaw Pact forces. As Bernard Brodie says in his article (Backspace #26, May 1997) "Canada sent a team to Vienna..." —an understatement. The Department was faced with remarkable pressure on the Vienna immigration office: directives from Ottawa and hundreds (soon becoming thousands) at the door of an office set up to deal with a trickle of Austrians and refugees who managed to squeeze under the Iron Curtain. The reaction in Ottawa and Geneva (the European Immigration Branch HQ) was to respond to urgent requests for action by the Attaché (John Zawisza) by agreeing to expand the capacity of the Vienna office. From Geneva Harry Cunliffe (who had just taken over from Pat Quinn as chief of operations) and Charles Morrow (public affairs) were first on the scene. The phone lines hummed around Europe (and to Ottawa) as 'available' officers were enlisted.

At the beginning, what was lacking was experience in dealing with volumes of applicants. John Zawisza could hardly be called inexperienced, but it was his first posting, so I got the call to proceed from The Hague (where I was Immigration Affairs Attaché with about ten years overseas) to Vienna to second him in managing the office. Others, with varying degrees of experience, arrived day by day, including Don Lygo, Joyce Cavanagh and a group of trainee selection officers. (My memory is not clear enough to record all, and some have come forward with their own stories in any case.) The same process was happening in the sister departments as officers were sent to provide medical and Stage B examinations. The physical capacity of the Karl-Lueger-Ring premises was tested (not to say exceeded) as procedures were developed to offer applicants a two-stop process. Well, maybe three if you count the initial visit to get information, an application form and appointment. In a couple of weeks we set up the office to compress the process as much as possible so that applicants were on their way to Canada about two to three weeks after their initial contact, though, of course, that lengthened as the sheer volume rose.

The team of Visa Officers quickly developed into an effective processing 'machine', churning out hundreds, then thousands, of immigrants of the highest potential. Behind the 'front line' we got procedures in place which resulted in filling Air Canada's new stretch DC8 planes, made available for our use, as often as the airline could return them to Vienna. My old job as an Air Canada payload control agent gave me experience which came in handy in filling the seats. Of course, Air Canada cooperated enthusiastically both at the European management level and among the Vienna staff, which included some from their Prague office. Their willingness to cooperate gave rise to at least one amusing anecdote. A Visa Officer talked to me one day about two brothers, both bakers, who were heartbroken at the prospect of leaving behind in Vienna their dog. I, in turn, talked to Air Canada and we agreed to render the animal invisible. All Air Canada staff involved, airport as well as in-flight, simply did not see the dog all the way to Edmonton. We learned later that the crew enjoyed having a canine immigrant on board.

Large volumes of counselling and selection interviews did not stop us from being alive to the human dimension of fleeing their country. One day a Visa Officer observed that a ménage à trois had applied. Apparently, the wife really wanted to shed her lover and return to her husband and persuaded the Visa Officer to this effect. Putting the married couple on a flight together and the lover on a different flight to the other end of Canada presented no problem to us....

I feel sure that John Zawisza will recount his struggles in dealing with so-called VIPs who came over to pick the ripest cherries among the crop of prospective migrants (refugees?). Early on, Chuck Morrow and I had a good deal of pleasure looking after some of them. I remember particularly Dr Arnold Walter from the Royal Conservatory of music who had had a successful music career in Vienna and who was a friend of the then Artistic Director of the Toronto Symphony, the eminent Czech conductor, Karel Ancerl. Canada's musical life was enriched enormously, as were other cultural branches—film, theatre, dance.

Outside the Visa Office, life was rich and rewarding. My wife joined me a couple of weeks after I arrived and we took full advantage of the opera and the restaurants. One opera experience has always stayed with us both. Don Lygo loved opera and accompanied us to hear *Der Rosenkavalier*. He was not impressed. Just one long boring waltz was his comment. Chacun à son gout.

The end of my time in Vienna came all too soon. Geneva HQ felt my time would be better utilized managing the office in The Hague so my number two there (John Weisdorf) came to replace me on October 10th and stayed until the special 'movement' was being wound down. It was not an experience which advanced his career the way it did for the majority of other young Visa Officers—win some, lose some. My own career changed direction the following year but the month in Vienna remains a high point in my work in Europe.

### Maria Beaulne 68 Czech Experience

Within days of the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, as ever increasing numbers of Czech citizens headed west, especially to Austria, the Canadian Embassy in Vienna started to prepare for the processing of these refugees to Canada and assembled a team to make it happen. I was fortunate enough to be selected to join a group of officers who quickly set up an assembly-line-type processing to select qualified candidates, ensure they met medical, security, and legal requirements for immigration and then send them off as quickly as possible on chartered aircraft to the Canadian destinations determined at interview.

Most of the Czechs had heard of Toronto, so everyone wanted to go there to settle. We Immigration Officers, in our wisdom of at least knowing other cities, made destination choices for these people in order to spread them across the whole country. We didn't pick a city because it could offer a job in the person's area of work, but because it hadn't had an overflow of refugees destined to it by us that day. Therefore, anyone who didn't have a personal contact was sent to cities like

London, Saskatoon, or Kamloops, rather than the big metropolis they requested.

We had quite the set-up in the Embassy: a smaller office normally, the Immigration Section was suddenly overflowing with at least 10-15 temporary staff members. There were no extra offices, no space for the administration of the extra tasks such as airplane charters, visa issuance on the spot, all the medical exams, press conferences, etc. So we all doubled up: immigration interviews were done in offices, at least two officers per room, seeing a whole family each, which meant we probably had 10 or more people in a room at the same time—what conditions for determining someone's future!!

The refugees arrived from Czechoslovakia by car, by train or simply with friends, with few belongings and rarely any money. They knew that they didn't want to stay in a country under Russian occupation but they certainly didn't know much about where they wanted to go. They met other like-minded refugees in Vienna, talked about destination options, which country had the better offers (Australia, Canada, the US or another European country were their options), then lined up where they could get sent on soonest. Canada chartered several aircraft, assigned each accepted refugee to the next flight, usually within 48 or 72 hours, and it all ran smoothly.

The officers who came to assist in the processing in Vienna were mainly young, idealistic, believing in the good we were doing for these people in their plight, and willing to work very hard to make it happen as quickly and efficiently as possible. We worked long days, each officer processing between 40 and 50 persons per day. Then we compensated ourselves and our fatigue by going for a meal together, reviewing our experiences of the day and generally relaxing in the pleasure of each other's company. The next day it was the same routine all over again. Another detail that required much too much attention was the problem of hotel rooms: Vienna has few extra hotel rooms at the best of times, so the additional burden of all the people the crisis brought to the city was almost too much to handle. I distinctly recall being advised by the Hotel Intercontinental every morning that they had no room for us for the next night (we were even doubled up in the hotel rooms). We would therefore go into the office, inform John Zawisza that the hotel wanted to put us out in the street, he would spend time on the telephone with the hotel informing them that he needed the rooms, and somehow we still had a place to sleep the next evening. I always wondered who was left to sleep on a park bench!

It seemed much longer due to the experiences crammed into the short period but, after a month, I was instructed to return to my home base of Cologne. There were Czech refugees to process there as well, but nothing compared to the numbers in Vienna.

To this day, I remember the time very vividly—it was probably the most hectic and most rewarding period during my tenure as an Immigration Officer. We worked hard, we played hard, and we certainly helped many frightened people to a new start

in a country where they knew their freedom was assured. I still carry the image of the young couple I destined to Lethbridge, waiting by the door as I came out of the building at the end of the day, and who looked at me very wistfully with the comment "I wonder what this Lethbridge will be like!" I hope that whether it was Lethbridge, Moncton or Nanaimo, Canada lived up to their expectations.

## Joyce Cavanagh-Woods

### Vienna

When I arrived in Vienna in September 1968, it was having just experienced "les evenements" in Paris that May. So it was out of the frying pan...

The office was in full swing, with John Zawisza mantled over his desk, issuing edicts on workflow, checking statistics, and bellowing instructions to the troops. And we were a lot of troops. Doctors, RCMP officers, airline personnel, various visiting cheeses from Geneva (in those days Geneva was regional HQ), and of course a phalanx of visa wallahs. Although there were a few old timers, like John Klassen, who actually knew what a refugee looked like, most of us were fresh faced and wide eyed, and ready to learn.

We worked VERY hard. There was no room for goofing off. In fact there was no room. The waiting room was always jammed, with odours of sausage and oranges permeating the area. Mothers with babies trying to keep control of the childrens' emotions and their own. Young men full of regret and hope. Grandparents being led through a process they had no stomach for. The faces changed daily, but the sounds and smells remained constant week after week. It was amazing that people who had already been through so much could maintain their self-control and self respect as they were fed through our sundry processes.

We worked relentlessly, filling forms, filling airplanes, and always, always doing more interviews. The interview I remember most clearly is one I had with a young man who claimed to be a concert violinist. Well, I said to him, you can forget *that* in Ottawa (where he was destined, for no particular reason). You will have to wash dishes or do some other manual work until you can learn English. (Remember, that although we were dealing with refugees, we still had to "counsel" about the job market). The young man was quite taken aback, and claimed that such work would ruin his hands. Well, that was too bad, but better face facts, was my riposte. Imagine my surprise when, a couple of years later, home on holiday, I attended a concert where said young man was the guest violinist...!

After a long and intense day at the office, a large group of us generally went out to dinner together. The temporary duty officers were happy not to eat hotel food, and I was happy not to cook. Vienna was, in those days, full of reasonably priced

*kellers, heurigers* and restaurants. We invariably ate heavy meals (because we were after all hungry, as Zawisza did not allow lunch breaks), with lashings of cream sauces, rich sausage, onions, peppers...and gallons of cheap white wine/beer. It is amazing we were able to function the next day, but we always did.

Though the refugee movement continued for many months before finally tapering off, Canada obtained some incredibly talented immigrants in those early months. Not only professionals, but many, many blue collar workers, who have undoubtedly done well in their areas of expertise. All went uncomplainingly to places like Chilliwack and Moose Jaw, without any idea of what lay in store for them. They had no choice: where they were destined depended on where the plane was stopping.

A word about our interpreters: we had many, and nearly all top-notch. But I remember a Hungarian gentleman who was somewhat wild-eyed, emotional, high strung, and seemed rather more interested in asking questions of the visa officers than doing his job. It was rumored that he was perhaps a spy, and he did not last long in the operation. But one evening he turned up at my apartment wanting to press his attentions. I was well and truly alarmed, and managed to keep him at bay, but I did thereafter tend to give more credence to the reputation of Cold War Vienna as a hotbed of spy activity, even of the least sophisticated kind.

Although I have forgotten all the Czech phrases I used to know (except "tell me your schooling, from the beginning"), I have not forgotten the energy and dedication with which we all worked to move so many so far so fast. This was the first of many refugee exercises I was involved in, and it gave me an excellent grounding in the essentials of logistics and teamwork.

It was a good thing we did, and I am proud to have been part of it.

### **Doug Dunnington in Vienna**

#### **Article 1. Lunch in Vienna**

My first training day in the Vienna office was chaotic to say the least. I knew little about immigration processing so tried to keep out of the way of the experienced officers who had come from hither and yon to help deal with the Czechs. When noon hour came around someone felt sorry for me and said that they would show me a nice spot to eat if I could wait until later in the afternoon.

"Not to worry" said I. "I come from Kitchener which used to be called Berlin and have taken a year of German at high school. I can handle a restaurant in Vienna. Besides, I'm a foreign service officer who is trained to be flexible and adaptable in any circumstance. Lunch will not be a problem."

With that I swagger out of the office in search of a typical Viennese restaurant from a travel brochure. My chosen one was particularly charming from the outside. It's inside was even better. I was now really in Austria. I spoke to the waiter in my best Grade 10 German and was determined not to have him think I was a tourist.

Everything was fine until he gave me the menu. It was all in ancient German. After perusing it three times, I saw but two words I understood "und sauerkraut".

Smiling like a cherub I motioned the waiter over and in my best tone said "Ich wunche das" pointing to the spot on the menu. "Das!" he said rather incredulously. "Jah" I responded not wanting to betray my ignorance. "OK" he said and off he went.

What seemed an eternity later he returned with sauerkraut like my mom used to make but also with what seemed to be sausage though darker than I was used to from Waterloo County.

By this time I was starving so immediately cut into the sausage. I almost shrieked as my whole plate was almost immediately covered in red. The waiter just smirked. It took me 3 seconds to realize that I had ordered "BLOOD SAUSAGE". Yuk

So much for my first experience with Austrian Cuisine.

#### **Article 2 An immigration trainee becomes a T.V. Star**

As the rookie on the processing team, my main job was issuing Forms 1000 and stamping visas in Czech passports. After the first several days, the latter task became rather boring but my stoicism with that part of the eventually paid off.

Canada's efforts in taking Czech refugees was receiving world-wide media attention so there were often reporters and TV crews around the office. The government even sent out a specialist to deal with the media. One day we were told that Germany's main TV news program was doing a feature on us and would be interviewing several of the officers. They wanted a special introduction to the program so I was asked to report to the Officer-in Charge immediately.

Imagine my surprise when John Zawisa announced that I had been selected for a special honour. The TV show would open with a picture of a Czech passport. The cover would be opened and then a Canadian visa stamp would be imposed on the page and signed. Guess whose hands had been selected to perform this key role?

Yes folks, over forty million residents of Germany and millions of other folks in Germany actually saw Doug Dunnington's hands and signature on a Czech passport. Dad and mom plus all the Dunnington family and friends were so proud of me.

Too bad I didn't get a copy of the film to show my grandchildren!

### Article 3.

After the first week of stamping passports and arranging flights, it was felt I could do interviews.

One of the first families I talked to was a TV cameraman, his wife and child. Jan told me about how he was filming the Czech news anchor describing the Russian attack in Prague. Things were getting tense as he could hear the gunfire in the streets and the escalating sounds of soldiers getting closer to his building. His concern mounted as rifle butts banged on the downstairs door. Discretion soon became the better part of valour as the whole crew fled down the back stairs where Jan's wife and son were waiting in the family car. They immediately hurled the vehicle toward the Austrian border.

After empathizing with them and deciding that they would be excellent immigrants in the long run, I had to caution them about the short-run. Broadcasting was a competitive industry in Canada so it was unlikely he could find a position for some time. Even then, he would have to be in a small city or town far away from one of the cities. His wife's secretarial skills would probably best serve them immediately though his electronics experience might help. The key was to be flexible.

Several weeks later, I was returning to our trainee class so escorted a plane of refugees across the Atlantic. During the course of the 8 hour flight I got to know most of them and shared their emotions as we saw the last of Czechoslovakia and the first of Canada. On arrival, I therefore stood at the doorway, shook hands and wished them all well as they headed down the ramp and past a CTV television crew filming their arrival.

Once the last person was off the plane, I returned to get my briefcase and then made my way down the stairs. The CTV crew was also packing up. As I headed across the tarmac, I heard my name being shrieked by a cameraman in a grenouille waving frantically.

It was Jan!!!

"Canada is wonderful. I got this job three days after we arrived. My wife is working for a lawyer and my son loves his new school. Our apartment is beautiful and everyone is so friendly". If I ever had a doubt about my new career, it ended that afternoon.

Too bad my old friends at Customs we had met during training gave me the "hot pass" and all my bags were searched. Oh well, My Barbara's welcome soon made me forget them. I still wonder whether they made an honest mistake or envied a young buck from Kitchener who had found such a great job.

### Daryl Mesheau

No one who'd been paying attention to the Dubcek initiatives was particularly surprised when the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968. In Rome we'd heard of the possibility of a special scheme out of Vienna and a few days after the invasion Ron MacDougall, who was in Rome as temporary OIC that summer, called me in to tell me that he'd volunteered me to go to Vienna. "Take your passport and cigarettes," he advised, "you never know when you'll be back."

A very excited 24-year-old drove his MGB GT to Vienna that weekend and ended up staying for almost five months, until January 1969. Under the driving leadership of John Zawisza, whom the local staff had nicknamed "Der Loewel," it didn't take long to get organized. On Monday morning the beginning of the flood of Czechs in the west on vacation and not wanting to go home was at the doors of the visa office at Dr Karl Luegerring 10.

Looking back today the operation appears to have been a model for risk management. Bigger risks, like ordering charter flights assuming they'd be filled and interviews replacing the normal lengthy visa control checks, and smaller risks, like signing stacks of blank Forms 1000 to facilitate workflow and booking very scarce hotel rooms on the expectation that staff would be available, were all taken in order to make it happen successfully. Most of the individual applications were dealt with within days. The vast majority of the ten thousand or more Czechs who came to Canada were dealt with in Vienna and most of those had been dealt with by the end of the fifth month.

Staff was brought in from all over Europe: visa officers, doctors, visa control staff, locally-engaged staff. At one point nine visa officers were interviewing at once, doing interviews that may have lasted 20 minutes, much of that time being spent gathering data for the Form 1000 and trying to persuade people to get on flights that weren't destined to Toronto. The place was, in fact, a visa mill in the most positive of senses. Air Canada staff were housed in our office and filling passenger lists became a motivating force.

The turnover of interpreters was a headache because many of them decided to immigrate after a couple of weeks of work with us. I was blessed with two excellent long-term ones. Hilda Gregor, whose daughter Jana was married at the Rathaus just down the street during the movement and whose wedding guest list was partly made up of all the staff whose presence wasn't absolutely required for an hour that morning, immigrated to Windsor with her husband Jan and her three children. Her equally excellent replacement, Zdenka Podhajska, was the niece of Alois Podhajsky of Lipizzan Stallion fame.

There were points at the beginning of the movement where it wasn't out of the ordinary to see three Air Canada jets on the

tarmac at Schwechat Airport at one time. We gradually settled into a routine of three or four charters per week. One particularly memorable morning we arrived at the office to be told that Air Canada was sending a stretch DC-8 over that day instead of the regular size. We depleted the waiting list, then simply went into the reception area and asked if there were forty people just making application who might be ready to go that afternoon and fill up the plane. It was probably the fastest visa processing Canada's ever done.

The "refugee" definition was an issue for a very few days at the very beginning until the decision was made that an application from any Czech outside Czechoslovakia who didn't want to return could be entertained. As a visa officer I had no problem with fudging the definition because the quality of the people who were asking to immigrate was so high. It did become an issue again toward the end of the program when it appeared to us on the line that NHQ had become nervous that the folks applying by then were simply immigrants with no real fear of returning. In fact, later in the program some clients freely admitted that they made their applications, were interviewed and medically examined, were given flight details, and then returned home to Czechoslovakia for a few days to await the dates of their flights out of Vienna.

The proposed change of policy created one situation I recall well where a particularly sympathetic fellow who happened to show up at my desk for interview in January suddenly found himself a test case and subject to a very thorough and forceful "refugee-definition" interview by two of my seniors, one standing behind each of my shoulders. I'm not sure who was more frightened, the fellow because of the nature of the questioning, or me because I was afraid of being caught for surreptitiously signaling him the correct answers with my eyes. Perhaps because we were of similar age, he trusted me sufficiently to follow my cues. Undoubtedly he's very happily retired today in Hamilton or Kamloops or Moose Jaw, or perhaps he's the mayor of somewhere.

One incident I recall well concerns a trip Don Lygo and I made one Sunday in September to the border crossing in the countryside between Vienna and Bratislava. A Russian armoured vehicle was in evidence on the other side as we walked along a country road through a field, more or less behind the sleepy Austrian border post. We of course were trying to get the best angle for a photo of the invaders. At one point I turned around, saw a line of white stones we'd passed unnoticed, and said, "Don, don't look now, but I think we're about 30 yards inside Czechoslovakia." What followed was the fastest that I'd ever seen Don or any other human move, and I was close behind. The actual border fences went up later.

The social life was extraordinary. Staff came from all over Europe and Air Canada crews were constantly coming and going. We were young and well-heeled and Vienna was still inexpensive. We worked very hard and we played very hard. It was the time of hippies and of poor but adventurous young Czechs who were disappointed at Dubcek's ousting but

excited about moving on to a new life. More than once I had Czech groups or families waiting for their flights crash in my room at the Intercontinental for a night, rather than under a train bridge as they'd planned.

The whole experience is one I'd trade for absolutely nothing today, short of perhaps world peace, or another lunch of *cevapcice* from the Yugoslav place just beside the office, or maybe a *klein braun* from the Julius Meinl shop nearby, or a chance to hear Frau Hofler say one more time, "Ach! Ich musse die Formen Tausend typen!"

Mike Molloy

## Vienna 1968: discovering the world

We had an inkling something was up when friends in Nelson reported that the RCMP had been making the rounds of the neighborhood asking about me. In true West Kootenay fashion everyone closed ranks and clammed right up. Later, someone from OTTAWA called my parents' home looking for my current address. My startled mother turned to my Dad for advice: "Don't tell them anything!"

But the government has its sources and one fine late spring afternoon as the BC Highways Department truck pulled into the driveway of the Mountain View Motel in Golden B.C. I could see Jo waiting with what looked like a letter in her hand. As I jumped down she handed it to me as if it were made of gold. Inside was momentous news - a message from someone name Phyllis Turnbull in Ottawa: I had been hired by the Manpower and Immigration Foreign Service, and Jo, our daughter Kathleen and I were to get ourselves to Ottawa by 17 June.

The weeks that followed were crammed with both excitement and some hard life experiences but we did manage to find Ottawa in our blue Beetle, join the service, and meet our trainers: Gavin Stewart and Liz Boyce.

The training was good, interesting and demanding. Within days we learned the course would include four weeks on-the-job training at two different posts abroad. It transpired that I had drawn Vienna and Belfast, while my fellow trainee, Doug Dunnington, had drawn Belfast and Vienna.

I didn't much care about Belfast, the Molloyes are of the southern, Dublin centered persuasion, but Vienna was something else. My favorite subject at grad school was European Diplomacy 1871- 1914 and I had done a lot of reading about the Hapsburgs and their ramshackle empire.

August arrived and the week before we are all due to depart the Russians rolled into Czechoslovakia, extinguishing the Prague Spring and postponing the fall of the Iron Curtain for a generation. There was some question about whether my assignment would happen but in the end it was agreed that I



would go. A few days later I arrived at Vienna's airport, early in the morning, with genuine traveler's cheques and \$35.00 spending money that Jo had scraped together for the occasion.

With my one year of university German I made my way to the Intercontinental Hotel, noting the statue of Strauss in the park across the street and discovered to my relief that they did in fact have a reservation in my name. The radio in the room (there was no TV), tuned to "Osteriech Drie", played some reassuring rock and roll and as I drifted off to sleep it occurred to me that most people in Austria probably didn't want to immigrate to Canada and I found that a little sad.

Next morning, with the aid of a map, I discovered that the Visa Office was about half the way around Vienna's famous circle from the Intercon and that I could get to it by cutting through the heart of the old city. That morning I also discovered Viennese coffee... love at first sip.

The Office was busy; the Manager, John Zawisa, was welcoming but preoccupied at the thought that his operation might soon be swamped with Czech refugees and seemed disappointed that I hadn't any better idea about how Canada might react than he did. I was assigned to the able care of John Klassen, a veteran immigration officer who was kind, helpful and resolute. I spent a couple of days observing his interviews and then was allowed to begin conducting my own under the very stern and critical eye of Miss Kristic, a striking, intimidating, older woman (26 at least) with dark red hair.

As the first week passed I thought I was getting pretty good at interviewing but even as a lowly trainee I was aware of the growing pressure at the front desk as the numbers of Czech seeking immigration to Canada began to climb. It seemed like forever before word came from Ottawa that Canada would mount a special program and in midst of all the communications came a message for me: stay put, don't go to Belfast. Further, my fellow trainee Doug Dunnington, who had gone first to Belfast, was to proceed to Vienna and we were both to stay as part of the reinforced team to deal with the Czechs - heady stuff for officers of eight week's standing.

In the meantime I enjoyed Vienna. I came to love the solemn grey buildings and the musty smell of antiquity that pervaded the place. At Mr. Zawisa's suggestion I took the tram to Grinsig, where I bought a carafe of white wine, my first bottle of mineral water ("to protect your stomach" Mr. Z had advised) and a great mess of cold cuts and salads and listened to the Oompa band. On instructions from Jo, her mother and her grandmother, I went to the Hotel Sacha and ate Sacha Torte mit Schlag. I explored the old city to the point that 37 years later I remember all the streets. I even bought a ticket to see the Lipizaner Stallions and fell asleep in the middle of the performance.

What impressed me most however was the museum of history and more specifically the display in the entrance of the automobile Franz Ferdinand of Austria rode in to his death in Sarajevo in 1914 and beside it, a coffin-like glass case with his

blood stained uniform from that fateful day. Sobering to contemplate in 1968 with Soviet tanks parked at the border crossing at Bratislava, 45 minutes away.

The Viennese themselves appeared to me to be very formal and solemn, sad in fact. They dressed differently - of course you saw them in their traditional "trocken" outfits on the weekends or going out to dine but even their workclothes were different - no windbreakers, no jeans, even the municipal workers wore "suit" coats. (Maria Hacke told me that it was much the same in Germany where "pedal pushers" were frowned on and I have taken care to exclude them from my wardrobe when passing through Germany ever since.)

By week three the office began to fill up with reinforcements from all over Europe. There were tense staff meetings where procedure and selection criteria were explained and dissected, argued about and, eventually, agreed upon. After one inconclusive early meeting I recall walking back to the work area with John Klassen who shook his head at the indecision and muttered, "Are we men or are we not?" In due course consensus was achieved and so far as I could tell we were to make a show of discouraging people, telling them it would be hard to adapt and hard to find a job, but, as soon as it was clear that they were determined to go to Canada, we were to accept them and go into counselling mode.

I thought I had it down rather well and was interviewing my 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Czech family when Harry Cunliffe, a very senior officer from the Europe Area HQ in Geneva, stepped in to observe my technique. I spent the next week carrying files from registry to the officers, from the officers to medical section, from medical section to "stage B" and back to registry. Apparently I was not yet the kind of interviewer needed for this show.

Doug and I were eventually summoned to Mr. Zawisa's inner sanctum and informed that, since it had been observed that we were capable of signing our names, we would become the visa signing experts. The visa signing section immediately took up residence in a broom closet, space being very hard to come by, and there we spent the remainder of our assignment.

All day long, as cases reached the end of the process, heaps of brown files would be piled on the tiny table Doug and I shared. We were shown how to check that all the documentation was in order and then to sign the Form 1000 for each person in the file, then stamp visas in the passports, fill them in, and tah dah, sign our names. I arrived in Vienna with a rather elaborate signature. I left with a very short one. In three and a half weeks we signed our names thousands of times. The cheerful part of the workday was passing the heaps of completed files to Roger St. Vincent, Officer in Charge of the Visa office in Kingston Jamaica, who happened to be vacationing in Europe, who had come into the office to see what was up and found himself in charge of transportation arrangements.

If the long days were filled with broom closet drudgery, the evenings were enchanting. The reinforcement included a lot of seasoned veterans like Cunliffe, Dave Bullock and Louis Mac who knew their way around life in Europe. There were younger officers too, with a couple of years under their belts, and they were our natural companions: Joyce Cavanaugh (- Woods), Daryl Mesheau, Maria Hacke (Beaulne) - good people who became lifelong friends and colleagues. Happily too the beer was plentiful, the wine was both good and cheap and the food ... well it was a pretty poor schnitzel that didn't overlap the plate an inch or more all around. And between the waltzes and the gypsy bands, the song that dominated the airwaves that summer went:

Those were the days my friend  
We thought they'd never end  
We'd sing and dance forever and a day  
We'd live the life we'd choose  
We'd fight and never lose  
Those were the days my friend, those were the days.

As for the refugees themselves, even to my inexperienced eyes, it was clear they represented a gold mine of skills and talent. Many had been on vacation in Austria when the tanks rolled in and had little in the way of possessions beyond a small bag of clothes: I never saw so many people come to interviews with tennis racquets tucked under their arms.

Around week 5 word came that my family was about to expand and Doug and I were ordered to return to Ottawa to resume our training. We came home on a refugee charter and were seated in the first class cabin. Before takeoff the crew served champagne to all the passengers and it seemed to me that this was the right way to greet people coming to start a new life in Canada.

### **Sacrifice and Bravery as the Prague Spring Ends**

**Charles Morrow<sup>1</sup>**

In August, 1968, with my wife Sally and eldest daughter Jennifer, we were holidaying in Ireland, and the rapidly-evolving political situation in Czechoslovakia was the furthest thing from our thoughts. My responsibilities at the Regional Office in Geneva were to run the advertising and promotion campaigns that were attracting professional and skilled immigrants to Canada from western Europe, as the Canadian economy improved and labour shortages increased. We were more concerned by the student riots in Paris and the meteoric rise of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, than the fate of Alexander Dubcek and the Prague Spring. But on the morning of August 21 newspapers headlined the invasion of Czechoslovakia by USSR and Warsaw Pact troops. Tanks on the streets of Prague signaled the end of the short-lived attempt to "give socialism a

human face", as Dubcek had proclaimed. And the likelihood that the open border with Austria would soon be slammed shut provoked the biggest refugee movement Canada had seen since the Hungarian flood a decade earlier.

I had telephoned Dudley MacWilliam, the Director of the Geneva HQ, that morning. His order had the directness of the RCAF Group Captain he had been until recently. "Get to Vienna as quickly as possible. Help handle the press, and anything else!"

Vienna was chaotic as more than 30,000 Czech refugees flooded the city. Word spread quickly that Canada would waive normal immigration procedures to accelerate the movement of refugees, and long lines of applicants formed outside the Canadian offices.

While my visa officer colleagues worked long hours processing refugees, I became "Mr. Fixit", with amusing and sometimes touching results.

On my first morning, the Officer in Charge, John Zawisza, caught me by the arm in the crowded corridor. "We've got a problem! Ottawa is sending over three VIP 'head-hunters' to search out the top talent and convince them to come to Canada. You've got to find them a hotel." John and I knew that every hotel bed in Vienna was occupied, sometimes night and day. The VIPs were Dr. Arnold Walter, recently retired head of the Music Faculty of the University of Toronto, a top scientist from the National Research Council in Ottawa and the head of the animation studio of the National Film Board in Montreal. Whole departments from Czechoslovakia's state-run universities, research institutes and its much-admired film production studio had packed up their belongings, loaded their Skodas to the roofs and decamped to Vienna. With not a moment to lose, I had a secretary call the posh Hotel Bristol. Herr Dr. Morrow of the Canadian Embassy wished to speak to the Managing Director, personally! When he came on the line, I adopted a grave voice. The Prime Minister had dispatched Canada's top figures in the arts and sciences to his fair city in an unprecedented humanitarian response to the refugee crisis! It would be insult Austrian-Canadian relations if they were not hosted in style. After some discussion at the other end of the line, I was informed there was only one space left, the Royal Suite. "We'll take it," sight unseen. When the trio arrived, the affable Dr. Walter, happy to be back in his beloved Vienna, quickly took the enormous master bed, while his two colleagues got camp cots below a massive oil painting of Habsburg royalty, in an ante-room. In the days to come, they scoured the city on the trails of musicians, scientists and film makers, often offering jobs on the spot.

The Department had moved quickly to charter DC-8s from Air Canada, the first flight leaving on September 15. Air Canada's Vienna staff was supplemented by their Prague team, which helped considerably with the language problems. They showed imagination and flexibility in handling all kinds of special situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Morrow was chief of information in the European HQ in Geneva from its opening in the Spring of 1966 until its close in July, 1969.

The sacrifices made in the quest for freedom were often touching. Many of the refugees were professionals or highly-skilled trades people who had given up secure jobs expecting new repression under a hard-line, Soviet-backed regime. Refugees told me how they had simply packed whatever belongings they could into their tiny cars, said good-bye to neighbors and family and turned the keys in their apartment doors. One family showed me photos of their ski chalet in the Tatra Mountains, a tranquil hide-away they would never see again. There were so many cars abandoned in the street outside the Canadian offices that we had to have the police tow them away.

When the size of the movement became apparent, a policy decision was made to try to direct immigrants to cities other than Toronto, and jets were chartered for destinations in the west and Atlantic provinces. Visa officers had the tough job of convincing applicants of the delights of Winnipeg, Regina and Halifax. The move made sense for many reasons. Above all, residents of smaller centers were eager to help in re-settlement, moved as they were by stories of students confronting tanks in the streets of Prague.

Writing a history of immigration to Toronto, Harold Troper attributed Canada's quick response to the Czech refugee crisis to a "fortuitous mixture of altruism and economic self-interest." While it is true that Canada competed with Australia for the most highly-qualified refugees, our staff in Vienna could not help but be moved by the many stories of the sacrifices and the bravery of these proud new Canadians.

#### **Hilda Gregor**

The following are memories from Hilda Gregor, a Czechoslovak national, who was hired on an emergency basis as an interpreter at the Canadian immigration office in Vienna during the hectic days of processing refugees from Czechoslovakia.

Even 35 years after escaping from our homeland we still have an affinity to go to the first few days of agonizing, what and where our next life would continue.

All that time, for Czechoslovaks Vienna was the nearest official front to freedom. Looking for friends, hovering around institutions, clubs, etc., we reached the Canadian Consulate, which was overwhelmed with people seeking assistance. There was an atmosphere aplenty, we were made wanted and welcome.

A sudden stunning request to assist in translating, changed the life of our family. I was hired as translator. For almost 3 months, I enjoyed the company of people representing Canada. The Consulate of Canada, under the auspices of Consulate General, Mr. Zawisza, and my direct boss, Darryl Mischeau (do I have after this long time the right spelling?) a tremendous lot of work was done daily. The Consulate called in their representatives from Germany, Italy and others to

coordinate all these applications. Overtime was not a bother. I am sure at least 50,000 people from occupied Czechoslovakia must have gone through its doors.

When we found out an applicant was financially so stressed, or living under bridges, refusing to stay in camps because their documents were taken from them, many a time we offered a sandwich or two.

The Canadian program for emigrants was unbelievably generous. Flight tickets were issued to all, with the understanding that a refund was expected after the applicant started working. On arrival at the intended destination, hotel accommodations with 3 meals a day were offered if relatives or friends were not available. Six month courses in English were offered where necessary. The Unemployment Offices were certainly kept busy. Many church representatives offered their help with rentals of homes. Vouchers were issued to buy used appliances and to furnish rentals.

Czechoslovaks, now citizens, in most cases already grandparents and great grandparents, are now proud to be a part of this great country. Greetings from one of them,  
Yours, Hilda Gregor

#### **Vince and Trauda Stvan remember**

The following are the memories of Vince and Trauda Stvan, who arrived in Canada from Prague in October 1968. They left Czechoslovakia with 2 suitcases and their 3 year old daughter, Martina. Another daughter was born in Montreal a few years later. Retired now, they still live in Windsor where the Canadian government originally sent them. Martina is a foreign service officer with CIC. She still has the teddy bear.

The Prague Spring that started with Alexander Dubcek being named the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party brought Czechoslovakia a certain hope for the future. We hoped for at least some political and economic freedoms that would improve our lives. Obviously, only naive people believed that "Socialism with a Human Face" was a workable philosophy. Communism has never had a human face and would not be able to invent it in the future. But, we had a vague expectation that if Dubcek's regime succeeded to stay in power, citizens would push it towards more democratic reforms and perhaps, slowly and with the help of 'world opinion', into free democratic elections.

The majority of the Czechoslovak population did not admit to a possibility of Soviet military intervention. We believed that the opinion of the free world would not allow the Soviet military clique to use force and so would "defend" Czechoslovakia. The events of 1968 showed that the Soviet Union did not care about world opinion and more importantly were not afraid of any counteractions by western countries.

Czechoslovakia was in the Soviet sphere of influence and NATO would not dare to intervene. The Soviet invasion increased resentment and even hatred towards Russians by the majority of the Czechoslovak population but also brought distrust of the Soviet leadership by many members of the Czechoslovak Communist party.

Soviet tanks along with the armies of East Germany, Poland and Hungary rolled across the border of Czechoslovakia on August 21<sup>st</sup> 1968 and occupied the country in a day or two. The Czechoslovak army was not allowed to leave its barracks. In a few months over 50,000 Czechs and Slovaks left the country and went for a "short vacation" – as the majority of them claimed – to Austria and West Germany.

Our family was one of them. We crossed the border at the end of October by a midnight express train from Prague to Vienna. Obviously, we could not take any valuable things or take too many possessions so that we would not attract the attention of the military guards and custom officers at the border. We carried two suitcases, one for each of us. The most precious possession was, of course, our three year old daughter – Martina and her teddy bear.

We had visited Vienna the year before. Friends who lived in an apartment across the hall had gone for a trip to the Austrian Alps and 'forgot' to come back. They applied for immigration to Canada from Vienna. We wanted to travel to Vienna and meet with them before they left, but we needed an invitation from an Austrian citizen. They arranged it for us and we received an invitation from Mr. J, a restaurant owner in Vienna. On that basis we could apply for passports and an exit visa to Austria. But the authorities did not enter our daughter's name into our passports, which was customary procedure to ensure that the parents would come back. In the summer of 1967 we travelled, for the first time in our lives, to a capitalist western country.

Then came the Prague Spring of 1968 and my trip to the University of Reading in England to attend an international conference. The invasion on 21<sup>st</sup> of August 1968 convinced us that there was no place for us in a country occupied again.

The question of exit visas was problematic. We already had passports from our trip the previous year, but we needed new exit visas and our child entered into the passport. In order to present our application to the passport office, we also needed a new invitation from abroad. To type it and sign somebody's name and address was the easy part, but to produce an envelope with a foreign stamp and a recent date was a problem. I had kept the envelope from the invitation by Mr. J; what I had to do was only to alter the date on the stamp with the help of my typewriter. Had I known what the clerk at the passport office knew – that Austria had increased its postage for international mail – perhaps I would never have done it and, who knows, having had no legitimate invitation we would never have crossed the border and never immigrated to Canada. But the clerk gave the envelope a prolonged look, looked at me and back at the envelope, and perhaps for

reasons known only to him, accepted the application. In a week we received a letter that our passports were ready.

Our unforgettable vacation started very strangely right in the cab that was driving us to the train station. The cab driver was silent on the whole way to the station. He knew that he was driving us to the "Vienna midnight train" (we were perhaps not the only passengers he was bringing to the station that night) and he probably guessed the reason for our travel to Austria. The train station started filling with parents and their small children. Strangely, all the small children clutched their dolls or teddy bears and obediently stood by their parents and waited. The train station, which by law of its purpose and existence is always a noisy place, was unnaturally quiet that night. Nobody talked; short words were exchanged in whisper.

Finally, the train arrived. People slowly boarded the train and ... the same atmosphere continued inside the train. As the train started moving, the passengers covered their faces with their coats and pretended to go to sleep. In about five hours we arrived at the border. We "woke up" as the border military guards and custom officers boarded the train to check travel documents and search luggage. Soldiers armed with machine guns were guarding the train in order to prevent anybody from leaving it. We were ordered to open one piece of luggage; it was found OK, as well as our passports. Finally, in about 45 minutes the soldiers and the custom officers left the train and we moved toward the Austrian border which we crossed in about 15 minutes. Suddenly, as if a magician had waved a magic wand, everybody threw their coats from their faces, went into the corridor or started talking to their neighbours. Everybody showed excitement about the trip to Austria. People did not talk about their emigration plans but it was obvious that nobody planned to return.

We were lucky; we did not have to go to the refugee camp. Mr. J. whom we had met a year before had promised us that in case we ever needed to stay in Vienna he would quarter us. He kept his promise and we stayed on his restaurant premises.

Our friends from across the hall were already living and working in Toronto, so our first steps went logically to the Canadian Immigration Office. The waiting area of the Immigration Office was packed with people. That day we just succeeded to get 'a number' with an interview date. The number was high and the date was far in the future. Actually, it was so far that we would not be able to survive on the small amount of Austrian shillings we had in our pockets. We would have to go to a refugee camp somewhere, where we would receive free meals. Many stories were circulating in Vienna about the bad conditions in these camps (mainly for families) and people tried to avoid them if they could.

In the corridors of the Canadian Immigration Office a 'good Samaritan' advised us not to wait until the given date of the interview, but instead to stay in the waiting room until the end of the day. We heeded this advice, did as we were told and ... found that the Canadian officers were the **best people on Earth**. When they saw a family with such an obedient young

child waiting patiently the entire day, they took mercy on us, stretched their work day even further, took us for an interview and in half an hour we were leaving the office with a **date** in our hands. Not a date of our future interview but the date of an Air Canada flight to Canada (with a presumption that we would pass our medicals that they arranged for the next day). We recalculated our budget, planned our portions of pasta and bread for each day and in approximately 20 days our family boarded the plane – still with \$18.30 in our pocket.

I remember that the interviewer was a younger gentleman (perhaps my age) and there was an interpreter present in the office, a young Slovak lady (I gather that she was probably Jana Gregor.) I did not need her. The officer, when he realized that I could speak some English, waved away her help and was patient with my English and me. I remember talking with him about my trip to Reading in May 1968, where I had applied for a scholarship for post-graduate study. He told me that it would be easy to enroll at any Canadian University.

The Vienna office sent us to Windsor, Ontario. Firstly, because Toronto was 'full' of new immigrants at that time and secondly, perhaps because there was a University there and my last occupation was 'teaching at a university'. We did not regret that they did not send us to Toronto, where our friends were. We were happy to immigrate to Canada and perhaps we asked only to be sent to Ontario.

We arrived in Toronto in the evening darkness, on October 21<sup>st</sup> 1968. The bird eye view of the huge city full of lights was impressive. After clearing customs at the Toronto airport the new immigrants were taken by bus to Hotel Ford. Our friends had been waiting for us at the airport and asked the Manpower representative for permission to drive us to the hotel in their car. We had dinner with them the next day and the "funny wooden houses" were a strange experience for us. In Europe wood is a construction material for cottages only. Wooden, wartime houses with open wooden porches in front and wooden electrical poles along the street were a shock. But, of course, inside the homes it was nice, warm and cozy.

The Toronto Manpower Office scheduled an appointment for us the next morning. We arrived on time and – again – were sitting and waiting with our daughter in the waiting room of the office until the end of the working day. Nobody called us. When I inquired about our appointment, they answered that we had to wait our turn. We did not dare to leave the waiting room, so my wife bought a few rolls and bologna and a few cans of Coca Cola from the nearest corner store. We lunched in the waiting room. We were waiting until there was nobody else in the room. The clerks were surprised and perhaps a little annoyed seeing us there. Our files had been misplaced. At last they called us into the office, handed us two train tickets, welfare allowance for two days, taxi fare to the train station and told us to catch the morning train to Windsor ... "somebody will be waiting for you at the Windsor train station".

The next day we boarded the train and enjoyed the ride to our new hometown, that we had never heard of before. At the Windsor train station we were met by Mr. Widlock, the representative of the Manpower office in Windsor. It must have been quite easy for him to recognize us in the crowd. Two differently dressed foreigners with a little girl. He brought us to the Prince Edward hotel (demolished a few years later). In the hotel we lived and ate free of charge. There were a few Czech and Slovak families with children in the hotel and also several single men and women. The food in the hotel restaurant was served buffet style and our meal bill was sent daily to the Manpower Office. Obviously, as it was free of charge, we all picked the best food possible available and in cruise-ship portions. Predictably, the response from the accounting department of the Manpower Office came in swiftly. After two or three days of a 'free ride', the immigrants in the hotel were allowed to pick only certain meals. But there was nothing to complain about. We were well fed, regardless of these restrictions.

Our family spent probably five days at the hotel. It was difficult to find rental accommodation in Windsor, particularly for a family with children, we were told. At last the Office did find us a room in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Childerhouse, who answered a classified advertisement in the paper. We lived with them for approximately three weeks - waiting for the beginning of English classes. Very soon I, as the family breadwinner, was enrolled in a 20-week English course and in the middle of November I started my Canadian education.

The learning of English was a novelty for all of us. The teachers talked to us and explained the meaning either in 'plain English' or they used an 'international language', i.e. their hands or drawings on the blackboard. The majority of the students in our class were university educated, so many of us could deduce the meaning of a word from its similarity with a Latin expression. Also, many of us had already studied English in our old countries. For good measure, at the end of our English course, two more weeks of professional and technical English classes were added. We were delighted.

While living with the Childerhouse family, we met their friend who was a student at the University of Windsor. He advised me to apply at the University library for a part-time job as a shelver. I did and started working in the afternoons after my English class. In a few months, with this additional income, we became rich enough to start looking for a car. I found one in the 'classified' section of the Windsor Star and bought a 1959 Chevrolet Biscayne for \$290.

Through the grapevine we learned that the Manpower Office was responsible for us until the end of our English courses/start of our jobs and was paying our weekly welfare allowance and would even provide basic furniture for a rented apartment. We found a two-bedroom apartment and asked for furniture. In a day or two a furniture truck stopped in front of our door and in came two beds and a kitchen table with four chairs. The spring box did not match the bed but it did not decrease its usefulness, so we did not mind a bit. In a short



time I started working for Chrysler Corp. as a labourer on the line.

Our last task was to convince the Manpower Office in Windsor that women are as useful in a modern society as men are and that it was important that they acquire education and/or professional skills. The most important was language. My wife started English courses in the spring, then part-time work as a shelver at the University of Windsor library. We were on our way to becoming Canadians.

*Editor's note:*

*The following article was published in the May 1997 Bulletin. As the content seems appropriate to the theme of this Bulletin it is reprinted as a summary of the story.*

*The late Bernard Brodie was employed in both the Immigration and Manpower operations of the Department. He was a long time Secretary of the Society.*

### **THE CZECHOSLOVAKS OF 1968/69** **by Bernard Brodie**

In the period 1947-52 Canada accepted over 186,000 refugees. This movement was followed in 1957/57 by 38,000 Hungarians and in 1968/69 by 12,000 Czechoslovaks.

As was the case for the Hungarians, there existed in Canada a great deal of sympathy for Czechoslovakia, which had become a victim of invasion by Soviet and other East European forces. In September 1968 Minister of Manpower and Immigration Allan MacEachen announced that Canada was prepared to consider applications from Czechoslovak refugees under relaxed admission criteria. Many of the refugees were medical doctors, technicians, designers and experienced tradesmen.

Canada sent a team to Vienna as the Austrians had once again offered temporary asylum to the majority of the refugees. The Canadian team included officials from the national Research Council, Canada council and the Canadian Association of Universities and colleges.

The Canadian government developed special programmes for the arriving refugees in the form of grants for transportation, language courses in English and French, employment training courses and accommodation, if not otherwise available.

Immigration officials made all the transport arrangements. By the end of 1968 about 10,000 Czechoslovakians had arrived in Canada. The total cost of the movement has been estimated at \$11 million, part of which was repaid by the refugees themselves. Unlike with the Hungarian movement, advances for airfare to Canada had to be repaid.

As was the case for the Hungarians, the composition of the Czechoslovaks was suitable for the Canadian labour market. Nearly 70% of the heads of household destined for the labour force were under the age of 40 and 19% had more than 12

years of education. Of the latter, one third fell into the professional or highly skilled categories.

The majority of these people were quickly absorbed into the Canadian labour force. A longitudinal study of 2,000 of them undertaken by the Department of Manpower and immigration showed that only 10% remained unemployed three years after arrival.

The study provided a good insight into their adaptation in Canada. When the refugees had arrived in Canada, the country was undergoing a slowdown in the economy. As a result, the refugees experienced a higher rate of unemployment in the initial period after arrival than other regular immigrants and a Canadian control group.

However, Czechoslovaks in the age group 25/44, the better educated and those in technical and professional occupations had a lower rate of joblessness. Average duration of unemployment shrank from seven weeks in the first year to four weeks in the third year.

Czechoslovak refugees proved be particularly stable in the jobs they obtained.

*Editor's note:*

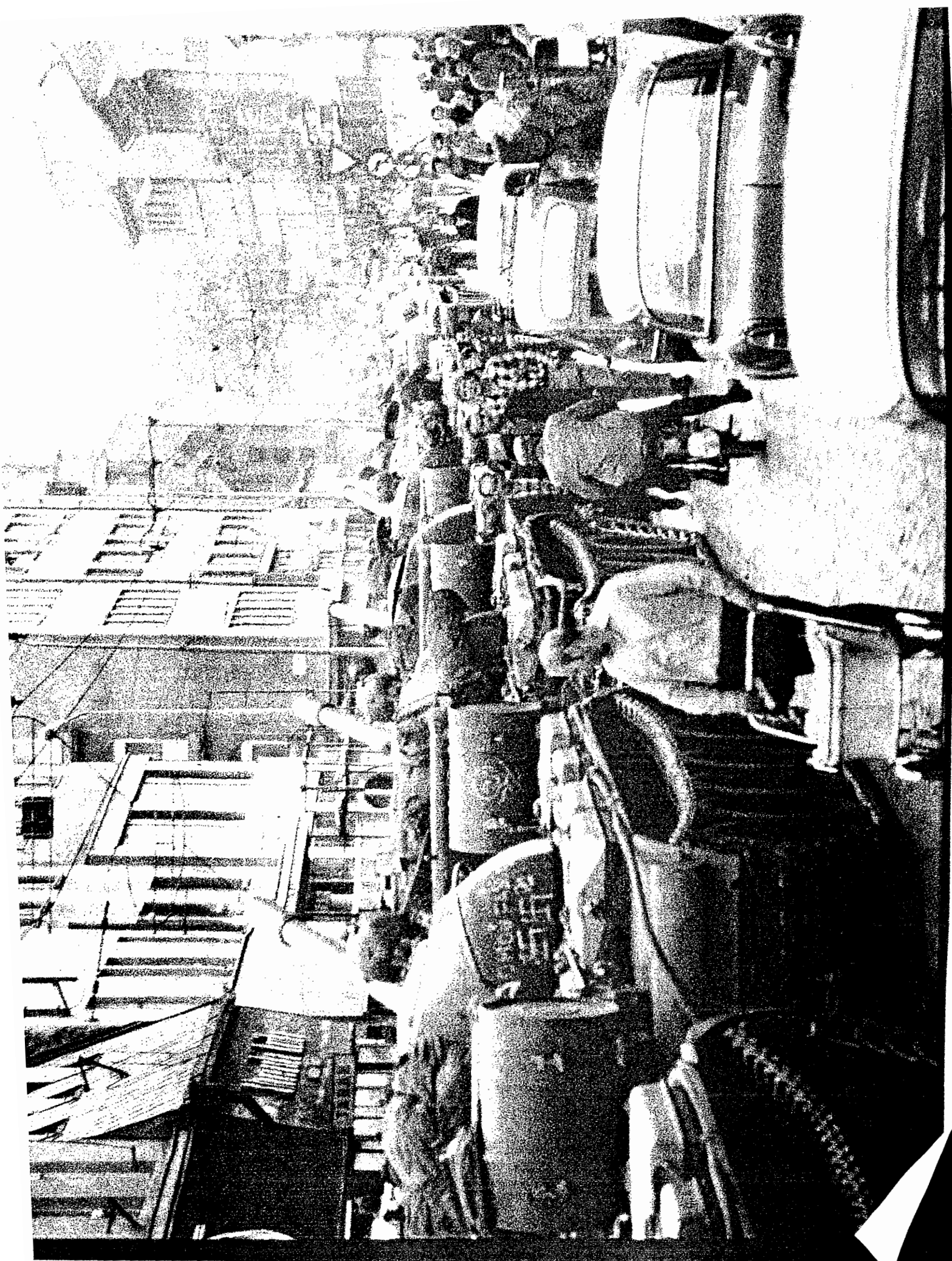
*Photos on the following page, courtesy of Charles Morrow, whose story appears on page 15.*

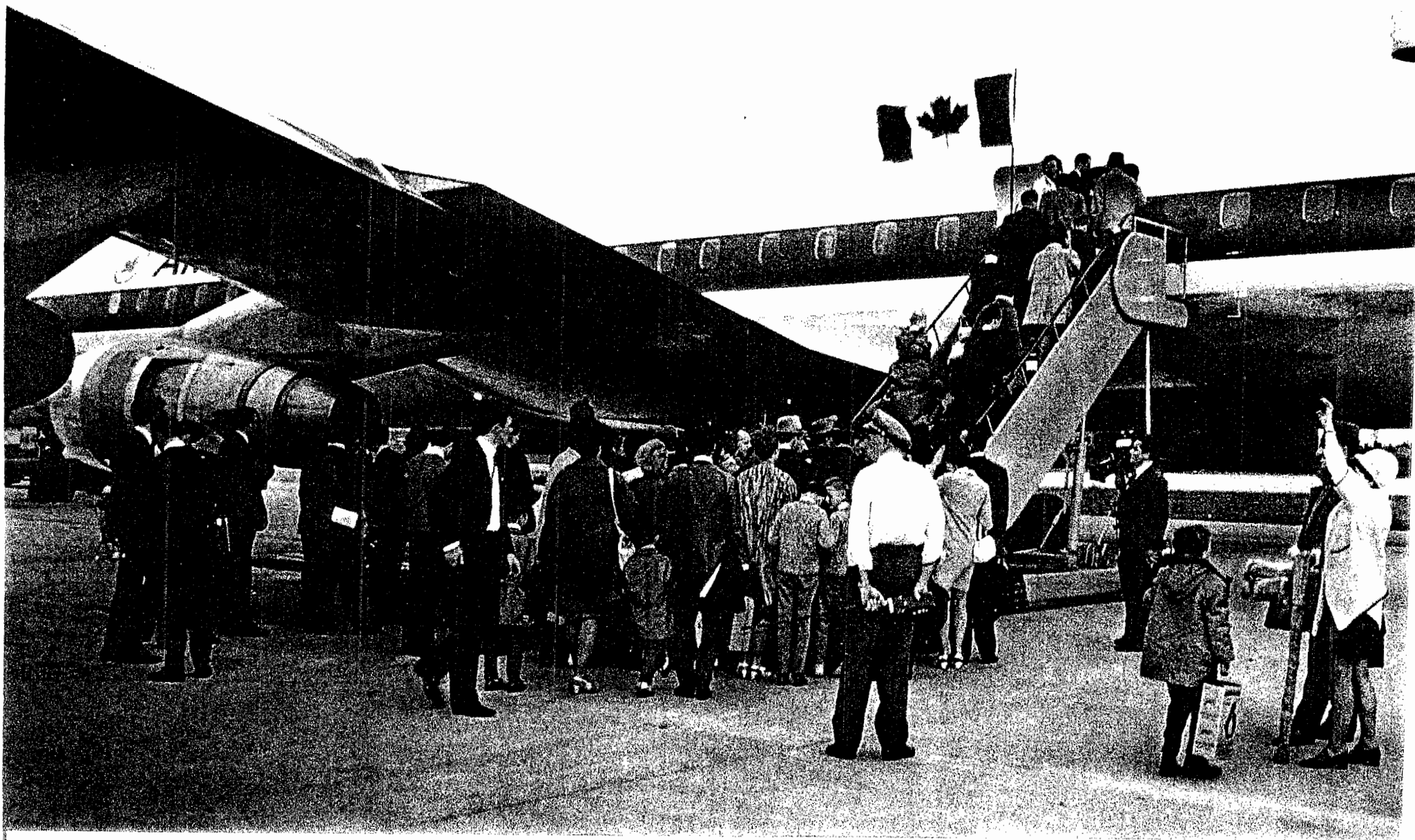
*The following is an anecdote from WWII, well before the CR movement, but is included for the benefit of the "punsters" within our membership. If there is none, please accept our apologies.*

*A diminutive Czech citizen (about 5' 4") who had run afoul of the German occupiers, was hurrying along the streets of Prague, one jump ahead of the Gestapo. In desperation, he ducked into a tobacco shop, and asked the proprietor :  
"would you cache a small Czech?" Sorry, couldn't resist.*

**Due to the length of this bulletin, a number of routine items, such as the "whereabouts of" column etc. will resume in future Bulletins.**

**Following good journalistic practice, we repeat our invitation to all members. Write to the editor, on any subject you wish. Any memories, be they comical, serious history, critical or whatever - they are all welcome. Recent Bulletins have covered overseas operations, but there remain hundreds of untold stories of Immigration field operations in Canada. If you have ever had the urge to tell a story, do it now !  
Let us hear from you.**





VIENNA, Sept. 15, 1968 - Canada's first charter flight for Czechoslovak refugees left Vienna today, carrying 203 persons destined for Toronto and other cities in southwestern Ontario. Two additional flights are planned within the next four days.

