

## *Czech Refugees in Cold War Canada* by Jan Raska

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influence of labour organizations, believed to be led by “enemy aliens,” were seen to be at the heart of this unrest. And so, on 25 September 1918, the federal government “effectively declar[ed that] all groups representing unskilled and immigrant workers at the Lakehead were illegal”—yet another wartime blow to democracy (142-145).

Finally, with respect to overall form, apart from the book’s evident and quite commendable strengths, there are perhaps just two important flaws of note. The Chapter Six summation of “Conscription and the Military Service Act, 1917” declares that despite local success rates, “Nationally... conscription was largely a failure in that it did not secure the large number of recruits that had been hoped for” (122). The source cited is J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman’s much-dated 1977 study, *Broken Promises*, the conclusions of which the authors also note were reversed by Jack Granatstein in 2001. This oddity begs the question, why would the authors choose to perpetuate the myth that conscription

failed at the national level? Indeed, their assertion is not supported by G.W.L. Nicholson’s official history of the CEF in 1962 and is flatly rejected by more contemporary historiography on the subject. On a technical note, surprisingly *Thunder Bay* suffers a bit from a lack of rigorous editing. Apparently, several spelling errors were not picked up by spell-check, and several other minor errors collectively suggest the manuscript required one more final scrub.

In summary, as the authors note, “The Lakehead at war was, in essence, a distillation of a nation at war” (11). In this respect, *Thunder Bay* is a highly readable, fast-paced account that will appeal both to general audiences and to academics alike, and certainly deserves a spot on the library shelf of all Canadian military historians.

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## *Czech Refugees in Cold War Canada*

By Jan Raska

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paperback. ISBN 9780887558276. ([www.uofmpress.ca](http://www.uofmpress.ca))

Many years ago, I had the good fortune of volunteering at the Bata Shoe Museum on Bloor Street in downtown Toronto. The museum opened its doors in 1995, the logical expansion of founder Sonja Baťa’s decades long commitment to shoe history, research and production. Née Wettstein in Zurich, Austria, Mrs. Baťa, as we always addressed her, came to Canada in 1946 after marrying

Tomáš Baťa, a Czech industrialist. Mr. Baťa had arrived in Canada almost a decade prior on a special Order-in-Council that enabled him to set up his shoe factory operations in Franktown, Ontario. The company expanded in subsequent years, and also facilitated the migration of hundreds of employees, becoming a quintessential refugee success story, of the rags to riches variety that has become part of the stock

and trade of narratives about the benefits of refugee assistance.<sup>1</sup>

I was reminded of the Bat'as' story in my reading of *Czech Refugees in Cold War Canada* by Jan Raska (University of Manitoba Press, 2018). Meticulously researched using a variety of sources including government documents, oral histories and materials from a variety of ethnic fonds and ethnic press outlets, *Czech Refugees in Cold War Canada* is a nuanced

analysis of three waves of Czech migration to Canada during the Cold War, most notably the first wave of émigrés in 1948, the wave of refugees that left the Soviet repression of the Prague Spring in 1968 and those who migrated in the 1970s and 1980s in defiance of continued communist controls over mobility. In doing so, Raska provides a clear and articulate study of the differences in experiences and motivations that attended each of these waves and the manner in which

successive migrants engaged, to varying degrees, with those who had moved previously (including the established generations of the interwar years).

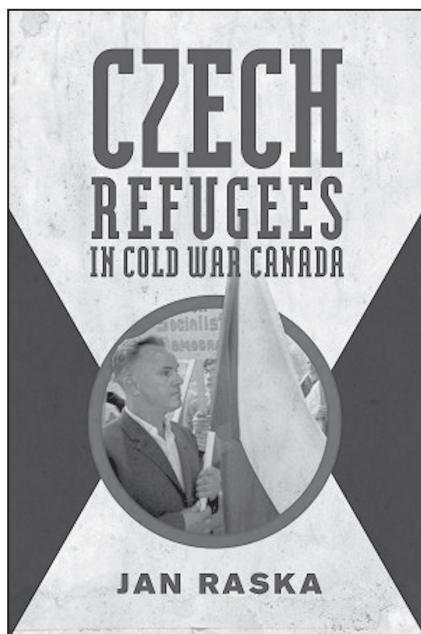
As Raska notes in his introduction, the bulk of his research and analysis explores the generations of Czechs and Slovaks who settled in Ontario and the Toronto area. As such, this work will be of particu-

lar interest to readers of *Ontario History*, especially given Raska's detailed focus on the work of community institutions such as the Czechoslovak National Alliance and Masaryk Hall, headquartered in Toronto, which evolved from organizations that were profoundly interested in political events in the homeland to key ethnoheritage institutions that advanced provincial and federal interests in settlement and integration. Additionally, wonderful bio-

graphical sketches provide personal insights into the complicated and convoluted migration from Czechoslovakia to Canada over the course of the thirty years in question. Frantisek and Marie Flosman who left Czechoslovakia in 1949 when their mill was confiscated eventually arrived in Canada with their two sons. They first settled in in London, Ontario and later Toronto. The story of their arrival highlights not only a number of changes in circumstances, but also how they came to

be deeply involved in community institutions in their adopted city. The relationship between migrants and community institutions is critical as Raska seeks to underscore the key role that community members played in fostering anti-communist sentiment in Toronto, Ontario and Canada generally.

In a short prologue, Raska explains his



<sup>1</sup> In this case, the Bata Shoe Company was already a global success story at the time of relocation but its continued success in Canada has contributed to narratives of refugee resilience.

own family's connection to the history of Czech refugees in Cold War Canada by recounting the story of their circuitous arrival via a "vacation" in Yugoslavia, one of the few ways that people could leave the rigid controls on mobility in the Soviet bloc by the early 1990s. The story is telling for a number of reasons: one, it is a reminder that Raska knows first-hand the complicated ways in which a single story is bound up with earlier histories of movement and control. He also understands on an intellectual level, and a deeply personal level, how important language is in researching, writing and understanding the history of refugees experiences in the cold war.

As numerous scholars, including historians Daniel Cohen (*In War's Wake*) and Peter Gatrell (*The Making of the Modern Refugee*), have documented, people on both sides of the Iron Curtain used the language of refugeehood and persecution or intolerance to make claims about life in the other sphere. This rhetoric often obscured the complex and multi-faceted ways in which people thought about migration, ideal destinations, security and refuge. Raska takes great care in teasing out these complexities by thoroughly engaging with the implications of calling people refugees (mass movement), émigrés (intellectuals) or immigrants (the most general of categorizations).

*Czech Refugees in Cold War Canada* is a relatively short book but Raska covers a great deal of terrain in the seven, chronologically-oriented chapters. He details life in the homeland, the distinct waves of migration to Canada, the implications of movement and settlement on Canada's political, cultural and economic landscape and the relationship between migration from Eastern Europe and the politics of

multiculturalism as they emerged in the early 1970s. His point that the community's focus shifted from anti-communist and political change at home to a focus on integration and settlement in Canada is particularly well-taken and speaks to the dynamic way that migrants and citizens understood their relationship to place and home in the global cold war.

Indeed, *Czech Refugees in Cold War Canada* is thoroughly engrossing on an empirical as well as a conceptual level. I particularly appreciate Raska's consideration of refugee agency in the context of the history of movement during the Cold War. The idea of "agency," of acting with some kind of independence or free-will, has become a critical cornerstone of refugee and migration history in recent decades as scholars seek to understand how individuals and communities made decisions and acted in their own perceived interests, independent of (though sometimes in connection with) state and humanitarian efforts to coerce certain kinds of behaviour. Raska's approach is to divorce the term *refugee agency* to think about refugees and "their agency." It is a subtle distinction but one that I found rather provocative, as though one could leave one's agency at the door, as you would a pair of shoes. It is a marked departure from the idea that agency and the human experience are somehow inherently connected and, along with the detailed history of settlement and connections with the homeland detailed throughout the book, will no doubt invite future conceptual innovations and additional research on the topic of refugees in Cold War Canada.

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