

CZECHS AND POLES IN CHICAGO: PAN-SLAVISM AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CERMAK DEMOCRATIC MACHINE, 1860–1931

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While Poles rejected Pan-Slavic ideas in Europe, especially those that saw Russia as the protector of the Slavs, in Chicago a type of Pan-Slavism quickly emerged in the years after the Civil War. Polish and Czech immigrants forged a working relationship based on their common Slavic identity and on the realities of immigration, social class, and shared space in the city's neighborhoods. These two groups also confronted anti-immigrant and anti-working class biases in the city. Their relationship with the German American community, a politically and culturally powerful group in Chicago, often proved to be problematic. During World War One, the Slavic coalition actively attacked Chicago's Germans in an attempt to gain more political power. This coalition eventually resulted in the creation of a political machine under the leadership of Anton Čermak, an immigrant from Bohemia, who became the city's only foreign-born mayor in 1931.

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After the Napoleonic Wars, Pan-Slavism, the idea that the various Slavic nations should cooperate and perhaps even unite politically, emerged in Central Europe. The first Pan-Slav Conference took place in Prague from June 2 to June 16, 1848 as part of the revolutionary movements of the time period. Many Czechs felt that Slavs had interests distinct from Germans and they refused to attend the Frankfurt Assembly, the first freely elected parliament of Germany. The Prague forum quickly divided between factions, many favoring the German revolutionary movements spreading across Central Europe while

others saw Slavic autonomy within the Hapsburg state as the goal. During the Prague Conference enthusiastic students and others took to the streets and confronted local Austrian authorities. A stray bullet killed the wife of Field Marshall Alfred I, Prince of Windisch-Gratz. The Field Marshall then seized the city, disbanded the congress and established martial law throughout Bohemia. Despite this calamity Pan-Slavism became a potent force in Czech culture. For Poles, Pan-Slavism at first seemed attractive and Polish radicals participated in the 1848 Prague conference. Once it became a tool of Russian foreign policy advocating the liberation of the Slavic peoples under Russian leadership, however, Poles, who had already lived under the brunt of Czarist rule, began to opt out of the movement.¹

As 1848 came to an end many refugees from the violent reaction to the so-called Springtime of Nations began to head to the United States. Chief among these were Germans. Czechs also proceeded across the Atlantic to settle across America. Chicago quickly became a major destination for Czechs who had left Bohemia and Europe behind and it developed into the leading city of the Bohemian diaspora.

The first Czech immigrants arrived in Chicago about 1852 from New York. Originally they settled just to the south of the city cemetery, which would later become Lincoln Park, at North Avenue and Dearborn Street. Three years later the community largely left the area and settled on the Near West Side along Canal between Van Buren and Taylor Street. In 1863 in this neighborhood, which became known as Praha or Little Prague, Bohemians organized the first Czech Catholic parish in Chicago, St. Wenceslaus. It stood adjacent to both the Irish Catholic parishes of St. Patrick's to the north and to Holy Family to the west. The German Catholic parish, St. Francis of Assisi was its direct neighbor to the southwest. Despite the growing nationalism of Czech intellectuals, Bohemian immigrants often settled near Germans, as they knew that group best in Europe and many spoke German. After the Chicago Fire of 1871, and the second conflagration in 1874, Czechs began to leave the Near West Side and move directly south into a neighborhood that they eventually christened Pilsen.²

Pilsen developed into a thriving area dependent economically on the lumber district and on the nearby McCormick Reaper Works. The neighborhood and the

¹ The classic study of Pan Slavism is H. Kohn, *Pan-Slavism Its History and Ideology*, New York 1960. See also L.D. Orton, *The Prague Pan Slav Conference of 1848*, Bolder, Colorado, 1978; and L.L. Snyder, *The New Nationalism*, N.Y. 2003, pp. 37–328.

² J. Habenicht, *Dějiny Čechův Amerických*, St. Louis, 1910, pp. 566–567; A.G. Masaryk, 'The Bohemians in Chicago,' *Charities* (December 4, 1904), p. 206; J.Slabey Roucek, 'The Passing of American Czechoslovaks,' *The American Journal of Sociology* 39 (March 1934), p. 612.

region immediately to its west, while dominated by the Bohemians, attracted a number of immigrant groups including large numbers of Poles. On 17th Street between Paulina and Marshfield Streets Poles organized the third Polish Catholic parish in the city, St. Adalbert's in 1874. The locality to the west of Ashland Avenue became the second Polish district in Chicago. This neighborhood and the Back of the Yards, four miles to the south saw the most interaction between Czechs and Poles in Chicago.³

In the 1860s Chicagoans often mistook Poles and Czechs for each other, lumping them together simply as Slavs. At the time of the Civil War both groups were small, although the Czechs were more institutionally developed and they began to become involved in the political process. As early as April 1865 the Poles and Czechs held a combined meeting and made a joint resolution showing their sorrow over the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and pledging their support to his successor Andrew Johnson. Six years later on September 23, 1871, Poles and Czechs held a joint meeting at the Bohemian Gymnasium at 106–108 DeKoven in Praha. Speakers alternately addressed the crowd in both the Czech and Polish languages. The meeting passed a resolution pledging the support of both the Czech and Polish communities for the Republican ticket and advocating the nomination of a Pole, Frank Nowak, as a candidate for Collector of the West Division. Ethnic leaders often remarked that if the Czechs and Poles would unite they could reach all of their political goals.⁴

This early political collaboration continued as Czechs and Poles cooperated on various economic and political issues. While Pan-Slavism in Europe might have suffered under the shadow of Russian expansionism, in Chicago, far from the reach of Moscow, it seemed to exert a claim on the two Western Slavic nations who often referred to each other in their newspapers as “Brothers.” In the early years, especially on the Near West Side, Poles used Bohemian semi-public spaces to celebrate or commemorate events. In January 22, 1873 Poles gathered at the Lipa Slovenska (Slavonic Linden Tree Association) Hall at Canal and Taylor to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the 1863 Insurrection against the Russians. Poles and Czechs often celebrated together, on June 16, 1878 the Polish nationalist organization; Gmina Polski (Polish Commune) held a picnic that began with a procession that started near 22nd and Canal Streets and proceeded to Silver Leaf Grove. They marched under the escort of the Bohemian Sharpshooters commanded by Captain Hoodek. Roughly 4,000 people joined in the event.⁵

³ D.A. Pacyga, E.Skerrett, *Chicago: City of Neighborhoods*, Chicago 1986, Chapter 7.

⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, April 19, 1865 September 24, 1871, February 28, 1876.

⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, January 24, 1873; *The Daily Inter-Ocean*, June 17, 1878.

In the nineteenth century social class bound the two ethnicities as they shared the workplace especially in the lumberyards, packinghouses, and reaper works of the city. Most Czechs and Poles entered the city's workforce as common laborers. In Pilsen in particular they became among the most radical members of the emerging American working class. The Czech and Polish lumber shovers were active participants in working-class protest. In May 1876, lumberyard owners decided to cut wages from \$1.50 a day to \$1.25. The men struck in response. Others quickly filled their places and on May 8 about 2,000 Polish, Czech, and German strikers rioted against the strikebreakers and halted work in several lumberyards. One of the foremen shot three of the strikers killing at least one. The police finally broke up the confrontation taking fourteen men into custody. A large number of the men had been laid off for the winter months and the wage cut further enraged them. Bohemians and Poles actively participated the following year in the Great Railroad Strike. They fought police on the Northwest Side of the city and in Pilsen where they made up a large number of those shot and clubbed during the riots.⁶

Both groups suffered from prejudice. In 1877 the Town of Jefferson, which would later be annexed to Chicago, attempted to stop the construction of a Bohemian National Cemetery charging that the manner in which the Bohemians buried their dead and the way they kept their burial grounds made them a nuisance. The village government claimed the cemetery would depress land values and cause a health hazard. The courts found against the village. The Bohemian National Cemetery itself grew out of a dispute over the burial of Marie Šilhánek who died on July 25, 1876 and was denied burial at St. Adalbert's Cemetery, a combined Czech-Polish institution to the northwest of the city in the Town of Nilcs, by Rev. Joseph Molitor, the pastor of St. Wenceslaus Church. She supposedly never made a final confession. The priest's denial was obviously aimed at the growing Czech Freethinker movement. This resulted in a campaign led by *Svornost*, the first Czech language newspaper organized in 1875 in Chicago and a voice of the emerging Freethinker Movement in the Bohemian community. The paper took an anti-Catholic and secularist point of view. Freethinkers quickly made up a majority of the Czech population and they moved to create their own burial place. Czech and Polish Catholics established two joint cemeteries St. Adalbert's in Nilcs and Resurrection Cemetery to the southwest of the city

⁶ *Chicago Tribune*, May 9, 1876, July 27, 1877, August 5, 1877; *The Daily Inter-Ocean*, May 9, 1876.

in Justice, Illinois. Both of these later became more identified with the Polish community as Czech Catholics eventually created their own cemeteries.⁷

The close connection between the two ethnic communities in the nineteenth century continued along various lines as both attempted to flex their economic and political muscles. The Czechs as the older and better-established group often presented a model to their fellow Slavs. As the Polish population grew and became more institutionally developed it followed along the path set by the Bohemians. In the early 1870s the Bohemian community created several Building and Loan Associations the first being The Chicago Bohemian Building and Loan Association, No. 1 modeled on one operated by the Germans in Cincinnati. By 1883 the Czech community boasted of fifteen such societies. These organizations provided funds for the purchase of homes by members. Czechs quickly withdrew their savings from Chicago banks and invested in these ethnic institutions. That same year two such Polish institutions existed, the oldest being the Sobieski Savings and Loan Society.⁸

Three years later as Chicago reeled from the Haymarket Affair and the strikes associated with the Eight Hour Movement, the *Chicago Tribune*, again reported on the building and loan associations claiming that they would flounder if strikes continued jeopardizing the investment of thousands in the Czech and Polish communities. The newspaper counted some forty building and loan associations in the Bohemian neighborhoods. The Bohemian leader, Prokup Hudek, alone had organized twelve of these groups in the 6th Ward, which contained the Pilsen neighborhood. As Polish and Czech lumber shovers, sorters, and laborers, continued their struggle against the management of the vast lumberyards in Pilsen these associations began to struggle. The *Chicago Tribune*, which three years earlier had praised the local organizations, now pointed to poor management among other factors threatening the “thrifty” Bohemian community. Primarily the journal proclaimed that young reckless recent immigrant Czechs, Poles, and Germans who had a monopoly on day labor in the district, had called the strike and struck a blow against the prosperity of the Slavic community. The paper also mentioned the lockout of those employed in the garment industry as a factor, since the loss of income from the “sweating” system also hurt families and made it difficult to keep up their memberships in the building and loan associations.⁹

⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, October 22, 1877; J.E.S. Vojan, *Jubilee of the Bohemian National Cemetery Association in Chicago, Illinois*, Chicago 1927, pp. 4–7.

⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1883; *Svornost*, March 27, 1883 (Chicago Foreign Language Press survey henceforward cited as CFLPS).

⁹ *Chicago Tribune*, May 17, 1886.

Nevertheless the neighborhood loan associations continued to thrive and the Czechs remained leaders in the industry. In 1912, a report dealing with the Chicago building and loan associations reported that 214 existed in the city and of these 103 were Bohemian. All told the associations represented the sum of \$19,000,000 of which the Czech societies held \$10,000,000 (the equivalent of \$237,798,411 in 2013).¹⁰

Czechs and Poles continued to take active part in the political process and had representatives across the political spectrum. In 1887 they met to discuss the factions in the United Labor Party. In 1893 Polish, Lithuanian, and Czech voters in Pilsen rallied for Republican George Swift for mayor. The following year Polish and Czech Republicans rallied at Pulaski Hall on 18th and Ashland Avenue for the Czech candidate for alderman, J.M. Kralovec. The candidate spoke briefly in Czech and English to the enthusiastic crowd. Four years later, Polish and Czech Republicans gathered again at Pulaski Hall to celebrate the election of William McKinley. An overflow crowd also filled the lower hall of the building as leaders addressed the crowd in English, Polish, and Czech. In 1904 members of both ethnicities rallied behind the ever-popular Democrat, Carter Harrison II. The two ethnic groups continued to support each other politically. The following year the Polish and Czech leadership announced it would support each groups candidates regardless of party. Ten years later the Czech newspaper *Denni Hlasatel* called upon Polish voters to support Josef A. Mendl, a Bohemian candidate for the Democratic nomination for Cook County Sherriff. The paper stated, “No doubt the Poles will get the Bohemian – and Slavic votes if they themselves show evidence of a Slavic mutuality of interests.” Mendl won the primary with a good deal of support of Bohemian, Polish, and other Slavic voters and became the Democratic candidate. Other Czechs also gained nominations as Anton Cermak, a rising Czech American political leader and his allies continued to build a well oiled political machine. The Polish newspaper, *Dziennik Związkowy*, often encouraged the community to vote for Bohemian candidates.¹¹

As the nineteenth century entered its final decade, despite the successes of the savings and loans and the political activism of the Czech and Polish communities, both existed on the edge of financial ruin. Immigrant neighborhoods tightened their belts as the economic depression of the 1890s hit the city. On August 25, 1893, while visitors enjoyed the Columbian Exposition on the city’s lakefront, workers

¹⁰ *Denni Hlasatel*, October 12, 1912 (CFLPS).

¹¹ *Chicago Tribune*, February 7, 1887, December 17, 1893, May 5, 1897, October 24, 1904; *Denni Hlasatel*, July 28, 1914, September 1, 1914 (CFLPS), *Dziennik Związkowy*, March 31, 1917 (CFLPS).

marched through downtown streets. Again Czechs and Poles made up many of the demonstrators. At one point the crowd reached about 4,000 at the Columbus statue in Grant Park with hundreds of onlookers checking to see what the commotion was about. At 3:30 p.m. over 1,000 men formed a line and marched north on Michigan Avenue carrying the American flag and a banner that read "We Want Work." The peaceful procession proceeded until it turned on Randolph Street towards Wabash Avenue. At that corner a teamster attempted to drive a wagon through the crowd who in turn attacked the driver. The police rushed to save him. Afterwards the march continued quietly to city hall and then returned to the Columbus statue where speakers again addressed the crowd in English, Polish, Czech, and German. Police leaves were canceled as another march was scheduled for the following day. Organized labor planned to hold more lakefront meetings and many said that they had to come to the aid of the unemployed. That September the *Chicago Tribune* reported a large number of immigrants returning to their homelands as economic conditions worsened. Ships returning to Bremen, Germany through which most Poles and Czechs passed, reported a 20 percent increase in passengers.¹²

Domestic labor problems were hardly the only issues the two Western Slavic groups showed interest in. Chicago had long been a center for socialist activity and the Czechs played a very active role in the movement. In 1896 one hundred Polish and Czech socialists met at Pulaski Hall for more than two hours and presented resolutions to Congress condemning Spanish actions in Cuba and demonstrated their support for the Cuban revolutionaries. Speakers included socialists, Joseph Grondziewski, George Duzewski, and Frank Malc. Several non-socialist speakers also addressed the meeting. The meeting ended in a march through the streets. A man in a masquerade outfit led the procession dragging a dead dog labeled General Valeriano Weyler, the Spanish commander sent to put down the rebellion. A drummer followed the dog and the other demonstrators carried signs reading "Cuba Libre," "Death to the Tyrants," "Wake Up Cleveland and Act," referring to President Grover Cleveland, and "We As Americans Seek Liberty For All." At the end of the march the protestors burned Weyler in effigy at the Northwestern Railroad yards. The man who led the march proclaimed that he hoped the time would come when General Weyler himself would be burned. After singing "La Marseillaise," the Slavic crowd dispersed.¹³

¹² *Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 1893, September 14, 1893.

¹³ For the growth of socialism among the Czechs see T. Čapek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America: A Study of Their National, Cultural, Political, Social, Economic, and Religious Life*, Boston and New York 1920, Chapter 12; *Chicago Tribune*, December 21, 1896.

Poles and Czechs were especially sensitive to the German and Austrian occupation of part of Poland and all of Bohemia and Moravia. In 1902 both groups remonstrated against the visit of Prince Henry of Germany to the United States. The protests included the singing of patriotic songs, speeches, and resolutions. Polish churches were at the center of the protests across the city. Children in Czech parochial schools sang and recited nationalist hymns and stories to mark the occasion. Both felt that they had suffered at the hands of Germans in Europe and the United States. While the Czechs had often cooperated with Chicago's Germans they felt that the German community ignored their political ambitions. Also the Czechs questioned the teaching of the German language in the city's public schools. German political power had forced the adaptation of the language in Chicago schools. Bohemians saw this as counterproductive for their children. The Czech newspaper *Svornost* complained in 1890, "Our Bohemian countrymen in the homeland have fought against the compulsory study of the German language, by children, for many years. Bohemians of America have been of great assistance to them in this fight; but even at that the German Language is much more useful in Austria than it is in the United States." In 1900 Chicago's German politicians succeeded in stopping the adoption of Czech, Polish and Italian in the public schools in their neighborhoods.¹⁴ German Catholics in the nineteenth century tried to prevent Poles from attending services at St. Boniface Church on the Near Northwest Side of the city. In 1908 the pastor of that parish, Fr. Albert Evans, warned against the influence of Polish taverns and dance halls in his parish. He especially feared Polish weddings fearing that celebrants would drift over to the newly constructed Eckhart Park, which stood across the street from St. Boniface. Once World War One broke out the rift between German and Slav in Chicago quickly widened even further.¹⁵

World War One brought the two Western Slavic groups closer together. Both Poles and Czechs organized their communities in opposition to German war aims and to German-American political power in the city. The outbreak of fighting on July 28, 1914 saw a massive anti-Austrian demonstration led by Czech nationalist intellectuals in Pilsen Park, a beer garden built by the Pilsen Brewing Company, a Czech brewery, and located on 26th and Albany in South Lawndale. The neighborhood at the time was more popularly know as Czech

¹⁴ *Svornost*, March, 8, 1884, July 24, 1890. (CFLPS); J. Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism: Americanization, Education, and European Immigrants*, Cambridge 2010, p. 109.

¹⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, May 5, 1902, August 2, 1908; For the earlier conflict at St. Boniface see Rev. Msgr. H.C. Koenig, S.T.D., ed, *A History of the Parishes of the Archdiocese of Chicago*, Chicago 1980, 2 vols. V1, pp. 136–137.

California or Česky Kalifornii. Several thousand Czechs and their fellow Slavs attended the rally condemning Austro-Hungarian aggression towards Serbia. At the onset of the war Polish Chicagoans had divided loyalties. The Hapsburg Empire had given Poles in Galicia a good deal of power and in some ways the so-called Dual Monarchy was a tri-part monarchy with Poles enjoying near autonomy. Chicago Czechs on the other hand immediately called upon their countrymen to rise up against Vienna and declare Czech independence.¹⁶

In turn Chicago's Germans quickly rallied to the cause of the Central Powers and on August 14, 1914 the Chicago German newspaper, *Abendpost*, declared that a Slavic victory in the war would mean death to education, constitutionalism, liberalism, and free thought. Furthermore a Slav victory would mean the end of four centuries of European culture. Germans provided the largest ethnic group in Chicago in 1914. They held a good deal of political power and had elected one of their own on the Republican ticket, Fred A. Busse, mayor in 1907. As the war began, Chicago's Scandinavians, who also made up a large part of the Republican coalition, also supported the Central Powers. Meanwhile the possibility of violence between various ethnic groups proved all too real on the streets of the city. William Hale Thompson, who was elected on the Republican ticket as mayor in 1915 openly opposed American participation in the conflict and courted German American voters.

Chicago's Germans held huge rallies as the war in Europe raged. German American organizations berated the Slavs. The Germania Club pronounced that the war was one between the Teutonic peoples and Slavs calling Germany's neighbors to the east the natural "serf" races of Europe. The Slavs led by the Czechs quickly took up the fight with the Germans. The Bohemian-American Press Association called for fair play for America's Slavs. It complained that daily the German press in America only referred to Slavs as "barbaric, Asiatic, or semi-Asiatic." The statement mentioned the Czech, Comenius, the Pole, Copernicus, and many artists and others of Slavic descent who had contributed to Western Civilization. At an outdoor rally at the intersection of Milwaukee and Division Avenues on the Northwest Side of the city in Chicago's oldest and largest Polish neighborhood thousands of Poles heard the Serbian side of the story. In Mid-August 1914 the Polish National Alliance called all three of the warring powers in Central Europe as "rapacious cultures."¹⁷

¹⁶ D.A. Pacyga, 'Chicago's Pilsen Park and the Struggle for Czechoslovak Independence' in L. Schelbert, N. Ceh, eds, *Essays in Russian and East European History: A Festschrift for Edward C. Thaden*, Boulder Colorado 1995, pp. 117–129; J. Dewey, *Conditions Among the Poles in the United States – Confidential Report* (1918), p. 6–7.

¹⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, August 10, 1914.

In 1915 the Czech newspaper, *Denni Hlasatel* appealed for “brotherly agreement” between the two West Slavic communities. It called for cooperation among the leadership of both communities, and declared that it should be easier for the two groups to cooperate than in the past as the very liberty of both nations was at stake in the Great War. The editorial also pointed out that the Czech community might emulate what Chicago’s Poles were doing in regard to their support for their homeland. Czech newspapers often complained that the Bohemian community was doing too little in regards to helping their fellow Czechs and Moravians in Europe, while using the Poles as a an example of a patriotic response.¹⁸

Especially after the entrance of the United States into the war on the side of the Allies on April 6, 1917, Chicago’s Poles and Czechs joined together to lead a crusade against the German community. Beginning as early as 1915 they campaigned against textbooks in the public schools, which they claimed were “Kaiserrized.” In August 1917, Superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools, John D. Shoop, after promising new textbooks for two years, refused to remove the books that praised Kaiser Wilhelm from the curriculum. Both the Czech National Alliance and the Polish National Alliance planned massive demonstrations against the offending textbooks. Finally in 1917 thousands of Slavic students tore out the offending pages from their textbooks in a show of solidarity against the Central Powers. Czechs and Poles also petitioned to have German names removed from public schools and streets. The Poles in particular objected to the name and bust of Otto Von Bismark, “The Iron Chancellor” who had campaigned against Polish culture in the German occupied partition of Poland, on a Chicago Public School located in the heart of a Polish neighborhood. In July 1917 Mrs. Lu Lu Snodgrass, a member of the board tabled a motion to change the school’s name made by a Polish member, Anton Czarnecki. She stated that Bismarck was dead and should be respected. Czarnecki responded that Bismarck might be dead but so were Nero and Attila yet they did not deserve a school being named after them. Czaenecki further stated, “Bismarck was just as much a tyrant as they. And yet in this free country we ask a child from Poland or from Alsace-Lorraine to go to a school labeled after Bismarck, the man who crushed their national life.” He suggested the name of a German who had fought for America such as Von Steuben as a compromise. Later Superintendent Shoop explained, “We do not want to hurt the feelings of anyone.”

¹⁸ *Denni Hlasatel*, November 11, 1914, March 10, 1915, February 2, 1921 (CFLPS); Chicago’s Czech community donated some \$100,000 for war relief and aid to the Czechoslovak independence movement, Čapek, *The Čechs (Bohemians) in America...*, p. 269.

The Chicago Public School Board, handpicked by Mayor Thompson, who still hoped to court the Germans politically, refused to remove the bust. In August 31, 1917, riding a wave of anti-German sentiment, Anton Czarnecki presented and had passed a resolution that abolished the dual-language German language elementary school program in the public schools. The vote ended more than a half-century of German language instruction in the cities public schools. During this time the German language claimed parity with English in the school system. Finally in March 1918 after a petition of Polish students the Bismarck School name was changed.¹⁹

As the war raged on in Europe, Chicago's Poles and Czechs moved closer and closer politically. At a rally attended by 35,000 Polish Chicagoans at the Coliseum, the Polish pianist and political leader Ignace Jan Paderewski stated:

As long as a united, independent Poland is not rebuilt, as long as the Czechs, Moravians, and Slovaks are not free, as long as Serbia and the southern Slavic peoples are not freed and united, as long as the great, terrible war now raging from the Baltic to the Adriatic—a war involving more than fifty-four million highly civilized Slavs—is not won; so long will Prussian ambition remain uncurbed.

His call for a united Slavic response to German expansion by the building of a Slavic wall stretching from the Baltic to the Adriatic seas was met by thunderous applause. The necessity for Slavic unity was also strongly supported by J.J. Zmrhal of the Bohemian National Alliance and by other Slavic groups. A week later the Polish Falcons (Sokol), a gymnastic-patriotic organization modeled on the German Turners, called a meeting that was held at the Polish Women's Alliance Hall on the Northwest Side of the city emphasizing the need for Slavic unity. Representatives of the Bohemian Falcon organization, Dr. Rudis-Jicinsky, editor of the Bohemian *Sokol Americky*, and Mr. Paskowsky, Commandant of the Bohemian Falcons, attended. The hall filled to capacity shook with applause for the various speeches given by the Czech guests and for the singing of the Bohemian hymn, "Gde Domov Moj" (Where my home is). Dr. Jicinsky's statement, that Poles and Czechs should fight side by side in order to bring about Slavic unity also brought an enthusiastic response. Rybicki,

¹⁹ This discussion of World War One is largely based on the essay by M.G. Holli, 'The Great War Sinks German *Kultur*,' in M.G. Holli, P. d'A. Jones, eds, *Ethnic Chicago*, Grand Rapids 1984, p. 460. For the argument over the Bismarck name and bust and the textbooks see *Denni Hlasatel*, April 20, 1917, July 25, 1917, August 6, 1917 (CFLPS); *Dziennik Zwiazkowy*, March 28, 1918; *Chicago Tribune*, July 19, 1917. For the Czech and Polish reaction as well as the Czarnecki resolution see Mirel, *Patriotic Pluralism...*, pp. 109–110.

president of Circuit II of the Polish Falcons' Alliance, called for a union of the Polish and Bohemian Falcons in Chicago. The Polish audience rose to applause the proposal. The *Dziennik Związkowy* called for a United Slavic States to be established in Europe.²⁰

The response of both communities to the entrance of the United States into the fighting was great. Both Poles and Czechs joined the American army in large numbers. The purchase of Liberty Loan Bonds also represented the commitment of the two groups to the Allied cause. Anton Cermak, while pointing out his community's involvement in July 4th activities, praised the Poles for their patriotism and for their purchase of bonds. In addition the Poles in the diaspora raised an army of some 25,000 men to fight alongside the French on the Western Front. The Czechs supported a Czech Army to fight for Czech independence.²¹

While peace brought a lessening of tensions between the Slavic and German neighborhoods, the appointment of German American George Mundelein as Archbishop (1916) and later Cardinal of the Chicago Archdiocese opened old wounds. The Cardinal moved against ethnic parishes, and in particular against the Poles, who enjoyed a good deal of power in the Chicago Church. The Czechs had less influence in the Catholic Church as their community was divided between Freethinkers, Catholics, and Protestants.²²

The war had increased the already strong tie between Poles and Czechs. It laid a solid basis for further cooperation, but not all was well between the two communities. As early as 1896 the emerging class of Polish small business owners in Chicago protested the presence of Czech and Jewish-owned businesses in their community. The Polish Businessmen's Association of the Southwest Side held a meeting at St Adalbert's school hall on 17th and Paulina Street. Most of the membership belonged to the parish located just west of Pilsen. Speakers asked for help for Polish businesses in the neighborhood. As the Polish community developed more small businesses the community's leadership attempted to steer away Polish Americans from Czech and Jewish owned businesses. It only had a limited appeal, however, and Poles often patronized the stores owned by Polish and other East European Jews as well as by Bohemians, Germans, and others. The Chicago campaign was greatly influenced by an emerging Polish business

²⁰ *Dziennik Związkowy*, March 15, 1918; *Denni Hlasatel*, March 4, 1918 (CFLPS).

²¹ *Denni Hlasatel*, May 12, 1917 (CFLPS); *Chicago Tribune*, July 13, 1918.

²² R. Slayton, *Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy*, Chicago 1988), pp. 136–138; E.R. Kantowicz, *Corporation Sole; Cardinal Mundelein and Chicago Catholicism*, South Bend 1983), pp. 77–81.

class in Poland, which used the term *Swój do Swójego* or roughly translated as “Patronize Your Own.” The *Dziennik Związkowy* declared in 1917 “If the Poles finally come to understand that they must cease to patronize German and Jewish stores and support Polish enterprise instead, not only the Avondale Clothing Company, but many other Polish business establishments will prosper in the future. The newspaper complained that little progress had been made in getting Polish Chicagoans to support Polish owned businesses and ended by proclaiming, “Poles! Support Polish business and industry!”²³

Besides competition with Czech businesses, the end of World War One brought other divisions between the Czechs and Poles. In Europe the border issue of Teschen or Cieszyn in Polish and Těšín in Czech erupted between the two new states of Poland and Czechoslovakia. As an example of the cooperation between the two ethnic groups during the war and with the hope of maintaining it for future political reasons in Chicago, Polish and Czech community leaders attempted to bring the two communities together and offer a way to a peaceful resolution in Europe. Both communities felt that they had played a role in their prospective country’s independence movement and felt they would be listened to in the two Slavic capitals. On February 3, 1919 the American Czech and Slovak Commercial Congress held a dinner at the Morrison Hotel in downtown Chicago to close the first day of its meeting. Charles Pergler, the first ambassador of the Czechoslovak Republic to the United States and himself a Czech American, and Jan Smulski, a Polish American banker and businessman spoke to the group. They spoke of peace between the two new republics. Smulski assured the gathering that war between Poland and Czechoslovakia would not break out. Of course neither American group had much influence on European borders or attitudes.²⁴

Nevertheless Chicago’s Czech Democratic politicians, especially Anton Cermak and John Cervenka, had much to lose if the wartime cooperation between Poles and Czechs should fall apart. Cermak had grand ambitions and hoped to build a powerful political organization. To do this he would have to have the cooperation of the Poles, as well as various other Slavic groups, and Jews. His political ambitions rose when he joined the United Societies for Local Self-Government, an anti-prohibition organization in 1907. The United Societies provided Cermak with a considerable political base. Reformers, especially the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, called for Sunday blue laws that prohibited the sale of alcohol on the Sabbath and often singled out the immigrant

²³ *Chicago Tribune*, December 14, 1896; *Dziennik Związkowy*, August 2, 1919, August 9, 1919, September 1, 1917, September 21, 1917, September 22, 1917, March 30, 1918 (CFLPS).

²⁴ *Chicago Tribune*, May 11, 1919, February 4, 1919.

populations especially Germans, Poles, and Czechs as drinkers. In 1907, Rev. Frederick J. Stanley claimed that, "This attitude of defiance for the laws of the land in the great mass of Germans, Slavs, Bohemians, Poles, and other foreigners in our great cities will unless checked, inevitably bring our nation to destruction." The "wet" issue gave Anton Cermak the perfect organizing tool with which to bring Chicago's various ethnic groups into his political machine. The United Societies first flexed their muscles in the anti-charter campaign of 1907, which defeated a new Chicago state charter. Cermak constantly worked to have the Poles and Czech allied politically in the city. In 1922 the election of Democrat Judge Edmund Jarecki was supported by multi-ethnic alliance Poles, Jews, and Czechs. In 1927 Cermak helped organize a group to protest the immigration restriction laws passed by congress earlier in the decade. The newly formed committee called for an organization in the United States to protect the interests of Czechs, Poles, and Slovaks. Cermak naturally served as president. That year also saw the creation of an organization called the "Polish-American Al Smith for President and Anton Cermak for Governor Club." Cermak, as President of the Cook County Board also appointed Miecislus S. Szymczak as the General Superintendent of the Cook County Forest Preserves. Poles obviously felt that their political star was rising along with the political ascendancy of Anton Cermak. In 1931 Cermak was elected mayor of the City of Chicago with support from his Slavic fellow citizens. The immigrant Bohemian leader had built a solid political organization that has stayed in power in one form or another since that time.²⁵

²⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, November 23, 1907; M. Wilrich, *City of Courts: Socializing Justice in Progressive Era Chicago*, Cambridge, U.K. and New York 2003, pp. 44–45; *Dziennik Zjedoczenia*, April 3, 1922, October 5, 1927 (CFLPS), Dominic A. Pacyga, *Chicago: A Biography* (Chicago, 2009), pp. 256–262.