

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 164

“Grim Earnest, to the Death”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

My mind was made up, for good—Austria must be opposed in grim earnest, to the death. This the world situation demanded. The only question was how to begin and what tactics to adopt.

Tomáš Masaryk, *The Making of a State*.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 164. Grim Earnest, to the Death.

I discussed the situation of the Czechs within Austria-Hungary all the way back in episode 50. The Czech lands of Bohemia and Moravia were once the Kingdom of Bohemia and were part of the Holy Roman Empire. The King of Bohemia was traditionally one of the seven Electors who chose the Holy Roman Emperor. By 1526, the King of Bohemia, as well as of Croatia and Hungary, was Louis II, or Ludvík in Czech. He fell at the Battle of Mohács that year, and on his death the Habsburgs acquired his titles.

The Czechs were mostly Protestants by then. The Catholic Habsburgs did not press the issue of religious conformity on their new subjects at first, but 92 years later, a Habsburg attempt to do exactly that led to the famous Defenestration of Prague, an event which in turn led to the horrific Thirty Years' War.

But the acquisition of Louis' three crowns by the Habsburgs is the reason why Hungary, Croatia, and Bohemia are all part of the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy in 1867. You will note that within the Dual Monarchy, Hungary had equal rights with Austria. Hungary also held Croatia as part of the domains of the King of Hungary. Bohemia, by contrast, was incorporated as a province of Austria, a region of Slavic Czech-speakers dominated by an elite of German-speakers.

With the coming of industrialization in the 19th century, Bohemia became the most industrialized region of the Dual Monarchy, most notably the Škoda Works, founded by a Czech engineer

named Emil Škoda in 1859. Industrialization brought greater wealth and the emergence of a Czech middle class that chafed under German rule. The Czechs resented their second-class status in their own country, which led to a fight over language rights in the late 19th century, which we've covered before on the podcast. The Czechs wanted their language to be official in Czech lands, and by 1897, voting rights had become broad enough that a majority of the voters in Bohemia were now ethnic Czechs, which led to the Bohemian Diet making Czech an official language alongside German in Bohemia.

This was offensive to German-speakers in the region, and across Austria. Now I know what you're thinking. It may be a little hard for a modern person to understand why German speakers would have so vehement an objection to all of this, but bear in mind that the Germans in Bohemia and Moravia were the elites. They were the nobles and the landlords and the business and professional classes. Their language was the language of education and the great universities. Whole libraries existed, stuffed to the rafters with learning and literature in the language of Goethe and Schiller. What was Czech? The language of the hired help. An ugly tongue that sounded as if its speakers were perpetually clearing their throats and looked funny in print, with all those little hats on the ns and rs and ss. And *Czech libraries*? Are you kidding me? Have any Czechs written books? Do those people even read?

The idea that one should have to learn to read and write and speak in Czech as a prerequisite to government service was worse than silly. It was insulting. German-speaking Bohemians rose up in outrage, and German-speakers in other parts of Austria sympathized with their cause. The new language law was reversed by the national Reichsrat.

One of the leaders of the Czech nationalist movement during these turbulent times was Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. He's appeared briefly in the podcast before, but now it's time for me to introduce him to you formally. Tomáš Masaryk was born on March 7, 1850 in Hodonín, a town in southeastern Moravia that lies on the Morava River, where the river forms the border between Austrian Moravia and Hungary, which lay just on the opposite side.

His father, Josef Masaryk was an ethnic Slovak, born across the river in a predominately Slovak region of the Kingdom of Hungary. Josef was uneducated and illiterate and had crossed the river in search of opportunity, which in his case meant a job as a stable boy on one of the Austrian Emperor Franz Josef's Imperial estates. Josef was a dedicated worker and was eventually promoted to overseer on the estate. In 1849, he married Teresie Kropáčková, the daughter of a butcher who worked as a domestic servant. Teresie had some education. She spoke Czech and Slovak and could also read and write and speak German, the language of education in Austria. German became young Tomáš's first language.

He was raised Catholic, although later in his life he would convert to Protestantism. He was an avid reader and showed promise, enough so that when he was 11, his parents enrolled him in a school. The time and place being what they were, his father had had to ask permission from his

masters to educate his own son, but permission was given. Tomáš was an excellent student, who went on to grammar school in Brünn and later Vienna, where he experienced firsthand the ethnic tensions of the Austrian Empire.

In 1876, Tomáš was awarded his Ph.D. in sociology. He sought work as a tutor at the University of Leipzig in Germany and there he met Charlotte Garrigue, an American woman the same age as he from a wealthy Brooklyn family. They appear to have hit it off at once, although the language barrier got in the way. They solved that problem by reading and studying together and gradually learning each other's languages. They became engaged just a few weeks later. Masaryk returned to Vienna in pursuit of a teaching position, while "Charlie," as he called her, returned to the United States. A few months later, Masaryk received a telegram from Charlie's family informing him that she had fallen from a carriage and was seriously injured. Masaryk dropped everything and headed at once to New York. By the time he arrived at her side, Charlotte was already recovering nicely from her injury, but the experience moved them to go ahead and get married at once, which they did in March 1878.

They seem to have had an exceptionally close marriage, bound both by love and by their mutual passion for learning. They would have five children altogether. As a token of his devotion to her, Masaryk took Charlotte's maiden name and became Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, a choice unheard of in 1878. The couple lived in Vienna for a few years while Tomáš taught at the university. In 1882, after yet another round of political debate over language rights erupted into violence, the Austrian government split the prestigious Charles University in Prague into German-language and Czech-language schools, creating a sudden demand for university professors who could teach in Czech. Masaryk answered the call and took a position as a professor of philosophy in the new school.

He became a prominent figure among those promoting Czech culture and advocating for increased autonomy for the Austro-Hungarian Empire's Czech and Slovak minorities. But he was not afraid to take a stand, even when it clashed with the interests of Czech nationalism. In 1886, he published an academic article disputing the authenticity of two historic manuscripts at the National Museum in Prague. These manuscripts were believed to be medieval copies of epic poetry that documented the existence of a Czech culture nearly a millennium old. Masaryk exposed them as forgeries, which was excellent academic work but tremendously unpopular among Czechs in Prague, who attacked him as a "loathsome traitor."

In 1899, a young Czech woman's body was found by the side of a road and a Jewish drifter and petty criminal named Leopold Hilsner was arrested for the crime. This led to an eruption of anti-Semitism in Bohemia, not unlike what would happen in the Leo Frank case in the United States sixteen years later. Lurid claims were tossed around about Jews ritually kidnapping and murdering Christian women. Masaryk wrote denunciations of these claims as "superstition" and documented other instances of similarly hysterical accusations being made against Jewish people. This was enough to spare Hilsner the death penalty, although he was still sentenced to

life in prison. Even Masaryk acknowledged that Hilsner was a “notorious rascal,” but insisted he was not a murderer. For his courage, Masaryk was roundly condemned by his fellow Czechs and forced to give up teaching.

He served two terms in the Austrian Reichsrat, in 1891-93 and 1907-14. In those final years, the Czechs were probably the most outspoken of Austria-Hungary’s numerous disgruntled minorities. In the Reichsrat, angry Czech deputies were using parliamentary maneuvers, such as endlessly moving for adjournment, to disrupt the proceedings and prevent the Reichsrat from getting any work done. This was done in protest against the denial of equal language rights for Czechs. In 1914, shortly before the war began, the Emperor and his ministers prorogued the Reichsrat and ruled by decree. This seemed likely to be the end of Tomáš Masaryk’s political career, and at the age of 64, his best academic work was behind him as well. What was left for him to do?

Then came the Great War. Young men in Austria, Czechs among them, were drafted and sent off to fight the Russians and the Serbs. After years of political bickering over Czech rights, the Czech soldiers in the Austrian Army were predictably unenthusiastic. Sullen. Sometimes even insubordinate. Austrian military justice was harsh, and Czech soldiers frequently drew disproportionately harsh punishments. Overall, the Austrian military doled out more death sentences and more executions than any other military during the Great War. And over the summer and autumn of 1914, as you well know, the Austrian military embarrassed itself repeatedly against both Russia and Serbia. In the Army and on the home front, the blame fell on Slav minority soldiers, like the Czechs and the Slovaks, who were accused of lack of patriotism, if not active collaboration with the enemy. Even worse, reports were coming in of Czech soldiers raising white flags to the Russians, only to be shot dead.

These matters weighed heavily on the conscience of Tomáš Masaryk. As a teacher and a politician, he had spoken out against the injustices of Habsburg rule. Now, the young men who had heard his Czech nationalism and taken it to heart were dying for it. Did he not have a duty to do something about that?

In Prague when the war began was an American of Czech origin, the 39-year old Emanuel Voska. If this name sounds familiar; it’s because we met him before in this podcast, all the way back in episode 115, where we learned that Voska had made his fortune in a marble quarry, and he will spend the war building up a network of anti-Austrian ethnic Czechs in the United States called the Bohemian Alliance. The Bohemian Alliance would do valuable freelance counterintelligence work for the British and Americans, exposing German and Austrian covert operations in the USA. Some credit the Bohemian Alliance with helping to push the US into the war.

Masaryk arranged a meeting with Voska. Voska was shortly to be returning to the United States and would be passing through London along the way. Masaryk asked him to deliver a message.

Voska agreed. In London, Voska met with Wickham Steed, a prominent English journalist who had been a foreign correspondent for *The Times* since 1896. Steed reported from Vienna during most of those years, and while in Vienna, Steed had developed an affection for the Slavic peoples of Austria-Hungary and a corresponding contempt for Germans in general and Habsburgs in particular. He was also a terrible anti-Semite, which has nothing to do with this story, but I feel I should acknowledge it.

Anyway, in 1913 Wickham Steed published a book titled *The Habsburg Monarchy*, which was a scathing indictment of Habsburg rule, so much so that it was banned in Austria-Hungary, and during the war he would use his platform at *The Times* to advocate for the dissolution of Austria-Hungary and for the creation of a Yugoslav state in the Balkans and of an independent Czechoslovak state.

So definitely a person sympathetic to Czech national aspirations. Voska sought the meeting to pass on the message from Masaryk. The message was this: Czech soldiers in the Austrian Army wanted to surrender to the Russians, but the Russians kept shooting them. Tell Mr. Steed to put a stop to it. Steed replied, "How on earth am I to stop it?" Voska had no answer to that. That was all the message he had been given.

Steed set his mind to the problem and came up with a solution. There was a song popular among Slavs in Eastern Europe called "Hej, Slovani!" which literally means, "Hey, Slavs!" It was originally written in 1834 by a Slovak Lutheran pastor and poet named Samuel Tomášik, during a visit to Prague. Tomášik was unhappy that he was hearing German spoken as often as Czech, in the Czech capital. As he put it, "If mother Prague, the pearl of the Western Slavic world, is to be lost in a German sea, what awaits my dear homeland, Slovakia, which looks to Prague for spiritual nourishment?" The Poles had a patriotic song called "Poland Has Not Yet Perished." Tomášik penned a Slovak one. Its opening lines translate to "Hey, Slovaks, there still lives the Slovak language..."

The song was taken up by Czechs and by South Slavs and the lyrics broadened to embrace all Slavic peoples. It became the unofficial anthem of the pan-Slavic movement. Wickham Steed's idea was simple. Instruct Czech soldiers to sing this familiar song, "Hey, Slavs!" when they wanted to surrender, and instruct Russian soldiers that when they hear the song, it means fellow Slavs seek their protection. Steed proposed this to the Russian ambassador in London, who passed it on to Petrograd. He also sent a message back to Masaryk, who spread the word among Czech nationalists.

This wasn't the only message sent back to Masaryk. Voska also met in London with the British war minister, Lord Kitchener. You'll recall how in that fateful summer of 1914, when most Europeans were expecting a war that would last mere weeks, Lord Kitchener shocked and unsettled many by predicting the war would last years. Word of his prediction was also carried back to Prague and delivered to Masaryk.

Most people who heard Kitchener's grim prediction felt disheartened by it. For Tomáš Masaryk, though, there was a silver lining. A short war would likely have ended with little change in the status quo. A long, exhausting war ending in an Austrian defeat was a formula to win for Czechs and Slovaks not merely stronger legal rights within a reformed Habsburg empire, but outright independence.

This would be an uphill battle that would require all the years of Kitchener's dark prediction. Czech and Slovak nationalists would have to convince the Allies to include this cause among their war aims, even though hardly anyone in France or Britain, let alone the United States, knew what a Czech or a Slovak was. Many people in the West knew well enough that Austria-Hungary was a German-led mish-mash of a dozen different nationalities, many of them different varieties of Slav, but few could name any of those funny-sounding nations or understood anything of their histories or cultures or what made them different from one another. The Slav nationalists would need those years to educate the Allies about the justice of their cause.

And Prague was not the place from which to do that. The Austrian Army was floundering on all fronts and the blame was falling on Slavs. The Emperor ruled by decree and the police and military intelligence were monitoring Slav political activists. Masaryk had just communicated with an enemy government for the purpose of facilitating mass defections of Czech soldiers. That was treason. Some of Masaryk's fellow Czech nationalists had already been arrested, imprisoned, even executed for lesser crimes than that.

In December 1914, Masaryk left Prague in the company of his youngest child, his daughter Olga, then 23 years old. Their destination was Italy, which was at that time still neutral. Their cover story was that Olga was sick and they were seeking medical care for her in Rome. He left behind a small group of supporters he called his "mafia," the most important of whom was a colleague at the university, a fellow sociology professor 35 years his junior named Edvard Beneš. Masaryk would not see Prague or the rest of his family again until after the war.

Masaryk's first steps out of Prague were also the first steps toward Czecho-Slovak independence, although few people could have foreseen that at the time. Masaryk was a respected figure among Czechs, but the old man could hardly be described as the Czech nationalist leader. And no one in the West knew who he was. And most Czechs in Prague would have expected that their best hope of achieving freedom from the Habsburgs lay not with the French or the British or the Americans, but with Russia. It was in the military might of their fellow Slavs that they placed their hopes.

[music: Tomášik, "Hey, Slavs!"]

Masaryk moved on from Italy to Paris, where he met up with the third figure who would become important in the Czecho-Slovak national movement, Milan Rastislav Štefánik, a Slovak astronomer who began his career as an associate of the slightly wacky Camille Flammarion (episode 54). By this time, the 34-year old Štefánik was a naturalized French citizen, a prominent

figure in the world of astronomy, an expert in the field of solar spectroscopy, and probably the most prominent ethnic Slovak in the Western world, a sort of male and Slovak version of Marie Curie. Štefánik was all in on the project of Czecho-Slovak independence. Like Masaryk, he saw the Great War as an opportunity, and his advocacy helped bring Czech and Slovak national aspirations to the attention of the French government.

Štefánik's first accomplishment was to persuade the French government to treat Czech and Slovak expatriates living in France not as enemy aliens but as allies. We've already seen how Czech soldiers were surrendering to the Russians in large numbers, and I've already told you the story of how the Russians facilitated the creation of what became the Czechoslovak Legion. Czechs in France and Britain also volunteered to fight for the Allies, although there were only a few hundred of them. They were inducted into the French Foreign Legion, organized into their own unit and fought on the Western Front. Unfortunately, the Western Front being the Western Front, it wasn't long before enough of them were killed or wounded that the unit was dissolved.

Štefánik himself enlisted in the French military and became a pilot in the Aeronautical Service. By the time Tomáš Masaryk made his way to Paris, Štefánik was in Serbia, flying reconnaissance missions in support of the Serbian Army, which made him a hero to the French.

Masaryk, meanwhile, made his first public call for Czech independence on July 6, 1915, in Geneva, at a ceremony commemorating the five hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom of Jan Hus, a Czech priest and early Protestant reformer, who was burned at the stake for heresy. Hus's execution was the beginning of Protestantism in Bohemia and it sparked a Czech revolt against their Catholic rulers, making the occasion a tempting historical parallel, and Masaryk made the most of it. In Vienna, the newspaper *Die Neue Freie Presse* pronounced Masaryk's speech a "Czech declaration of war against Austria."

Masaryk's speech attracted attention everywhere. In Prague, the pressure on Masaryk's "mafia" grew until Edvard Beneš felt it necessary also to leave the country to avoid arrest.

I'm going to pause the narrative here for a moment to address a question I think many of you are already thinking. With all this talk of Czecho-Slovak independence and a Czecho-Slovak Legion, you may well be wondering why a joint Czecho-Slovak state and not separate Czech and Slovak states as indeed, we have in our day.

Czech and Slovak nationalists have actually been promoting this idea of a joint nation since at least the 1890s. There are good reasons. Remember that in this era, international relations were often understood in a Darwinian, dog-eat-dog kind of way, and many took it as the natural order of things that large and powerful empires swallow up smaller and weaker states in the same way that big fish eat little fish. The Czechs and the Slovaks lived in the region of Europe where the German, Austrian, and Russian Empires met. It wouldn't do for a Czech or a Slovak state to break away from Austria only to be swallowed up by Germany or Russia, in the way that, say,

the Ottoman Empire gave up Bosnia only to have it annexed by the Austrians. A combined state could more easily defend itself against imperial revanchism.

Why Czechs and Slovaks in particular? I'm going to refer you back to episode 27 for the full background on the various Slav ethnic groups, but briefly, I explained there how the many nationalities we call "Slavs" are divided into three major groups: East Slavs, West Slavs, and South Slavs. Czechs and Slovaks, along with Poles, constitute the West Slav group. Czechs and Slovaks therefore have a closer linguistic and cultural affinity to each other than to other ethnic groups in Central Europe, even other Slavs.

But Czech and Slovak peoples, unlike the Poles, live entirely within the borders of Austria-Hungary. Czechs are in the Austrian, or Cisleithanian, side of the Empire, while Slovaks live in the Hungarian, or Transleithanian, side. Each is a minority group within its own part of the Empire, so it is also the case that, within the dynamics of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, banding together gives both groups more leverage against their respective rulers than either would have on its own.

This is particularly true of the Slovaks, who are far fewer in number than the Czechs, and for all the difficulty the Czechs have been having getting their German-speaking overlords to grant recognition to the Czech language, the Slovaks are having an even harder time with their Magyar overlords. Hungary has been far more oppressive in its rule over minorities than Austria has, and the Slovak minority is only a small portion of the Hungarian nation.

So Slovaks in particular could use a patron, but one might ask whether being plunked into a majority Czech nation would be any better than having been plunked into a majority Magyar nation. Well, that's going to be an ongoing controversy that will eventually lead to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia on January 1, 1993, which we'll cover in episode, oh, I don't know; let's say 862.

But for now, the advantages of joining forces outweighed the disadvantages, so most Czechs were happy to band together with the Slovaks and...a lot of Slovaks were happy to band together with the Czechs, I guess? Well, they didn't have public opinion polls back then, but in lieu of polling data or a plebiscite, the most convincing evidence Allied governments have that Slovaks were indeed on board with this concept of a joint state was its endorsement by the Western world's most prominent Slovak, Milan Štefánik.

By 1916, Masaryk had been granted a teaching position at the University of London. This gave him a salary and a platform from which to make the case for independence in Britain. British academics rallied to his cause, as did Wickham Steed in the pages of *The Times*. The British government claimed it was in the Great War to defend the rights of small nations like Serbia and Belgium that had been trampled by the Central Powers. It was a simple matter for Masaryk and his supporters to extend that argument. Surely the rights of small nations that have already been

trampled by the German-speaking imperialists counted for as much as the rights of the nations currently being trampled? Am I right?

[music: "Lightning over the Tatras"]

I've already mentioned that the nations with the largest Czech and Slovak populations outside of Austria-Hungary were first, Russia, and second, the United States. America's Czech and Slovak citizens and residents gave the Czecho-Slovak campaign a leg up in America, where most people may not have known what a Czech or Slovak was, but they were about to find out how many of them were their friends and neighbors.

The majority of Slovak immigrants to America had settled in western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio and were already politically active by the time of the Great War. The Slovak League of America had been founded in 1907 and among other things lobbied the Federal government to recognize "Slovak" as a separate nationality in the 1910 census. Previous censuses had tagged Slovaks as Hungarians, much to their displeasure. The Slovak League also advocated for Slovak autonomy within Hungary, but not at first for full independence. The League was initially lukewarm toward the united state idea, but in October 1915 in the city of Cleveland, a joint conference of the Slovak League and the Bohemian Alliance approved the "Cleveland Agreement," a call for independence and the creation of a unified Czech and Slovak state. The Cleveland Agreement made this palatable to Slovaks by including pledges to protect Slovak autonomy within the unified state by creating a federal system with a separate Slovak parliament and with Slovak as an official language.

A month later, in November 1915, Tomáš Masaryk issued a statement in London calling not only for an independent Czecho-Slovak state, but for the dissolution outright of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He wrote, "In these tragic days, we feel it our duty to proclaim our absolute confidence in the complete victory of the Allies and, in the name of the Czech people who we represent, we request the privilege of standing by their side." This statement, signed by Czech and Slovak leaders in France, Britain, Russia, and the United States amounted not only to a Czecho-Slovak declaration of war against the Central Powers, but also staked a claim for the as-yet-unborn nation to membership in the alliance.

In early 1916, Masaryk traveled to Paris to meet up with Beneš and to give lectures on Bohemian history at the University of Paris. It was here that the two met up at last with Milan Štefánik, who was returned from Serbia after he fell ill and required stomach surgery. Despite his illness, Štefánik arranged a meeting with the French prime minister, Aristide Briand, who afterward made the first public declaration by an Allied government in support of Czecho-Slovak independence. The British and the Russians would soon follow the French lead and also endorse the cause, at least rhetorically. Shortly thereafter, these three, Štefánik the Slovak, Beneš the Czech, and Masaryk, the half-Czech, half-Slovak, would form the Czecho-Slovak National Council, which would serve as a government in exile for the future nation.

But Masaryk and his council understood that getting Allied governments to pay lip service to Czecho-Slovak independence was all well and good, but for it to become a post-war reality would require more than a committee of old men calling themselves a “national council.” The nations of the world understand best the currency of military might. Czecho-Slovakia had a government in exile. It needed an army in exile.

And that brings us back around to the fact that the largest populations of Czechs and Slovaks outside Austria were in Russia and the United States. We looked at the situation in Russia last time. Remember that the Russian government was at first slow to incorporate Czech and Slovak fighters into its Army, citing concerns about international law. Czech and Slovak nationalists couldn't help noticing that Imperial Russia had its own restive ethnic minorities longing for statehood and questioned how committed the Russian government truly was to their cause. And more than that, 1915 was the year of the Great Retreat, with the Russian Army getting pushed back over a hundred miles after its initially encouraging gains in 1914. Visions of the Russians marching into Prague and liberating their fellow Slavs militarily soon evaporated.

The following year, 1916, brought the Brusilov Offensive and new hope for Russia and also for Czechs and Slovaks, whose soldiers fought well and inspired their Russian comrades. General Brusilov himself praised the Czech and Slovak soldiers and became an advocate for recruiting more of them into the army. The Russian Emperor, Nikolai II, in a characteristic display of decisiveness, decided in April 1916 to allow Czech and Slovak POWs to fight with the Russian Army, then reversed this decision in October 1916, then reversed it again in December.

Meanwhile, Czechs and Slovaks in Russia embraced the leadership of the new National Council. Milan Štefánik, who you'll recall is a French citizen and an officer in the French Army, was dispatched to Petrograd both as a representative of the National Council and of the French government to discuss arming more Czechs and Slovaks, and also transporting Czech and Slovak fighters to the Western Front. If the Emperor and his military were uncomfortable with foreign soldiers on Russian soil, well, they would be more than welcome to come fight for France.

Štefánik and the French succeeded in persuading the Russians to allow more Czechs and Slovaks to take up arms, but the Russians insisted on keeping them under Russian command and in Russia. Then, in January 1917, in response to President Wilson's call for the belligerents to state their war aims, the Allies included among the demands in their reply “the liberation...of Czecho-Slovaks from foreign domination.”

Then came the February Revolution, in March 1917. Yes, I know. In April, the Provisional Government's foreign minister, Pavel Milyukov, held a press conference in which he seemed to be claiming Galicia and the Turkish Straits for Russia, which got him in trouble with the anti-war left, episode 144. In that same press conference though, he also stated Russian support for Czech and Slovak independence. This led to correspondence between Milyukov and Masaryk, and to Masaryk traveling to Petrograd in May to meet Milyukov in person.

He arrived just in time to see Milyukov resign. The months that followed would see the gradual collapse of the Provisional Government and the Russian Army, but Masaryk and his supporters spent the time recruiting more fighters for the Czechoslovak Legion. As you now from the last episode, its numbers swelled dramatically over this period. As the Russian Army disintegrated, the POW camps opened up. As law and order broke down, ethnic Czechs living in Russia took up arms in self-defense. After the Bolshevik coup and the armistice, the remaining POWs were released and by the time the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed, the Czechoslovak Legion numbered more than 50,000.

You already know what happened next. After a series of unexpected events, the Legion found itself taking up arms against the Red Army and in control of the Trans-Siberian Railway, not to mention a significant quantity of gold. We'll talk about that later.

Masaryk, meanwhile, had left Russia via the route the Legion was supposed to have taken, east along the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, and then by sea to North America. After a journey of weeks, he arrived in Vancouver on April 29, where he was met by a Czech-American, Charles Pergler, a lawyer and the vice-president of the US branch of the Czecho-Slovak National Council. I say "vice-president" only because the American branch had reserved its presidency for Tomáš Masaryk.

Pergler accompanied Masaryk to Chicago by train, where they arrived on May 5. Masaryk was completely unprepared for the reception he received. Over a hundred thousand Czech- and Slovak-Americans were waiting at the train station and lining the route from there to his hotel. They waved flags and banners and when he stopped to speak to them outside his hotel, his message was received with cheers.

Masaryk, who was accustomed to having to explain wherever he went what Czechs and Slovaks even were, was stunned by this reception. But in the US, his cause was already known and had already won a corps of supporters. It was a combination of the large Czech and Slovak communities in the US plus all the work they had put in over the past three years in publicizing the aspirations of their cousins in Europe plus the favorable press coverage their cause had gained from the inspiring tale of the plucky Czechoslovak Legion. Americans seemed ready to take up Masaryk's cause and make it America's own.

Except for one American, the most important American Masaryk needed to convince to make his dream a reality. That would be Woodrow Wilson. And Wilson was mindful that even a meeting with Masaryk would send a signal about American intentions toward Austria-Hungary. Despite the declaration of war against Austria just a few months ago, this was a step Woodrow Wilson was not ready to take. Not yet.

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks to all of you for listening, and I'd like to thank Elizabeth for making a donation and thank you, Michael, for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons help pay for hosting and storage and my internet connection and all those

other little things that keep the podcast chugging along. If you'd like to help out, visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons. And if you haven't had a chance to leave a rating and review at the iTunes store, please do. It will only take you a moment, and it will help other listeners find the podcast, listeners who hopefully will enjoy it as much as you do.

And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we turn our attention to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and check in on events there while, spoiler alert, the Wilson Administration and Allied governments embrace the inevitable and finally recognize the new nation of Czecho-Slovakia. That's next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Tomáš Masaryk left his family in Prague in 1914 and has been away from them for three and a half years now. While Masaryk gained much for Czecho-Slovakia over that period, he and his family suffered personally. Charlotte Masaryk, already in poor health, was harassed by Austrian police after her husband left Prague. She enjoyed some protection from her status as an American, but the stress no doubt contributed to failing health. She experienced lengthy hospitalizations, though she would live long enough to become the First Lady of Czechoslovakia before passing away in 1923, at the age of 72.

Their eldest son, Herbert, was 34 years old and an accomplished painter when his father left Prague, but he would die just months later from typhus. Their second child, Alice, had become a teacher and was arrested in 1915 and imprisoned for eight months on suspicion of supporting her father's work abroad. She faced execution, but was released in response to pressure from the US government. She would later be elected to the Czechoslovak parliament and become head of the Czechoslovak Red Cross. She died in 1966.

Their other son, Jan Masaryk, would become Czechoslovak foreign minister and fall to his death from his apartment window in Prague in 1948, shortly after communists took control of the country. His death was and is widely believed to have been murder, and is sometimes referred to as the "Third Defenestration of Prague."

[music: Closing War Theme]