The Myth of the Anabasis: the Czecho-Slovak Legions in Russia and Czechoslovakia 1914 – 1928

by

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# Table of Contents

- Acknowledgements ........................................... 3
- Introduction .................................................. 4 - 14
- Chapter 1 ..................................................... 15 - 28
- Chapter 2 ..................................................... 29 - 39
- Chapter 3 ..................................................... 40 - 53
- Conclusion .................................................... 54 - 59
- Bibliography .................................................. 60 - 63
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Introduction

A little more than 2400 years ago, an army of ten thousand Greek soldiers fought their way through the heart and the hinterland of the Persian empire, fending for themselves amongst various factions in a vicious civil war. Their patron, Cyrus the Younger, died in battle against the overwhelming forces of his brother, Artaxerxes II. Electing new commanders, the Greeks opted for a long march to the sea to escape home, fending for themselves in a hostile landscape and amongst foreign lands. This heroic tale was forever immortalized by Xenophon, one of the soldiers elected to help command the retreat from Persia. He titled his work Anabasis.¹

While it may not be well known now, Anabasis was once a story with widespread cultural currency in the Western world. The text is used to teach beginner Greek, and thus in early 20th century Europe, young men learnt the story of the ten thousand Greek soldiers and their brave journey home. From the periphery of the Austro-Hungarian empire, about fifty-five thousand such men would, through the tumult of the First World War and the Russian Civil War, experience a similarly epic journey home from war in the hostile lands of Russia. These men, mostly Czechs, but including some Slovaks, invoked the Classical past to describe their ordeal as a modern Anabasis, and to envision themselves as a modern legion.

This Czecho-Slovak Legion, as it was termed, has slipped from the historical consciousness of the modern world, much like Xenophon’s Anabasis. The Legion played a unique role in the First World War, in the Russian Civil War and in the consolidation of Czechoslovakia, a state whose existence both began and ended the European interwar order from

1918 to 1939. More than 100,000 Czech and Slovak soldiers voluntarily participated in the French, Italian, American, and especially Russian armies on the three major European fronts in World War I, fighting the Central Powers with the hopes of attaining Czecho-Slovak independence. While they are all termed Legionnaires, it will be those Czech and Slovak soldiers who fought in Russia, not France or Italy, who will be discussed in this thesis. The Legion in Russia was the largest of the Czecho-Slovak Legions, it fought the longest, and it was the most important in helping to achieve independence for Czechoslovakia.

After fighting ceased with Austria-Hungary and Germany following the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Russian Legionnaires began travelling along the Trans-Siberian Railway to Vladivostok, for eventual passage to France, to continue fighting for Czecho-Slovak liberation. Tensions escalated with the Bolshevik government, however, and the Legion was unable to maintain its neutrality in the Russian Civil War, becoming the first sizable military force to fight the Bolsheviks. Fearful of Communism, the Western Allies took note of the actions of the Czecho-Slovak Legion and this allowed the Czecho-Slovak independence movement to negotiate with the Allies for Czechoslovak independence after World War I. Czechoslovakia was the only Slavic successor state to Austria-Hungary that was already recognized by the Allies before the Paris Peace Conference even began. The Czecho-Slovak independence movement achieved this

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2 Regarding terminology, “Czecho-Slovak” will be used in lieu of “Czechoslovak” whenever possible in this thesis, out of respect for Slovak nationality. In cases where the name was officially recognized, and generally used, such as Czechoslovakia, the original term will be retained. The term Legionnaire has been used in various Slavic languages to describe soldiers who fought on behalf of their nation from abroad in World War I. In the case of interwar Czechoslovakia, the Legionnaires fought in France, Italy, and Russia. For this thesis, the term ‘Czecho-Slovak Legion’ will be used to refer to the force of ethnic Czechs and Slovaks fighting against Austria-Hungary on the Eastern Front, and then against the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War unless otherwise specified.
early diplomatic recognition thanks to the sacrifices of the Legion in Russia, where four thousand of them lay down their lives.³

This thesis uses the methodology of Hayden White to problematize the existing heroic narrative of the Czecho-Slovak Legion by examining its emplotment through contemporary accounts and historical literature.⁴ It further examines the Legionnaires after their escape from Russia to reveal their complex postwar situation; the Legionnaires received privileged social services in Czechoslovakia but were disappointed with their integration into the new state, as their unruly behaviour and high suicide rates indicate. Lastly, this thesis reveals the state’s efforts to harness the Legionnaires in creating a national history and a national myth to cement Czechoslovakia as a progressive, Western-oriented democracy in the eyes of its own citizens and of the rest of the world. The willingness of an elite political coterie known as the Castle, led by T.G. Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, to crush prominent right-wing Legionnaires who challenged their myth-making project will be highlighted.⁵ The conclusion will briefly describe the history between the end of this thesis in 1928 and the Second World War. This second global conflict not only ended the lives of many Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires, but also brought an end to the country they had fought so hard to found, a country that had worked so unscrupulously to create and to preserve their myth. Celebration of the Legionnaire legacy would not be revived for another forty years, until the Velvet Revolution of 1989, when the Communist government fell and a Western-oriented democracy once again ruled in Czechoslovakia.

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The situation of the Legionnaires upon their return to Czechoslovakia, while better than that of veterans who remained in the Austro-Hungarian armies, still often included poverty, family disruption, and a feeling of maladjustment. Some Legionnaires did attain influential military and political leadership positions, but these were disproportionately few. The narratives of the Legionnaires’ experiences and, to a lesser extent, the memories of their struggle were mobilized by their own leadership and the politicians of interwar Czechoslovakia to serve primarily the interests of those leaders and politicians. While left-leaning Legionnaires certainly existed, and were very vocal with their views, the vast majority of Legionnaires were politically centrist or right-wing. Those on the far-right were targeted by the Castle because of the perceived threat they posed to democracy and to the Castle’s own political influence in Czechoslovakia.

Part of the challenge of studying the complex legacy of the Czecho-Slovak Legion in the First Czechoslovak Republic (October 1918–October 1938) and Second Czecho-Slovak Republic (1938–1939) is that the documentation relating to the Legion was suppressed. The Nazis, from 1939 to 1945, and the Communists, from 1948 to 1989, restricted access to sources relating to the Legionnaires or to interwar politics more generally. The Nazis and the Communists persecuted the Legionnaires because they represented the military prowess and independence of Czechoslovakia, which was antithetical to their goal of suppressing Czecho-Slovak democracy and autonomy. The short lived Third Czechoslovak Republic, between 1945 and 1948, did not provide a meaningful revival in the study of the Legionnaires. As will be

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6 Unless otherwise stated, all translations made from the Czech are by the author.
Jan Michl, Legionáři a Československo [Legionnaires and Czechoslovakia], (Prague: Naše Vojsko, 2009), 11.
discussed in greater detail in the literature survey below, much of the English language scholarship prior to 1989 is severely limited because of the restricted access to Czech and Slovak language sources.

Between the Two World Wars, most publication about the Legionnaires concerned their military exploits, with discussion of their situation following their return from Russia limited to newspapers, which acted as mouthpieces for the political parties that controlled them. Detailed study of the Legionnaires’ postwar economic or social situations was not undertaken during the predominantly authoritarian era from 1945 to 1989. The politics of the First Republic were first studied critically by Communist historians, and revisions of these narratives would not occur until after the Velvet Revolution.

In the years following their return from Russia, several Legionnaires wrote about their experiences and had their accounts published. One such account is *Battle with the Austrian Hydra: The Diary of Legionnaire Čeněk Klos*. This text draws from a Legionnaire’s diary written as the fight in Russia unfolded. As the title suggests, *Battle with the Austrian Hydra* reveals the powerful patriotism which drove some Legionnaires to defect from Austria-Hungary to Russia. It was accounts such as these that were promoted by the dominant Castle party during the Interwar period.

One of the richest primary sources is *The Road to Resistance: How The Czechoslovak Legion Lived and Where It Journeyed*, published between 1926 and 1929.² Accounts relating to the experiences of the Russian Legion are in parts three, four, and five of this five-part compilation of hundreds of personal accounts. Many of the accounts demonstrate substantial

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hostility to the Bolsheviks, and to Russians more broadly. One Legionnaire wrote “we hate the Russians,” which helps explain why these Legionnaires refrained from left-wing politics more than those Czechs and Slovaks who remained at home throughout the war.\textsuperscript{10} Newspaper publications from the interwar period make it clear, however, that Bolshevik propaganda successfully converted a few Legionnaires who were very vocal upon their return to Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{11}

Czech-language secondary sources that discuss the Legion’s fight in Russia from the interwar period are quite politicized, tainted by the myth-forming propaganda of the Castle political clique and its opponents. This myth promoted Czechoslovakia as a just, democratic state, and emphasized the link between the Legionnaires and the political elite who claimed the mantle of founders of the state.\textsuperscript{12} English-language works of greatly varying quality also emerged in this period. Henry Baerlein’s \textit{The March of the 70,000}, published in 1926, cites very few sources.\textsuperscript{13} Gustav Becvar’s account stands out as one of the best, mostly because the author was a Legionnaire himself and spoke Czech. In subsequent decades, due to limited access to original sources, the secondary sources on the Legions continued to cite the same sources, or none at all.

One strain of scholarship that did emerge during the Communist decades was the first studies of Czech and Slovak fascism. While skewed by ideology, works such as Václav Peša’s

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\textsuperscript{10} Josef Novak, “Primorsky Krai and Vladivostok”, in \textit{The Road to Resistance}, 45.

\textsuperscript{11} Newspaper article “Legionářy a čeští komunisté” [“The Legionnaires and Czech Communists”], \textit{Právo Lidu [The People’s Truth]}, in MZV-VA I 2218, Národní Archív (NACR) [National Archive of the Czech Republic], Prague, Czech Republic.

\textsuperscript{12} Orzoff, \textit{The Battle for the Castle}, 16.

\textsuperscript{13} Kevin J. McNamara, \textit{Dreams of a Great Small Nation: The Mutinous Army that Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire, Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe}, (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 370.
pioneering 1953 article “On the Question of the Beginnings of the Fascist Movement in the Czech Lands” began to examine fascism in interwar Czechoslovakia, a subject I’ll discuss shortly. These works provide insight into how fascist parties used advocacy for Legionnaire rights to attack their political rivals, particularly the centrists, like the Castle, who already claimed to speak for the Legionnaires and to protect their interests.

The most comprehensive English language study of the Czecho-Slovak Legions in Russia is Victor M. Fic’s four volume series, published between 1977 and 1998. Available in English translations that make up in substance what they lack in style, Fic’s works provide analysis of the relationship among the Soviets, the Czecho-Slovaks, and the Allied powers that intervened in Russia. While the last two volumes use some archival sources from Prague, he generally retains an anti-Bolshevik bias that continues to romanticize the Czecho-Slovak Legion. Furthermore, the quality of his scholarship in other subject areas renders the rigor of his scholarship doubtful.

Since the Velvet Revolution in 1989, scholarship on the Legion has revived and continued to improve, albeit slowly. For example, J. F. N. Bradley’s 1991 work The Czechoslovak Legion in Russia, 1914–1920, while readable, has been criticized by Kevin J. McNamara, a later scholar of the subject, for its limited source use and factual errors. More recently, in 2014, Brent Mueggenberg’s The Czecho-Slovak Struggle for Independence 1914–1920, relies on the same few English-translated sources previously used by other scholars.

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These secondary sources generally hold their focus on the broader strategic military history of the Legion story. This thesis will concentrate on the lived experience of the soldiers on the ground, as it contrasts with the machinations of the independence movement leading the Legion from abroad.

Kevin J. McNamara’s *Dreams of a Great Small Nation: The Mutinous Army That Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire, Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe* is the best, most recent secondary-source survey of the Czechoslovak Legion’s combat in Russia. It is especially effective at highlighting the fact that the Czechs and Slovaks in the Legion, while ultimately both fighting to free their peoples from the Hapsburg monarchy, were not always unified. Lastly, it is among the most recent works on the subject in English, and employs some previously unused primary sources, thus bringing into conversation a wider range of evidence and existing scholarship. Like most work on the Legionnaires over the decade, however, McNamara ends his history with the return of the Legionnaires to Czechoslovakia, and retains most of the romantic character of the subject.

To examine the fate of the Legionnaires after their return to Czechoslovakia, the publications of the interwar period newspapers and the sparse available scholarship will be used. The most authoritative scholar on the post-combat history of the Legionnaires is Jan Michl. His 2009 opus, *The Legionnaires and Czechoslovakia*, only ends with the death of the last state-recognized Legionnaire in 1999 and the death of the last unofficial Legionnaire in 2003, who lost state-recognition after serving time for collaboration with the Nazis.¹⁸ He points out that the Legionnaires were the only demographic in the young republic to have their own separate social security network, a privilege granted to them by a government whose very existence rested on

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their accomplishments. This indicates the importance of the Legionnaires to the new state of Czechoslovakia and to the ruling elite that had founded it on the military sacrifice of the Legionnaires. 19 Newspaper publication archives, particularly from the 1920s, provide additional evidence of the vocal debates about the mixed success of Legionnaire reintegration into civilian life or into the Czechoslovak military. In brief, existing scholarship on the integration of Legionnaires leaves room for the incorporation of contemporary newsprint and for an examination of the disconnect between what the Czechoslovak state provided for Legionnaires and what they expected.

The Castle, as the most powerful faction in interwar Czechoslovakia, influenced the reintegration of Russian Legionnaires by crafting policies such as the separate healthcare system discussed above. The Castle also produced a mythic legacy of the Legionnaire wartime combat through institutions such as party-controlled newspapers, government departments, and through events, such as public holidays. The authoritative work on interwar Czechoslovak politics is Andrea Orzoff’s *Battle for the Castle*. Orzoff pioneers the deconstruction of the myth of virtuous Czechoslovak democracy, as promoted by T.G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, and their Castle faction.

The emphasis this group placed on the myth of the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires, particularly from Russia, in their political narrative is of greatest relevance to this thesis. Since they themselves placed the Legionnaires at the centre of the foundation of Czechoslovakia, they competed over who represented the best interests of the Legion, while both sometimes neglected the needs of Legionnaires once they had served their political utility. 20 Other scholars, such as Nancy Wingfield, have helped illustrate how public holidays were used as occasions to fortify

19 Ibid, 9.
the Legionnaire legacy, connect it with the foundation of the state, and enhance the power of the ruling political and military elite of Czechoslovakia.\textsuperscript{21}

David Kelly’s work on Czech fascism is foundational for any discussion of the political right and how they competed with the Castle over the support of the Legionnaires and how Legionnaires on the political right were persecuted by the Castle. Kelly provides key texts for examining the political involvement and the political utilization of the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires from Russia.\textsuperscript{22} He emphasizes that, of the three most prominent right-wing leaders, only Radola Gajda was a Legionnaire. Gajda was also the only one who openly embraced the label fascist, after he founded the NOF (The National Fascist Community) in 1926.\textsuperscript{23}

The following chapters seek to intervene in the existing scholarship outlined above through a narrative analysis of different primary and secondary sources. Chapter one outlines the persistence of romantic emplotment in the narrativization of Czecho-Slovak Legion history. It uses primary sources, particularly ego-documents, such as Klos’ diary, to reconstruct the experience of the Legionnaires in Russia. Close narratological analysis of primary and secondary sources complicate the prevailing romantic emplotment of said sources.

Chapter two examines the fate of Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires after their return from Russia between 1918 and 1920 until the apogee of Castle-fascist conflict in 1928 with the conclusion of the Gajda affair. Centrist and right-wing political involvement will be surveyed


alongside the economic and social situation. I shall underscore the pervasiveness of poverty and other effects of poor reintegration.

Chapter three will examine how Czechoslovakia’s political, military, and literary elites, and how they created and manipulated the legacy of the Czecho-Slovak Legion in Czechoslovakia’s first decade. I will analyze the myth-making mechanisms of interwar Czechoslovakia, which used the mass media and public commemoration to disseminate the notion that the state was founded with the help of heroic Legionnaires who were loyal to the Castle. Right wing Legionnaires who disagreed with this version of history were politically persecuted.
Chapter 1

In interwar Czechoslovakia, the literature on the wartime history of the Czechs and Slovaks was dominated by works with titles like *The Battle Against the Austrian Hydra*, and *The Road to Resistance: How The Czechoslovak Legion Lived and Where It Journeyed*.24 These works told the story of the Czecho-Slovak Legion’s epic wartime combat in Russia, and did so in a manner that romanticized the struggle for national liberation of the Czechs and Slovaks through combat in a foreign land. This chapter interrogates the history of the Czecho-Slovak Legion’s combat in Russia between 1914 and 1920 to reveal persistent romantic emplotment, which has influenced subsequent scholarship on the subject right up until the present day. The subsequent chapter demonstrates the effects of this romanticized narrative on the Legionnaires after their return to Czechoslovakia, when the narratives of their deeds far outpaced the government services they had access to. The final chapter will examine who was responsible for propagating this epic version of the Legion story, and what political purposes it served.

Before I delve into narratological analysis of *The Battle Against the Austrian Hydra* and *The Road to Resistance*, it is first important to provide a detailed summary of the formation, combat, and escape of the Czecho-Slovak Legion. Before the outbreak of war in 1914, two important developments made the formation of the Czecho-Slovak Legion possible. A movement for national liberation, often with pan-Slavic elements, grew amongst the Slovaks and Czechs, but it was the Czechs who were the most organized, powerful, and vocal of Austria-Hungary’s

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thirty million Slavic subjects. Many Czechs and Slovaks emigrated to Russia in the decades prior to World War I, pushed out by Austro-Hungarian suppression, and lured by pan-Slavism and by economic opportunities. By 1914, the Czech and Slovak population in Russia numbered 65,000 by the lower estimates, and about 200,000 by the higher estimates. Estimates vary because Russian record-keepers were not thorough in dissecting the ethnic and linguistic complexities of its formerly Austro-Hungarian subjects.

From 1914 onwards, the actions of the Russian government and of the newly-formed Czecho-Slovak independence movement abroad drove the creation of a Czech and Slovak military unit on the Eastern Front called the Druzhina. The earliest volunteers were the patriotic Czechs and Slovak emigres in Russia mentioned previously, and the first 350 were officially enlisted on August 2nd, 1914. The Druzhina was praised for its high morale and discipline. This unit was mainly used in supporting roles, such as reconnaissance, until the battle of Zborov on July 2nd, 1917, when the Czecho-Slovak Druzhina distinguished itself in frontline combat against the Austro-Hungarian army. The battle of Zborov allowed T.G. Masaryk, the leader of the Czecho-Slovak National Council in Paris, to convince the beleaguered Russian Provisional Government to permit Czech and Slovak POWs to join the Druzhina. The Czecho-Slovak Legion thus took shape as tens of thousands of Czech and Slovak POWs swelled the ranks of the Czecho-Slovak armed forces in Russia to 47,420 troops by May 1918. The unit became an


\[26\] For the high estimate see Rowan A. Williams, “The Czech Legion Revisited”, In *East Central Europe*, vol. 6, no. 1, (1979): 20.

For the higher estimate, see McNamara, *Dreams of a Great Small Nation*, 62.

\[27\] Ibid, 62.


\[30\] McNamara, *Dreams of a Great Small Nation*, 133, 141.
Allied army, fighting against the Central Powers, under the command of the French general staff so as to guarantee that the Czecho-Slovak National Council would maintain control of the Legions, and not the Russian high command.

Following the October Revolution and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1917, the new Bolshevik government agreed to allow the Czecho-Slovak Legion passage out of Russia via Vladivostok so they could be shipped to France to continue to assist the Allied war effort after Russia’s withdrawal from the conflict. After retreating from Ukraine in the face of a renewed German onslaught, the Czecho-Slovak Legion began its slow journey eastward over the Trans-Siberian Railway.31

Miscommunication arose and tensions grew among the Czecho-Slovak Legion, the Allied governments, and the Bolsheviks. The situation was complicated by the release and repatriation of hundreds of thousands of German and Hungarian POWs, many of whom were hostile to the Legion. The Allies and the Czecho-Slovak independence movement considered diverting the Legion away from Vladivostok, while the Bolsheviks and their local Soviets tried to aggressively recruit the Legionnaires with propaganda. Paired with this effort, the Bolsheviks demanded increasingly stringent disarmament terms from the Legion. By April 1918, the Legionnaires were strung out over thousands of kilometers of the Trans-Siberian Railway, becoming more suspicious of the Bolsheviks as almost all their trains ground to a halt to allow the German and Hungarian POWs to travel the opposite direction. Speculation of German and Bolshevik collusion became widespread amongst the Legion. Legionnaires also came into contact with White Russian forces who fed their suspicions of Bolshevik intentions.32 The White Russians

31 MacNamara, Dreams of a Great Small Nation, 161.
were groups opposed to the Bolsheviks in the Russian Civil War. The Czecho-Slovak Legion officially strove to remain neutral, but some factions within the Legion sympathized with the White Russian cause of defeating Bolshevism.

In May 1918 open conflict erupted between the Czecho-Slovak Legion and the Bolsheviks due to an incident at a remote Siberian railway station called Chelyabinsk. The commanders of the Czecho-Slovak Legion secretly travelled to Chelyabinsk to partake in a “Congress of the Czechoslovak Revolution Army.”33 A Hungarian POW severely wounded a Legionnaire by throwing a piece of metal from his departing train. The Hungarian’s train was stopped by the infuriated Legionnaires, who found the perpetrator and beat him to death. The local Soviet authorities arrested the Legionnaires and the delegation sent to appeal for their release. The Legion reacted by seizing the entire town, freeing their comrades, making peace with the local Soviet, and then returning to their train cars. News of the incident aroused fury in Moscow, prompting Leon Trotsky, Soviet Commissar for War, to order all Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires disarmed and disbanded into either labour camps or Red Army battalions.34 The order was intercepted by the Legion leadership, who controlled both the railway station and the telegraph office at Chelyabinsk. They decided that cooperation with the Bolsheviks was no longer possible and opted to continue to Vladivostok with all haste, using whatever force necessary.

What force proved necessary involved the Czecho-Slovak Legion almost immediately in open conflict with the ill-prepared Bolsheviks. To avoid being cut off from each other, the units of the Legion first opted to link together and then continue their journey eastward. In only “six

weeks, the entire length of the strategic Trans-Siberian Railway from Penza to Vladivostok” was in Czecho-Slovak hands. Some historians have speculated the Legion could have defeated the Bolsheviks in June and July of 1918, especially if an Allied intervention had been prompt and decisive. The Legion opted instead to strategically retreat from Russia, though this process would be far more complicated than their seizure of the Trans-Siberian Railway. Retreat from Russia was delayed by growing Bolshevik strength, factionalism amongst various White Russian forces, and Allied efforts to use the Legion as part of disorganized foreign intervention efforts in the Russian Civil War. Between the end of 1919 and September 1920, the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires finally shipped off to the independent Czechoslovakia that so many of them had fought for.

With a general history of the Czecho-Slovak Legion outlined, this chapter will now analyze the specific narrative elements of Legionnaire memoirs to reveal which aspects of wartime experience are emphasized and which are silenced. Hayden White declares, paraphrasing Kant, that “historical narratives without analysis are empty, while historical analyses without narrative are blind.” Narration demonstrates a historical consciousness because it organizes events in a logical fashion, usually chronological or thematic. One of the distinguishing characteristics of narration is the mode of emplotment used to tell a story. Emplotment provides a coherent structure for a story, and it must be maintained consistently to be comprehensible to the reader. Of the four most common modes of emplotment, modelled on

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36 McNamara, *Dreams of a Great Small Nation*, 218.

nineteenth-century novel genres, White defines the romantic mode as “a drama of self-identification, symbolized by the hero’s transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it…a drama of the triumph of good over evil.”\textsuperscript{38} It is this romantic emplotment which governs the history of the Czecho-Slovak Legion.

The Czecho-Slovak Legion story was emplotted in the romantic mode even as the Legion was still fighting in Russia, and it has hardly been challenged by publications since the end of the Russian Civil War, whether by those Legionnaires who experienced the events directly or by authors and scholars reflecting on the Legion afterwards. While some of the more recent scholarship, such as the work of Robert McNamara, has de-romanticized certain elements of the narrative of the Czecho-Slovak Legion, it has retained the overarching dynamics of an epic.

Newspaper publications during World War One were the first to seize on the story of the Czecho-Slovak Legion and to romanticize it. Eager for more optimistic news from Russia following the Bolshevik coup, western publications, encouraged by T.G. Masaryk’s Czecho-Slovak National Council in Paris, began to scrutinize and to celebrate the Czecho-Slovak Legion in Russia and their combat against the evil of Bolshevism.\textsuperscript{39} Czechoslovak newspapers from 1918 quickly began reporting about “our Legionnaires” and “our men in Siberia”, particularly more right-wing publications.\textsuperscript{40} Thus began the identification of Russian Legionnaires with Czechoslovak national identity.

\textsuperscript{38} Hayden White, \textit{Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe} (Baltimore, 1973), 8-9.

\textsuperscript{39} Various English and French language newspaper from 1917-1920, fond Ministerstvo Zahraníčních Věcí - Výstříškový Archív [Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Newsprint Archive], MZV-VA I 2218, NACR, Prague, Czech Republic.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Venkov} was the official daily newspaper of the Czechoslovak Agrarian Party. “O sibiřské legionáře” [“About the Siberian Legionnaires”], \textit{Venkov [Countryside]}, fond Ministerstvo Zahraníčních Věcí - Výstříškový Archív [Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Newsprint Archive], MZV-VA I 2217, NACR, Prague, Czech Republic.
Sources published shortly after the return of the Legionnaires from Russia were already praising the heroism of the Legionnaires. One such source account is Čeněk Klos’ war diary, *Battle with the Austrian Hydra: For Freedom of Homeland*, edited by his friend and fellow legionnaire Eduard Culka. The diary follows Klos from his conscription in the Austro-Hungarian army, to his defection to the Russians, to his time in POW camps awaiting permission to join the Czecho-Slovak Druzhina. The title of the diary alone strongly hints at the evil this drama will be combatting, the Austrians, and for what purpose, the liberation of the Czech homeland. The latter is an example of the romantic transcendence of experience; namely, the liberation of Czechs from Austrian rule through combat for the Triple Entente.

Nationalist self-identification is evident in Klos’ diary with consistent references to the Czech homeland and to his identity as a Czech soldier fighting for national liberation. Though it changes slightly over the course of his account, Klos’ identity remains largely consistent and is an explicit and consistent aspect of his narrative voice. The only shift is from a general declaration of Slavic brotherhood among the Czechs, Slovaks, and Russians to explicit affiliation with the Czecho-Slovak independence movement of T.G. Masaryk, a shift that most Legionnaires underwent as their movement became more formally organized around the National Council in Paris. In brief, Klos demonstrates a powerful patriotic identity as a Czech.

In addition to a clear patriotic self-identification as a Slavic nationalist, Čeněk Klos overcomes his material circumstances in pursuit of his fight to liberate his homeland. Klos embraces the suffering he endures, from the harsh drilling in the Austro-Hungarian army to the cold trench conditions on the front, because he is motivated by his desire to defect to the

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42 Klos, *Boj s Rakouskou Hydrou*, 12, 63, 75.
Russians and fight against the Germanic oppressors of his nation. His experience in a Russian POW camp further degrades Klos’ material conditions, yet he overcomes them to join the Czecho-Slovak Druzhina.\textsuperscript{43} It must also be noted that since Klos’ account was edited by his friend, the narrative presented to readers may be modified and streamlined. Considering the praise Culka, the editor, heaps on Klos’ patriotism, it is likely this occurred to some extent.

The consistency of the patriotic tone of Klos’ account downplays the very real emotional and material suffering Klos endured because of the First World War and his involvement in the Russian Civil War. The love of his life, Anežka, married another man in the years of his absence, and while he ultimately contributed to the liberation of his homeland, he hardly lived long enough to enjoy it, dying of illness in 1920.\textsuperscript{44} Given the sickliness he describes himself suffering after his conscription into the army, and intensified during his time as a POW and Druzhina soldier, his wartime experience undoubtedly accelerated health problems and brought about his premature death at age twenty-six. The rather tragic elements in Klos’ \textit{Battle with the Austrian Hydra} are downplayed to maintain a consistently heroic narrative for public consumption. It is evident that in regard to self-identification, the transcendence of experience, and the heroic battle of good over evil which define romantic emplotment according to Hayden White, Klos’ diary meets all the criteria.

Along with Klos’ diary, one of most widely read primary sources about the Czecho-Slovak Legion is \textit{The Road to Resistance: How The Czechoslovak Legion Lived and Where It Journeyed}, a five-part compilation of accounts by Legionnaires from all fronts. The editor, Adolf

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\textsuperscript{43} Klos, \textit{Boj s Rakouskou Hydrou}, 11, 17, 28.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid, 4.
Zeman, was himself a Russian Legionnaire. The accounts in *The Road to Resistance* are mostly consistent with Klos’ *Battle with the Austrian Hydra*, and in other ways are different. These inconsistencies, and a close examination of some exemplary accounts in *The Road to Resistance*, reveal the over-simplification of the Czecho-Slovak Legion narrative in primary sources.

The key features of a heroic tale, namely self-identification with the good, the battle against evil, and the transcendence of experience in this process, all manifest in the accounts in *The Road to Resistance*. Early in his account of the Legion’s struggle against the forces of White Russian general Semyanov, Josef Mlčoch, a Czecho-Slovak soldier, proclaims: “We, simple Czechoslovak soldiers, were never friends of Kolčak, and especially not of Semyanov.” The good and evil dichotomy is quite visible here, with the Czecho-Slovak soldiers, committed to their goal of escaping Russia and liberating their homeland, fighting against the barbaric forces of Russian general Semyanov. Fighting breaks out between the two because of the Legion’s refusal to fight the Bolsheviks alongside Semyanov, in keeping with their commitment to proceed to Vladivostok as swiftly as possible. Following its stunning victory between May and June, 1918, the Legion had lost much ground not only to the Bolsheviks, but to White Russian forces such as Semyanov’s, as well as to the Japanese, who effectively controlled Vladivostok and its environs. Unlike Klos’ diary, which identifies the Austrians as the principal enemy of the Czecho-Slovaks, Mlčoch’s account identifies Semyanov’s Russians as the Legion’s enemy in this account. Despite the different enemies portrayed, Klos’ and Mlčoch’s accounts remain

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46 Josef Mlčoch, “Attack against Semyanov” [“Vystoupení proti Seměnovu”], in *Cestami odboje*, 528
consistent in their self-identification with the Czecho-Slovak Legion and the struggle for a liberated Czechoslovakia.

Josef Mlčoch’s account of the brief Czecho-Slovak conflict with General Semyanov is also romantically emplotted by means of a transcendence of experience. Mlčoch describes the relaxed nature of the Legion’s existence prior to the conflict with Semyanov. Sledding and sightseeing are among the recreational activities available and undertaken by Legionnaires near Mysov, the Siberian town Mlčoch’s unit was residing in at the outbreak of hostilities. This leisurely boredom is interrupted by Semyanov’s threat to block tunnels on the Trans-Siberian Railway, a ploy to force the Czecho-Slovak Legion to join him in attacking the Bolsheviks. Mlčoch’s unit swiftly mobilizes and seizes hold of the town. Swift, largely bloodless victories follow as the bulk of Semyanov’s forces are disarmed. Under renewed orders from the top of the Legion’s chain-of-command, the Czecho-Slovaks who partook in the anti-Semyanov action are ordered to return the seized weaponry and make peace with Semyanov, allied to the Japanese who dictate how quickly the Legionnaires can evacuate Russia. Mlčoch’s account further reveals adherence to the idea of a transcendent experience as analysis of his everyday activities reveals.

Unlike Klos’ account of his experience, which highlights the physical suffering in the Austro-Hungarian army and the labour of POW camp, Mlčoch’s experience is rather one of boredom and occasional recreation. Klos transcends his experience by joining the Czecho-Slovak liberation movement, and eventually by combat. Mlčoch, on the other hand, transcends his experience of awaiting action by sudden combat. Comparing the emplotment of Čeněk Klos and Josef Mlčoch, namely through their Czecho-Slovak nationalism, their vilification of enemies, and their material experience as Legionnaires, reveals inconsistencies in the romantic emplotment of the Czecho-Slovak Legion narrative.
The different enemies whom Klos and Mlčoch identify in their accounts, the Austrians and a White Russian general respectively, reveal the complex and shifting nature of the Czecho-Slovak Legion’s position in Russia. The progress of World War One and the Russian Civil War shifted the Legion’s primary enemy from the Austro-Hungarians, to the Bolsheviks, to hostile White Russian leaders, to the foreign intervention forces, and not necessarily in such a neat and linear order. Admittedly, conflicts with White Russian forces or, say, the Japanese expeditionary force, were rather short-lived. The nuance of the Legion’s shifting fortunes is lost in the romantic emplotment of their story by the primary sources compiled by veterans; a comparison of two prominent accounts, discussed above, are indicative of the varied nature of the experience of the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires in Russia.

Secondary sources written in Czech retain many elements of the romantic emplotment found in the primary material, such as Klos’ diary or the accounts in The Road to Resistance. One such source is the 1995 work Anabasis by Robert Sak. The author lauds the patriotic eagerness of the Czechs living in Russia to volunteer for the Tsar’s army in 1914 in the opening chapter and proceeds to build on this romantic self-identification of the Legionnaires as Panslavic heroes with such concepts as the “[traditional] Czech love of freedom.” It is evident that a critical approach to the sources was not taken to attempt to deconstruct the mode of emplotment used to compose this narrative. The English-language secondary scholarship is generally less critical than the Czech scholarship, though even in the present decade, notions of titanic ideological struggle or of combat against great odds continues to recur.

While a valuable scholarly contribution to the study of the Russian Civil War, particularly the relations among the Bolsheviks, the Czecho-Slovaks, and the Western Allies, Viktor M. Fic’s four volume history of the Czecho-Slovak Legions fails to interrogate the romantic emplotment of the Legion narrative. The strongest evidence of this are his analytical conclusions. For example, he blames primarily the Soviets for causing hostilities to break out between the Czecho-Slovaks and the Bolsheviks in May 1918.\textsuperscript{49} Another example, in volume three, is the thesis that if Woodrow Wilson had supported Allied intervention in the summer of 1918, the Legion could have assisted a Bolshevik defeat and helped reopen the Eastern Front against Germany.\textsuperscript{50} Evidently, Fic maintains the dichotomy of the good Czecho-Slovaks versus the evil Bolsheviks, adding the unprepared Allies as a third major player. More broadly, Fic retains the patriotic anti-Bolshevik bias, and the general narrative frame of the Legionnaires overcoming their situation to secure their own destiny. This comprehensive study of the Czecho-Slovak Legion, without access to Czech, Slovak, or Russian sources due to the Cold War, fails to give the Legionnaires the agency they deserve in describing their involvement in the Russian Civil War.

Even after the fall of Communism, with greater archival access than before, English-language scholarship has struggled to acknowledge and interrogate the romantic emplotment of the Czecho-Slovak Legion narrative. Kevin J. McNamara’s \textit{Dreams of a Great Small Nation} romanticizes the Legion at several key junctions, despite the author’s efforts to include newly translated Czech-language sources to be more critical of the simplified Legion story. McNamara


makes no secret that his main aim is to bring the “epic tale of the Czecho-Slovak Legion” to a broader English audience. At least part of the reason why McNamara’s work on the Legion continues to be narrativized romantically is that the bulk of the Czech-language sources he boasts of utilizing in his research is The Road to Resistance: How The Czechoslovak Legion Lived and Where It Journeyed, a primary source which manages to be simplified in its richness.

The romantic narrative of the Czecho-Slovak Legion has not only survived in literature, scholarship, and in the popular imagination, but it has been institutionalized in ways that persist to the present day, such as state commemorations of the battle of Zborov. Nancy Wingfield has examined the commemoration of the Zborov and how, in the interwar years, it came to represent “the first time in 300 years that the Czech(-oslovaks) had taken up arms against the Hapsburg Monarchy, and [had] emerged victorious.” Though not celebrated as faithfully in this century, Zborov continues to hold an important place in the nationalism of the Czech Republic. In preparation for the one-hundredth anniversary of the battle, in 2017, a replica “Legion Train” was built as a mobile museum to travel the Czech Republic for five years, funded by a vast partnership of public and private institutions. While Wingfield may be correct that the battle of Zborov is not the foundational national holiday it was during the interwar period, the nostalgia of the Legionnaires persists in the Czech national consciousness.

51 Kevin J. McNamara, Dreams of a Great Small Nation: The Mutinous Army that Threatened a Revolution, Destroyed an Empire, Founded a Republic, and Remade the Map of Europe, (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), xiv.
52 Cestami odboje, trans. by Ivo Řezniček.
54 Legiovlak [Legion Train], National Legionnaires Community [Československé obce legionářské]
Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires suffered material deprivations and chaotic military combat in Russia, the nuances of which are only revealed through a close analysis of the ways the Legionnaires molded their own experiences to highlight their romantic features. Many of the military and political elites who were involved with the Russian Legion story, such as T.G. Masaryk or general Radola Gajda, would reinforce the romantic nature of the Czecho-Slovak Legion’s involvement in World War One and the Russian Civil War. They did this to shape the Czechoslovak national image, through the construction of a national history and of a national myth in the first decade of Czechoslovakia’s existence. More concretely, however, leaders like Masaryk influenced the state policy which would attempt to integrate the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires from Russia into the new state they had helped to liberate. The results satisfied neither the Legionnaires nor the leaders who orchestrated their return home.
Chapter 2

In June 1920, a contingent of Legionnaires returned home to the Czechoslovakia they had helped to liberate through years of fighting in Russia. After weeks of travelling by boat and train, they arrived at the central train station in Olomouc, where a crowd had gathered to welcome them. The welcome speech was given by former Austro-Hungarian general Josef Kroupa. However, rumours had circulated among the men from the right-wing magazine “Prerod” that Kroupa had signed execution orders for Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires captured on the Italian front. The Legionnaires interrupted the general’s welcome speech and chanted “we want a Czech general” so loudly that Kroupa was forced to leave the stage.55

Incidents such as this interrupted speech in Olomouc are almost never cited in histories of the Czecho-Slovak Legions by Czech or English-language scholars, and they were often downplayed by contemporaries themselves. The latter reason will be revisited in Chapter Three, but the former can be explained by the lack of interest in the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires after they returned to Czechoslovakia from Russia. Their postwar lives lacked the epic romance of their foreign-liberation struggle. For example, Robert Sak appends only three pages to the end of his historical study of the Russian Legions in order to discuss the career development of a few of the most prominent Russian Legionnaires. He devotes the majority of that limited space to criticizing General Radola Gajda for his actions in Russia and for his later turn to fascism, which will be discussed in the following chapter.56 The English-language scholarship on the Russian Legionnaires is even less interested in the postwar lives of these soldiers than the work of Sak and other Czech historians. This chapter seeks to extend the study of the Czecho-Slovak

55 Tomáš Sedlář, Československý Legionář (Olomouc, 2003), 50. Quoted in Jan Michl, Legionáři a Československo [The Legionnaires and Czechoslovakia], (Prague: Naše Vojsko, 2009), 27.
Legionnaires in Russia beyond the end of their combat abroad, and to examine their integration into the Czechoslovakia to “whose liberation they, more than anyone else, had contributed.” In what follows, I shall employ the studies that are available, such as the works of Jan Michl and Ivan Šedivý, along with contemporary newsprint, especially by Legionnaire authors, to reveal the complexities of the postwar lives of the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires from Russia.

The event at the Olomouc train station illustrates the general disappointment of Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires returning from Russia, and it also provides an example of the sort of disrespectful behaviour that earned the Legionnaires the enmity of powerful military and political interests. While the Legionnaires were not as victimized as they themselves believed—as evinced by the land reform program that explicitly favoured them, and by their low death rates between 1920 and 1932—their self-perception was one of ill treatment, or at least of inadequate reward for their sacrifice. However, they were also not the ungrateful rabble that some contemporaries and historians have made them out to be, as their unenviable employment numbers and high suicide rates demonstrate.

The romance of the Czecho-Slovak Legion’s combat in Russia did not translate home to civilian life in the young republic of Czechoslovakia. In the eyes of the Czechoslovak state, Legionnaires were distinct from not only the civilian public, but also from veterans of the Austro-Hungarian armed forces, and they were treated favourably. This chapter will argue that Czechoslovakia set up services uniquely for its returning Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires that generally failed to satisfy them, particularly those from Russia. The Russian Legionnaires expressed this dissatisfaction by antagonizing Austro-Hungarian veterans and military

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57 Untitled newspaper clipping, fond Ministerstvo Zahraničních Věcí - Výstřiškový Archiv [Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Newsprint Archive], MZV-VA I 2217, Prague, Czech Republic.
commanders. Understanding the state infrastructure for accommodating returning Russian Legionnaires will help explain the state’s persecution of politically radical Legionnaires, which will form the subject of Chapter Three. A key first step in the process of Legionnaire integration into Czechoslovakia was the creation of a strict legal definition for who a Legionnaire was, and who was not.

The state defined a Czecho-Slovak Legionnaire as “each volunteer member of the Czecho-Slovak Legion (revolutionary-liberation army), who was registered by, or on behalf of, the Czecho-Slovak National Council in Paris or one its branches prior to October 28th 1918 … and on the day of liberation … was in the services of the revolutionary-liberation army.” The legal definition also included those who volunteered in Allied armies, if they could prove they were unable to join an established Legion.  

The greatest number that fell into this latter category were American soldiers of Czech and Slovak ethnicity, the United States being home to the largest population of Czechs and Slovaks outside of Austria-Hungary.  

The legal definition of a Legionnaire emphasized the enthusiasm of these soldiers by stipulating that they must have volunteered, and by affirming their loyalty to the National Council of Masaryk and Beneš, who formed the core of Czechoslovakia’s first leaders.

Importantly, the legal definition acknowledged the ‘revolutionary-liberating’ character of the Legions, which was particularly true of the Legionnaires from Russia, whose governing structure was rather democratic and anti-hierarchical by military standards. The legal acknowledgement of the revolutionary spirit among the Russian Legions did not help resolve the disciplinary challenges that ensued in the military when Legionnaires failed to greet their non-

Legionnaire counterparts in the new Czechoslovak military, though this point will be discussed in greater detail later.

The key stipulation of the registration law was that Legionnaires had to prove their service on October 28th 1918, the date of the First Czechoslovak Republic’s independence. Thousands of Legionnaires were thus excluded from the legal recognition—and the legal benefits—of being a Legionnaire simply because they lacked the appropriate paperwork or proof of service for a single day in their entire military career. Even high-ranking officials sometimes had difficulty obtaining the necessary evidence. Dr. Lev Sychrava, one of the key independence movement leaders, required three witnesses, including foreign minister Edvard Beneš, to prove that he qualified as a Legionnaire. Of the 109,590 people who fought abroad in World War I for Czechoslovakia’s independence, fully 20,902 did not meet the legal qualifications for Legionnaire registration.60

Restricting who would be legally recognized as a Legionnaire was a way for the state to exert power over all its veterans, privileging those who had fought abroad for Czechoslovakia’s independence, in contrast to the vast majority who had remained loyal to Austria-Hungary. Furthermore, the legal recognition of Legionnaire veterans as distinct citizens cemented the state’s perception, which mirrored the Legionnaires’ own perception, that the Legionnaire identity, once acquired in combat, was permanent.

The restrictive legal definition of a Czecho-Slovak Legionnaire indicated the importance that the Czechoslovak state placed on these returning ‘revolutionary-liberators.’ Further evidence of the attention these soldiers received from the state was the early establishment of the Bureau of Legionnaire Affairs (the Bureau) in Czechoslovakia. The administrative framework for the

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60 Michl, Legionáři a Československo, 16, 285.
oversight of Legionnaire affairs was set up by Minister of Defense Václav Klofáč on September 25th 1918, even before ‘Legionnaire’ was legally defined or the Czechoslovak Republic officially declared independent. The Bureau of Legionnaire Affairs was tasked with statistics, reintegration, healthcare, and the care of orphans and other dependents of deceased Legionnaires. The Bureau would grow to become a complex administrative body, as its original mission was quickly expanded to assist with programs like land reform.61

The task of the Bureau in integrating Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires from three different foreign theatres of war was not simple, as a brief overview of the number of returning veterans indicates. Between the fall of 1918 and the spring of 1921, the Bureau oversaw the return home of over 80,000 veterans from the Czecho-Slovak Legions in France, Italy, and Russia. The Russian Legion accounted for 55,000 of the total number, and thus constituted a strong majority of combatants returning from abroad.62 The Legionnaires from Russia, Italy, and France quickly came to identify themselves as a collective, particularly in opposition to non-Legionnaire veterans.

One means that the Bureau used to privilege Legionnaires was the redistribution of aristocratic land in the 1920s. Though it was not the first task of the Bureau, land reform became important enough that it received its own division within the administrative structure of the Bureau.63 Czechoslovakia redistributed large aristocratic estates following independence, and Legionnaires soon became the greatest beneficiaries, first in “standard practice and then by

explicit governmental decree in 1922.\textsuperscript{64} Land was made available and credit was extended to allow Legionnaires to settle as independent farmers in the Czechoslovak hinterland. Besides rewarding Legionnaires, the land reform program also served as a tool for shifting the demographic balance in areas of mixed German/Czech ethnicity in favour of Czechs.\textsuperscript{65} Land reform was not only an initiative of the state, but a program that the Legionnaires themselves expressed enthusiasm for while they were still in Russia, which indicates that the Legionnaires had clearly articulated aspirations for their postwar lives. The newspaper articles that they wrote on the subject prove this: not only do the articles propose how land reform should be carried out, but they also cite examples that the Legionnaires had witnessed of land reform gone wrong in Bolshevik Russia.\textsuperscript{66} Land reform provides an example of how the state privileged the Legionnaires, and how the Legionnaires often clearly expressed their goals for integration in Czechoslovakia.

One development the Bureau did not anticipate, especially considering the suffering endured by the Legionnaires while fighting abroad, was that the Legionnaires from all three fronts in fact had lower death rates than the national average. The statistical bureau calculated that 703 Legionnaires should have died annually according to the average Czechoslovak death rate, but between 1920 and 1932 only 353 Legionnaires died per year on average.\textsuperscript{67} Since some of these deaths were suicides, and the Legionnaire suicide rate was higher than that of the


\textsuperscript{65} Glassheim, \textit{Noble Nationalists}, 75.

\textsuperscript{66} Newspaper article “Jak si představovali naší sibiřští legionáři pozemkovou reformu v naší republice” [“How our Siberian Legionnaires imagine land reform in our republic”], in fond Ministerstvo Zahraničních Věcí - Výstřiškový Archív [Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Newsprint Archive], MZV-VA I 2217, NACR, Prague, Czech Republic.

\textsuperscript{67} Michl, \textit{Legionáři a Československo}, 14–15.
average population, the natural death rate for Legionnaires was even lower than the gross Legionnaire death rate. Exploring what could account for these lower death rates reveals some of the other characteristics that set the Legionnaires apart from the average population.

That the Legionnaires had lower death rates than the average Czechoslovak citizen can perhaps be explained either by the healthcare to which they had access, or by the culling effect of their combat experience in Russia. To be sure, assessing the material lives of Legionnaires compared to that of the average population is more complex than it first appears. The Legionnaires were given better access to healthcare than the average population through three clinics created exclusively for them across Czechoslovakia, and through insurance schemes for general care. Another factor behind their relatively low rate of mortality is that those who survived in Russia were hardier and healthier than the average population, a morbid sort of ‘survival of the fittest.’ Though information on the subject is rare, it is doubtful that sick or wounded Czecho-Slovak POWs were recruited, or even allowed, into the Legion. While Čeněk Klos, discussed in Chapter One, described himself as prone to sickness, he also demonstrated extreme patriotic motivation and had unique talents and experiences that justified his recruitment into the Legion. Consequently, his example should not be considered representative of the average Legion recruit.

While they may not have been dying as rapidly as the national average, a notable number of Legionnaires chose to end their own lives. Despite the clinics made available and the special treatment vis-à-vis Austro-Hungarian veterans, suicides made up a prominent portion of the Legionnaire mortality rate. Between 1920 and 1931, 250 Legionnaires took their own lives.

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68 Michl, Legionáři a Československo, 28.
averaging between 22 and 23 per year. While Jan Michl uses this data as an opportunity to highlight the corpulence of the Legionnaire administration’s bureaucracy, since the statistical office noted the exact method of each suicide, he ignores how the total number of suicides reflect the dissatisfaction of the Legionnaires with their lives after returning from war. What were some of the factors that drove Legionnaires to take such a drastic measure?

One reason for high suicide rates may have been a lack of available employment. A February 1921 report from Brno, Czechoslovakia’s second largest city, complained that 15,000 Legionnaires were unemployed in the country, 1,400 of them in Brno. Proposed solutions included releasing women from the state sector to create openings for Legionnaires, funding public works, and pressuring private employers to hire Legionnaires. However, these suggestions were not followed, and the unemployment challenge for Legionnaires remained persistent throughout the interwar period. For men who had volunteered to fight for the freedom of their country, it was a disappointing experience to return home and have no purposeful way to contribute to society.

The Russian Legionnaires were more disadvantaged than other veterans due to a variety of factors mostly related to the duration and intensity of their time abroad. As has been noted previously, they were gone the longest of all the Legionnaires. The case of Gustav Becvar is illustrative; following his return to his hometown of Brno from Russia in June 1920, he writes, “after six and a half long years, I finally saw my mother.” Other Legionnaires returned even later, with some still entering independent Czechoslovakia for the first time in the 1930s after living abroad, typically in countries along their route home from Russia. The Russian

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70 Michl, Legionáři a Československo, 29.
71 Ibid, 30.
Legionnaires not only faced the same challenges as other Legionnaires, such as loss of contact with loved ones, but by being away the longest they had challenges uniquely related to their combat in Russia. As will be discussed below, most of the state service jobs reserved for all Legionnaires were filled by the time the Russian Legionnaires returned in 1919 and 1920.

Shortly after the war the Czecho-Slovak government sought to guarantee employment to returning Legionnaires, but the scheme turned out worse in practice than on paper, particularly for those late to return like the Russian Legion. On July 24th, 1919, with the adoption of law 462/19, the Czechoslovak government reserved half of all state sector jobs for Legionnaires.\(^{73}\) Not only were these jobs of low status, such as office clerk assistant or servant (which suggests that these jobs would probably not have been necessary under other circumstances), but the positions were quickly filled by the French and Italian Legionnaires, who arrived from the front promptly after the end of World War I. The Legionnaires who had fought in Italy, constituting the second largest force after the Russian Legion, took up the bulk of the civil service jobs, yet they had a combat death rate that was almost half that of both the French or Russian Legions.\(^{74}\) In sum, French and Italian Legionnaires, who had suffered less than the Russian Legionnaires, occupied the great majority of the state sector jobs that were created for the Legionnaires in general, which fueled discontent amongst Russian Legionnaires towards the government.

One avenue of employment that may, at first glance, seem optimal for experienced soldiers who had volunteered for combat would be continued military service in Czechoslovakia’s young armed forces. While Russian Legionnaires were over-represented in the military leadership of interwar Czechoslovakia, employment in the military was appealing to

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\(^{74}\) Ibid, 385.
most Legionnaires. In 1921 there were 28 Legionnaire generals in the Czechoslovak armed forces, the vast majority of them from Russia, and by 1929 that number had more than tripled to 103 generals.\textsuperscript{75} Not only were Legionnaire generals over-represented due to the substantially larger pool of Austro-Hungarian veterans, but they served for a longer period of time. Legionnaire generals held the rank for twelve years on average before retiring, while non-Legionnaire generals only served four years on average.\textsuperscript{76} While highly motivated, long-serving units, such as the Jan Hus regiment, reportedly requested to serve one year free of pay in the new Czechoslovak military, the clear majority of Russian Legionnaires were anxious to return to civilian life after many years of war.\textsuperscript{77}

Some of the Legionnaires from Russia who did remain in military service asserted their identities through scorn for Austro-Hungarian veterans, which made their integration into the Czechoslovak armed forces challenging. One military commander complained that “Russian Legionnaires do not greet domestic officers.”\textsuperscript{78} Unsurprisingly, Austro-Hungarian veterans were unimpressed with this poor treatment, and disciplinary issues with Russian Legionnaires persisted throughout the 1920s. While the Russian military and the Western press praised the Czecho-Slovak Legion in Russia for its discipline in combat against the Bolsheviks, the Czechoslovak military, on the contrary, was critical of its returning Legionnaire veterans.

\textsuperscript{75} Radan Lášek, \textit{Československá generalita [Czechoslovak Generals]} (Prague: Codyprint, 2013), 8.

\textsuperscript{76} Lášek, \textit{Československá generalita}, 9.

\textsuperscript{77} Untitled newspaper clipping, fond Ministerstvo Zahraničních Věcí - Výstřiškový Archív [Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Newsprint Archive], MZV-VA I 2217, NACR, Prague, Czech Republic.

As Chapter One demonstrated, the Legionnaires had suffered in Russia more than the romantic narratives of their combat there would suggest. To a certain extent, the suffering continued after their return to Czechoslovakia, as indicated by their high suicide and unemployment rates. The Czechoslovak government’s state employment scheme benefitted the Russian Legionnaires the least. Tensions continued in the military and in civilian life between Legionnaires and Austro-Hungarian veterans, as the event of June 1920 in Olomouc indicated. The returning soldiers in that angry crowd expected more from the homeland that they felt responsible for helping to liberate. Despite their lower death rates and their preferred access to healthcare and to redistributed land, the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires from Russia were unsatisfied with their government. Having spent two chapters analyzing the wartime and postwar lives of the Legionnaires, we shall now examine how T.G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, and the Castle faction dealt with Legionnaires who exceeded their tolerance for free speech and political activism. What happened to prominent Legionnaires, particularly those on the right-wing of the Czechoslovak political spectrum, who raised their voices in direct opposition to the government?
Chapter 3

Having suffered prolonged conflict in Russia, the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires returned to Czechoslovakia with high hopes and with sometimes radical political views. The Czechoslovak state created generous social programs for the Russian Legionnaires, though it was Legionnaires from France and Italy who profited the most. The results of Legionnaire reintegration policy were mixed, and many Legionnaires were disappointed. Some chose to become involved in radical politics, which earned the opposition of the Castle, an elite group led by T.G. Masaryk and Edvard Beneš. The Castle had a larger project in mind, of fostering national unity through the public commemoration of the Russian Legionnaires. Indeed, as recent scholarship has shown, the Castle’s ultimate objective was to promote the myth that Czechoslovakia was a harmonious, Western-oriented democracy, a mythmaking process whose origins should be traced to the First World War to be properly understood. If prominent Legionnaires espoused radical right-wing views and supported anti-government action, however, Masaryk and Beneš were willing to use undemocratic means to suppress them. This chapter will highlight the Castle’s persecution of Václav Čerenský and general Radola Gajda. First, it will establish why the Castle prioritized Western-oriented mythmaking to such an extent that it would violate the democratic values it espoused to safeguard the myth of Czechoslovak democracy.

T.G. Masaryk and Edvard Beneš only dreamed of an independent Czechoslovak republic, based on the Western European model of liberal democracy, prior to the First World War. From 1914, with their leadership of the Czecho-Slovak independence movement, however, Masaryk and Beneš had the opportunity to pursue their plan of liberating Czechoslovakia as a democratic state allied with the West. This view was challenged by other Czech and Slovak leaders, but opposition would fail as a result of the shrewd politics of Masaryk and Beneš. Based on deep-
rooted pan-Slavic aspirations, and on the historical liberation of Slavic states in the Balkans, such as Serbia and Bulgaria, many Czechs and Slovaks expected that if they were liberated by any foreign power, it would be the Russians. T.G. Masaryk and Edvard Beneš only convinced a majority of Czech and Slovak leaders late in the war that alliance with Britain, France, and the USA presented the greatest likelihood of successful independence. The challenges they faced combatting Russophilism amongst Czechs and Slovaks hardened the resolve of Masaryk and Beneš to persecute those who seriously challenged the dream of democratic Czechoslovakia.

The figure of Josef Dürich presents an optimal case study of the tension between a Russian-orientation and a Western-orientation within the Czecho-Slovak independence movement. Dürich was an influential pro-Russian Czech politician who was one of the first Czecho-Slovak independence leaders to flee Austria-Hungary after 1914, and to tenuously ally himself with Masaryk. In 1916, however, he attempted to negotiate separately with the Russian high command, which was interested in fostering a pro-Russian Czecho-Slovak independence movement. The Russians were already suspicious of Masaryk’s associations with Britain and France. Despite Dürich’s best efforts, the Union of Czecho-Slovak Organizations in Russia and the leaders of the Czecho-Slovak Druzhina voted to openly ally with Masaryk’s National Council in Paris in April 1916.79 What this move signified was that the Czecho-Slovak independence movement, which later formed the core of the Czechoslovak government, was oriented towards Western European backers, and the model of government they planned to install in independent Czechoslovakia was a pro-Western republic, not a pro-Russian kingdom.

Dürich attempted to reorient the Czecho-Slovak independence towards Russia a second time, and he received covert support from powerful individuals in the Russian high command.

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This link with Russia, however, led to his downfall when Milan R Stefanik, a key Slovak ally of Masaryk and Beneš, leaked documents to the Czech and Slovak community in Russia exposing Dürich as an agent of the Russian high command. Dürich lost all support amongst the Czechs and Slovaks in Russia and cemented their Western orientation under the leadership of Masaryk and Beneš. Dürich’s attempts to create a separate Czecho-Slovak independence movement based in Russia failed. This example demonstrates why independent Czechoslovakia in 1918 was founded by Masaryk, Beneš, and Stefanik as a pro-Western republic, not a pro-Russian kingdom. More importantly, the removal of Dürich from power through shrewd political maneuvering provided excellent training for the interwar period when Masaryk and Beneš undermined their political opponents with similar methods.

Furthermore, it is important to underscore, as Chapter One demonstrated in greater depth, that the Czecho-Slovak Legion made Czechoslovak independence feasible. In Masaryk’s own words: “Unless we had a fighting force, our claim to freedom would hardly be heeded…mere tracts on ‘historical and natural rights’ would be of little avail.” Ironically, it was not to be Russia, the historic liberator of the Slavs, which supported Czechoslovak liberation. Rather, it was the combat of a few divisions of Czechs and Slovaks in Russia, and against Bolshevik Russians, which would give the Czecho-Slovak revolutionary-independence movement leverage with Britain, France, and the USA to negotiate statehood for Czechoslovakia by war’s end. In short, Russia helped Czechoslovakia become independent more by providing an enemy to fight rather than an ally to provide support. The political leaders of the Czecho-Slovak independence

80 McNamara, Dreams of a Great Small Nation, 107-109.
movement, who formed the core leadership of postwar Czechoslovakia, owed their leadership and success to the military combat of the Czecho-Slovak Legion in Russia.

This thesis has been building towards a discussion of the political leadership of the Czecho-Slovak independence movement and, especially, of the interwar Czechoslovak state. The general perception of interwar Czechoslovak politics is that, despite tottering from one scandal or crisis to another, Czechoslovakia remained the strongest democracy in central and eastern Europe. Not coincidentally, Western values, such as liberalism and the rule of law, prevailed here more than elsewhere in the region. While true in certain respects, this is also, in many ways, a myth actively constructed by the leaders of the wartime resistance movement and of the postwar leadership.\(^{82}\)

The leading political group, given its ancestry in the Czecho-Slovak independence movement, was the Castle. Drawing its name from Prague Castle, residence of all Czechoslovak governments from 1918 onwards, the Castle was “an informal but extremely powerful nexus of institutions and allies,” which “included a coterie of literary intellectuals who led the country’s propaganda effort along with Masaryk and Beneš”.\(^{83}\) More specifically this included the mass media, namely, newspapers but also publishing houses or radio stations. Even individual arms of the government bureaucracy, such as specific ministries, were controlled or influenced by the Castle. Notably, Beneš retained control over foreign affairs for much of the interwar period.

The purpose of the Castle was to “help Masaryk and Beneš affect the political process from outside the halls of Parliament”, which specifically included using “propaganda as a beneficial, elite-driven, civic education”, which they understood to be a matter of national


\(^{83}\) Ibid, 9.
Propaganda thus matured from the means to Czecho-Slovak independence to the means by which independence for Czechoslovakia would be consolidated. The consolidation of Czechoslovakia would occur through “civic education”, which meant the inculcation of Western European values of liberal democratic civility. The Legionnaires, particularly those from Russia, played a multifaceted role in this Castle propaganda effort to instill civic virtues in the Czechoslovak populace.

The reintegration programs for Legionnaires tried to teach them the civic virtues Masaryk and Beneš so firmly believed in by employing them in the civil service and by offering incentives to pursue further education. These schemes were largely unsuccessful, as the previous chapter already discussed. However, if Russian Legionnaires remained politically radical, repressive methods were employed. These will be discussed shortly with relevance to right-wing Legionnaire leaders, following an examination of the Castle.

The Castle was not the only informal network of political power in interwar Czechoslovakia, but regarding its policies towards the Legionnaires, it faced little opposition from other political parties. It was both allied with, and opposed to, the Pĕtka (the Five), “an unofficial coalition of the most important Czech political party leaders”, which controlled the principal ministries and set the agenda for parliamentary debate. One scholar used the term “partocracy – a state ruled by political parties – ” to describe interwar Czechoslovakia. The independence of parliamentarians was tightly regulated and this insured that political parties, not individual candidates, would be on election ballots. The locus of political activity and influence

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85 Ibid, 6, 8.
86 Ibid, 16.
in Czechoslovakia, thus shifted from parliament to informal contact between the major party
leaders and to publicized communication via the mass media, whereby party bases and the
broader public would be mobilized to put pressure on other parties and on the government
bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{88}

These political elites in Czechoslovakia responded with both enthusiasm and fear to the
return of Legionnaires from abroad. Exemplary of the latter is a February 1921 unemployment
report from Brno, which warned of the danger of Bolshevization amongst job-deprived
Legionnaires. Discussed in Chapter Two in the context of Legionnaire unemployment, this report
also demonstrates the ideological fears of the government with regards to Legionnaire
politicalization.\textsuperscript{89} While Bolshevization was feared, the Castle perceived the radical right to be the
greatest threat to its vision of a Westernized, Czechoslovak democracy. This was due to a few
factors, amongst them the personal quarrels of prominent leaders with Masaryk and Beneš.\textsuperscript{90}
This chapter will focus on the Castle’s conflict with far-right Russian Legionnaires who
challenged its myth of Czechoslovakia as a virtuous, pro-Western democracy.

The Legionnaires returning to independent Czechoslovakia from abroad organized
themselves to advocate for their interests. Legionnaires from Russia were particularly eager to
become involved politically, due to their elevated level of political extremism, which both
contemporaries and historians have noted. The conflicts of these Legionnaire organizations in
the period 1920-1921 reveal how the Castle dealt with disloyal, particularly right-wing,
Legionnaires. All Legionnaire organizations claimed to be apolitical, but those which least
deserved the name, and also the largest prior to 1921, were the Union of Czechoslovak

\textsuperscript{88} Orzoff, \textit{The Battle for the Castle}, 17, 63, 65.
\textsuperscript{89} Michl, \textit{Legionáři a Československo}, 30.
Legionnaires (Union) and the Druzhina, not to be confused with the military unit preceding the Legion in Russia 1914-1917. The Union was an openly leftist organization, which included Communist sympathizers, while the Druzhina was an openly nationalistic Legionnaires organization. Both groups would soon come into conflict with each other, and with the Castle.

Problems arose with both the Union and the Druzhina in late 1920, as returning Russian Legionnaires swelled the ranks of these organizations and expressed their frustrations with the Czechoslovak Republic in the streets of its major cities. In September of that year, a series of protests and counter protests served to escalate tensions among the Union, the Druzhina, and the Castle. This conflict reveals the intolerance of the Castle to Legionnaire politicization broadly, and to right-wing agitation specifically, and it highlights the undemocratic means the Castle used to persecute the Legionnaires by whom it felt threatened by.

On the Day of the Legions, September 5th 1920, the Union organized a march which delivered demands to the government in Prague. Thousands of Druzhina supporters gathered a few days later in opposition to the Union protests, and the counter protest by Union supporters saw them threaten the Druzhina founder, Václav Čerenský, with bodily assault. In fairness to the Union, it was the Druzhina which had proclaimed that “where the power of our republic’s government is insufficient or unsatisfactory, Legionnaires will step in ourselves to protect law and homeland”. One development which raised some alarm, and which would prove fateful not long after, was the split of the Communist element from the Social Democratic Party in

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92 Ibid, 21-22.
September 1920. While both left and right-wing Legionnaire organizations were politically vocal and outspokenly radical, the Castle felt more threatened by Čerenský’s Druzhina, as the conflicts of December 1920 reveal.

The events of December 1920 escalated the Castle’s mistrust of political Legionnaire organizations, and deepened the anti-right bias of Masaryk and Beneš, resulting in their persecution of the Druzhina. The Communists, who had just recently split from the Social Democrats, occupied the Losyovsky Palace in Prague, the headquarters of the Social Democratic Party, and declared a general strike which grew to include almost a million people nationwide.93 The Union was divided on loyalty to the Communists or to the government, and the organization would never recover from the divisions this event sowed between the radical and moderate leftist Legionnaires. Accurate data cannot be obtained about actual Union member participation, but it is a reasonable assumption that the Legionnaires from Russia, with their well honed political agitation and penchant for decisive military action, would be amongst the occupiers of the Losyovsky Palace and amongst the strikers.

The Union was not swift, decisive, or consistent in expressing loyalty to the government during the general strike of December 1920. The Druzhina was. However, the Castle used the dramatic events of that period as an excuse to subvert the leadership of the Druzhina. A lawsuit was successfully launched against Druzhina founder and leader, Václav Čerenský, over his public criticism of Edvard Beneš. Čerenský had quipped that during WW1, Beneš “went abroad in tattered trousers…and now he’s somehow a millionaire”.94 Čerenský was stripped of his Legionnaire status and of the accompanying pension. This loss of Legionnaire identity was not

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94 Ibid, 21.
only a successful personal attack on Čerenský, an outspoken right-wing critic of the Castle, but it proved to all Legionnaires that radical political outspokenness, like criticizing the foreign minister, would be punished by the substantial legal means at the disposal of the Castle and the government they influenced. It would not be the last time that the Castle used a combination of litigation and press propaganda to persecute a right-wing Legionnaire leader who opposed them.

In response to the political conflicts involving political Legionnaire organizations in the fall of 1920, the Castle championed the creation of the apolitical Czecho-Slovak Legionnaire Community (CSOL). The Druzhina and the Union were deprived of what power they retained after the dramatic events of late 1920. An all-Legionnaires congress, notably excluding the leadership of the Union and the Druzhina, decided to create the CSOL, which held its first annual meeting May 22-23rd 1921. For the remainder of the interwar period, the Castle could claim the loyal support of what quickly became the largest Legionnaire organization. The CSOL continues to exist today, and has been one of the most prominent partners in the Czech Republic’s commemorations around the 100th anniversary of the battle of Zborov and the Legionnaires’ combat in Russia more generally.

Identity as a Czecho-Slovak Legionnaire became a key issue for enforcing the power of the state over its most celebrated, yet also most troublesome, veterans. A quintessential example of how the Castle harnessed its institutions and influence to eliminate opposition was how prominent Legionnaires, such as Václav Čerenský, were persecuted for their right-wing views. The most infamous target of Castle persecution, and perhaps justifiably so given his fascist sympathies, was Legionnaire general Radola Gajda.

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Political tensions within the country came to a head in the mid-1920s. The November 1925 general elections saw the National Democrats perform worse than the Slovak People’s Party, which actively advocated for Slovak autonomy, and the Communist Party became the second largest party after the Agrarians. A short-lived coalition government collapsed within months, and from March to October 1925 Czechoslovakia was ruled by a caretaker government of bureaucrats directed by the Castle. Political struggle with right wing leaders Karel Kramař and Jan Stříbrný intensified, but the conflict which would define 1926 would be between the Castle and general Radola Gajda, hero of the Czecho-Slovak Legion in Russia.\textsuperscript{96}

One of the primary ways the far-right critiqued the Castle was by invoking government treatment of the Legionnaires following the war. Prominent veterans, such as Radola Gajda, criticized the state’s treatment of the Legionnaires in spirit and in practice. As a member of the armed revolutionary-independence resistance in Russia, his voice carried enough sway to concern Masaryk and Beneš, but they were more directly concerned with the possibility of Gajda leading a coup, given his fascist leanings. Major Josef Pilsudski’s military coup in Poland in early 1926 sparked fears that a similar coup could take place in Czechoslovakia. General Gajda, the most prominent military personality in the country and a suspected fascist sympathizer, seemed the most likely leader of a potential fascist coup.\textsuperscript{97}

The Castle responded to the perceived threat of a fascist coup in 1926 with swift action, and the ensuing Gajda Affair reveals the tensions between different Czecho-Slovak Legionnaire factions, between the Legionnaires and the Castle, and between the Castle and the far-right. While the Affair has been examined by scholars, Gajda’s trial has not been analyzed specifically

\textsuperscript{96} Kelly, \textit{The Czech Fascist Movement, 1922-1942}, 54.  
\textsuperscript{97} Radan Lášek, \textit{Československá generalita [Czechoslovak Generals]} (Prague: Codyprint, 2013), 99.
for Legionnaire involvement, nor situated in the broader context of the interwar Legionnaire experience. The process began, as many Czechoslovak scandals did, with a character attack in the press and in parliament. In May 1926, Edvard Beneš directed his followers to challenge general Gajda to explain why he allowed fascists to use his name in their propaganda despite his claims not to be a fascist himself.\(^98\)

Masaryk, Beneš, and the Castle pressured Gajda to step down from his position as first deputy chief of staff for the army, a temporary position which he had won despite opposition from certain military leaders. Gajda even accepted a bribe from Masaryk, but then refused to resign.\(^99\) This initial episode already demonstrates the willingness of the Castle leaders to act undemocratically to remove an opponent from the country’s leadership. With bribing ineffective, Masaryk used his presidential prerogative to send Gajda on leave and push the Ministry of Defense to begin an investigation of Gajda’s activities.

General Radola Gajda was tried by a military court on charges that he spied for the Soviets in 1920 while at the War College in Paris, by passing on French military secrets.\(^100\) He was found guilty of communicating with a hostile foreign nation, forced into retirement, and had his pension reduced by twenty-five percent.\(^101\) The particularity of this charge is not only almost certainly false, but was likely crafted as a personal attack on Gajda. To begin with, Gajda was a lifelong anti-Bolshevik, as his extensive combat in the Czecho-Slovak Legion and Admiral Kolchak’s government can attest to.\(^102\) Furthermore, he was only a student at the War College in


\(^{99}\) Ibid, 55.

\(^{100}\) He was sent to the War College in Paris as a compromise for retaining his rank as general after his return from Russia. See Ibid, 29-30.

\(^{101}\) Ibid, 55-56.

Paris, and unpopular with his French instructors, which makes his access to military secrets
doubtful at best. By the secrecy of the military trial and the personal nature of the charges, Gajda
became a martyr for right wing parties, including the Agrarians and the National Democrats. It
was the fascists, however, who most vocally supported him.

Forced retirement was not an acceptable outcome for Legionnaire veteran Radola Gajda,
and his retaliation against the Castle would push him to openly embrace fascism. Prompted by
continued attacks in the left-wing press, Gajda successfully sued the two key witnesses used
against him in the first trial for libel. The civil court which heard the case ruled in his favour,
which demonstrated that the Castle used tenuous means to convict him in military court. They
would use even more undemocratic means to crush Gajda’s retaliatory efforts.

Amidst ongoing battles in the press, Masaryk and Beneš responded to Gajda’s challenge
with a new military trial which saw him convicted on six charges out of a total of ten. As a result
of this last trial, Gajda was demoted from general to a private in the reserve, and was thereby
stripped of his official Legionnaire status. Not only was the disproved witness testimony from
the first trial used, because military court had different standards for evidence, but Beneš
produced forged telegrams to try to link Gajda with the Soviets in the 1920s. Recent historians
weigh the evidence favourably only on half of the charges Gajda was convicted on, namely that
he publicly decried the outcome of his first trial, that he made false claims in the press about his
military career to win sympathy during his first trial, and that he had well-documented contact
with the fascist movement. Tellingly, he did not deny the last charge.

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103 Lášek, Československá generalita, 100.
The ironies of the Gajda Affair are multifold. Masaryk and Beneš, themselves such ardent advocates of an apolitical army, used their influence with the Ministry of Defense to remove a popular general for political reasons. The Castle, despite advocating for democratic values of fair trial and justice, used false testimony and forged evidence to convict a fascist sympathizer of cooperating with the Russian Bolsheviks he had spent years fighting.

The Castle not only persecuted prominent Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires who challenged their vision of a moderate, Western-oriented democracy with some distinctly undemocratic means. They also tried to mold the Legionnaires into the bulwark of the moral republic they so proactively promoted through propaganda. Wingfield emphasizes that the commemoration of the July 2, 1917 Battle of Zborov formed the crux of this effort. The state holiday, known as “The Day of the Army”, offered the military elite of Czechoslovakia, which included many former Legionnaires, especially from Russia, the chance to reassert their role in the creation of the state. Additionally, the Castle used it as an opportunity to try to inculcate citizens with their view of Czech and Slovak history. This narrative linked the heroism of the Legionnaires in defeating the Austrians with the sacrifice of their distant ancestors in the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, when direct Austrian domination of the Bohemian lands began after the Czech defeat.\(^\text{107}\)

What this chapter has revealed is the willingness of Masaryk and Beneš to use undemocratic means, contrary to their own propaganda, to persecute prominent right-wing Legionnaire opponents, such as Čerenský and Gajda. They did this to safeguard the myth of the Legionnaires as loyal patriots and of Czechoslovak democracy as robust and oriented towards the West and not the Slavic world. If necessary, the Castle used press attacks, litigation, bribery,\(^\text{107}\)

and forged evidence to neutralize radical Legionnaires, in order to secure the mythic Czechoslovakia that the Castle, and the Legionnaires in Russia, had worked so hard to create.
Conclusion

The Czecho-Slovak Legions in Russia were a unique group of soldiers who volunteered to fight for the liberation of their homeland. They distinguished themselves on the Eastern Front in the First World War and in the Russian Civil War. Their combat in Russia was romanticized, both by themselves and by those who studied them. The suffering they endured was underplayed as necessary to preserve their heroism. Following their return to Czechoslovakia, they continued to suffer the consequences of their Russian experience, from high suicide rates to radical political agitation. The Castle, whose key members led the Czecho-Slovak independence movement, supported generous support services for the returning Legionnaires. Neither side was satisfied with the results, partially because both sides had unrealistic expectations and partially because neither side was prepared for the true complexity of the integration process for Russian Legionnaires. What truly caused conflict, however, was when right-wing Legionnaires spoke out against the Castle and challenged its mythic project of a Western-oriented, Czechoslovak democracy.

The decisive resolution of the Gajda Affair in 1928 did not end the role of prominent Legionnaires in politics, but it certainly weakened their ability to utilize their Legionnaire identity for political ends. With his military career ended, Radola Gajda launched himself fully into the fascist movement, becoming the leader of the National Fascist Community (NOF) in January 1927.108 He would achieve some minor electoral victories in the 1930s, when the growing threat of Nazi Germany and the discontent fuelled by the Great Depression made the anti-German, anti-Castle rhetoric of the NOF temporarily appealing. However, Gajda only

appeared in public in his uniform from Russia, since he had been cast out from the Czechoslovak military that he had indirectly helped to create by his leadership in the Czecho-Slovak Legion in Russia. Gajda remains a polarizing figure for some historians in the Czech Republic even today because his demise and political career are couched in such starkly ideological terms.109

Beyond discrediting prominent right-wing Legionnaire leaders like Čerenský and Gajda, the Castle also took measures to disenfranchise those Legionnaires who remained in the military, and to further shore up the loyalty of civilian Legionnaires through commemoration and the organization of large events. In 1927, active duty members of the Czechoslovak military, of all ranks, were stripped of their right to vote in parliamentary elections.110 Ironically, in the same year, the number of monuments to fallen Legionnaires accelerated in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the battle of Zborov and the growth of the Czecho-Slovak Druzhina into what would be called the Czecho-Slovak Legion.111 This trend of government organized Legionnaire commemoration peaked in 1928. Government ministries willingly granted state-employed Legionnaire veterans a holiday on May 19th and 20th 1928 for commemorations of the first all-Legion congress, and of the Chelyabinsk incident, and for the de-facto “acknowledgement of the right of [the Czecho-Slovak] nation for state sovereignty” which Chelyabinsk came to represent.112 By disenfranchising soldiers while commemorating their

112 Correspondence from the Independent Unit of Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires to the Ministry of Finance, May 14th 1928, Předsednictvo ministerské rady [Bureau of the Council of Ministers] fond, box 85, NACR, Prague, Czech Republic.
wartime accomplishments, the Castle guaranteed that the republic’s military would remain safely apolitical.

The loyalty of the Legionnaires did not ebb enough during the Depression to threaten the Castle, though it did spark the increased political radicalization of some members. This was a trend which was not unique to Legionnaires. As chapter two indicated, the service infrastructure for integrating returning Legionnaires would not change meaningfully after 1921, and this was not seriously contested over the course of the interwar period. Czechoslovakia was quite negatively affected by the Great Depression, given its developed industries and close trade links with Western Europe. Rising unemployment in the 1930s motivated voters to increasingly consider fringe political parties, on both the left and the right. It would not be until the Munich crisis of 1938, however, that any change in government would occur.

The Munich crisis in October 1938 brought an end to the First Czechoslovak Republic through a combination of external pressure from Nazi Germany and internal pressure from Konrad Henlein’s Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP), which received more than two thirds of the vote amongst Sudeten Germans.¹¹³ Beneš resigned and fled the country, and the new government acceded to Hitler’s demands to annex the Sudetenland. This deprived Czechoslovakia of about one-third of its territory and population. Furthermore, the expensive border fortification network it had constructed to jolt Czechoslovakia out of the Great Depression was lost, rendering the country completely indefensible.¹¹⁴ The Second Czecho-Slovak ‘Republic’ was a short lived, albeit repressive government, which suppressed Jews and attempted to curry favour with Nazi Germany in the hopes of avoiding further loss of territory. It was unsuccessful. On March 15th

¹¹³ Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle*, 175.
1939, Nazi Germany annexed the remainder of Czecho-Slovak territory as Slovakia declared independence and became a puppet state of Germany.

Many questions remain regarding the Legionnaires. What was the character of the Slovak participation in the Czecho-Slovak Legions in Russia, and how did their treatment after the war differ from that of Czech Legionnaires? As this thesis has implied, the vast majority of Legionnaires and relevant political elites during World War I and in Czechoslovakia’s interwar period were Czech. Further insight could be shed not only on Slovak Legionnaires, but Czech Legionnaires as well, through comparison to the other Slavic successor states of Austria-Hungary in east central Europe. Particularly, Poland and Yugoslavia both celebrated Legions of their own in attempts to formulate national histories and national myths, albeit to a lesser extent than Czechoslovakia. Contrasting these two nations with Czechoslovakia could help shed further insights into the workings of the Castle.

Comparative analysis has a long past in the historical discipline. Patrick Geary explains that examining the “common origins” and “subtle differences” of historical subjects enables “a more finely grained understanding not only of their differences and similarities, but of the historical circumstances that may account for these,” a model of comparative analysis utilized by Marc Bloch.115 This variant of the comparative method, examining similar subjects to elicit differences and similarities, could be employed to gain a new understanding of the relationship between World War I veterans and fascist movements in Poland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. In these Slavic successor states of the Austro-Hungarian empire, their respective Legion legacies were mobilized to form foundation myths and national narratives for

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their new states. Italy and Germany could also form a useful comparison for examining fascism amongst veterans in Czechoslovakia, to help explain why fascism failed to overcome the flawed, albeit robust, democratic institutions in Czechoslovakia and what relationship veteran political participation and political mobilization played in this.

Besides comparative history, the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires could potentially also be studied with other analytical approaches to further enrich an understanding of how they have been misrepresented historically. A gendered analysis of the Legionnaires would be challenging, but could yield some interesting insights. For instance, noticeable number of Legionnaires took Russian brides, fathered children, and took them home to Czechoslovakia. What were the impacts on women of the Russian Legionnaires being absent as long as they were? Or returning as traumatized and radicalized as they did? Another aspect of the Legion story which remains to be explored is the relationship of the Castle to the extreme left, particularly former Legionnaires who held extreme left-wing views, could be also be further explored. Indeed, the relationship between other government elites and the Legionnaires could also yield insights into the particularities of how the Castle treated prominent right-wing Legionnaires.

Why does examining the Castle and its relationship with the Czecho-Slovak Legionnaires, especially from Russia, matter in the present day? Many of the themes which implicitly run through this work are relevant not only in the present world but in historical scholarship. Politicians using undemocratic means to defend democracy against its extreme elements is something that can be seen in democratic countries around the world. Just as Masaryk and Beneš were concerned about populist appeals of right-wing leaders, so today are

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liberal politicians concerned about right-wing populist leaders, though military leaders seem notably absent. The reintegration of veterans from ideologically charged foreign conflicts, such as the Cold War and the War on Terror, has shaped the domestic political landscape and foreign policies of several Western democracies, notably, the United States. With continuing or increasing turmoil in many of the world’s regions, and the increased displacement of persons likely to result from continued climate change, it is unlikely that the world will have to wait another two millennia to witness the next Anabasis.
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