

Jan Raska. *Czech Refugees in Cold War Canada*. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2018. Pp 307 (Softcover), ISBN 978-0-88755-827-6.

Jan Raska's *Czech Refugees in Cold War Canada* is the first full-length academic study of Czech immigration to Canada during the Cold War. Raska relies on archival records and oral histories to uncover the arduous journey of admission, resettlement, and immigration for thousands of Czechs who came to Canada after the Second World War. While existing scholarship has focused on the Canadian state's efforts to control immigration and combat the red scare, Raska's study uncovers the migration experiences of three waves of Czech migration to Canada. Raska argues that Czech refugees reinforced the conservative Cold War paradigm of the period. After they arrived in Canada, some Czechs joined politically active ethnocultural community associations and portrayed themselves as the "true representatives of the Czechoslovak community in deliberations with [Canadian] government officials." These "citizen allies," as Raska describes them, embodied a local connection to the Western Cold War military alliance that Canadians embraced. Czech ethnocultural community associations strived for the liberation of their homeland from communism, embraced anti-communist Cold War rhetoric, and attained "social and cultural citizenship in Canada" (p. 3).

Raska begins by examining immigration from Czechoslovakia and the growth of the Czech community during the 1920s and 1930s. Three distinct communities emerged in Canada during this period. The first and largest was comprised of Slovak nationalists, who only welcomed Slovaks to join their associations (between 1918 and 1945, 80 per cent of all Czechs in Canada self-identified as Slovaks). These communities advocated for Slovak autonomy in a federalized Czechoslovakian state. The second community consisted of Czechs who joined with Slovaks and other smaller ethnic communities, to form a community that advocated for a single Czechoslovak national identity. They defended the existence of a Czechoslovak Republic. The final community were influenced by communist and socialist political ideologies. Most Czechs that came during the interwar period focused on integrating into Canadian society rather than joining ethnocultural organizations. It was only as the community grew in Canada after 1945, that the "cultivation of Czechoslovak culture" became one of three stated goals for the small community (p. 51).

The first post-Second World War migration of Czechs to Canada was in 1948 after the Communist seizure of power in Czechoslovakia. The Canadian Czechoslovak community was sympathetic to their plight and the “1948ers,” as they were called, eventually made their way to Canada. The 1948ers were primarily “pro-democracy and anti-communist politicians, diplomats, intellectuals, clergy, professionals, workers and students” who arrived in Canada with more education than any other previous migration of Czechs (p. 80). Once in Canada, many of the 1948ers joined ethnocultural associations such as the Czechoslovak National Alliance (CNA) and focused their agendas “on humanitarianism and the liberation of their homeland from communism” (p. 80). They were convinced that if communism was defeated, they could return to their homeland and restore democracy. “This mindset,” Raska argues, “prevented many refugees from rapidly assimilating” (p. 102). Thus, the 1948ers possessed anti-communist and pro-democratic ideals that differed from previous immigrants from Czechoslovakia and Canadian-born members of the Czech community (p. 103). The 1948ers were also highly educated and well-positioned to join Canada’s growing middle class.

The emerging anti-communist attitudes of Canada’s small but vocal Czech community became a prime target for federal and provincial politicians. Relying on the foundational work of C.P. Champion, Raska argues that the 1948ers in particular identified predominantly with the Progressive Conservative Party because “some immigrants viewed the Liberal Party as somehow linked to social democracy movements in Europe” (p. 118). Though this argument has been refuted by more recent scholarship (published while this book was in press), Raska sheds fascinating light on the efforts of Liberal Party politicians such as Jack Pickersgill, Walter Harris, and Paul Hellyer to attend Czech community events and praise the community’s capacity to preserve Czech values in Canada.¹ Harris and his wife even became the first non-Czech members of Sokol Toronto and Paul Martin and his wife joined Sokol Windsor. In reality there was ample interest from Canadian political parties

¹ Thirstan Falconer, “Building an Ethnic Coalition: The Liberal Party of Canada and the Engagement of Ethnocultural Communities, 1959-1974,” unpublished PhD dissertation: University of Waterloo, 2017.

in ethnocultural communities but their efforts to court them were sporadic.²

Raska effectively builds on the history of belonging and embraces Franca Iacovetta's depiction of "gatekeepers" who helped facilitate Cold War migrants into Canada. These gatekeepers, as Iacovetta shows, patrolled Canada's "entry points and its newly expanded welfare state" while running the country's "reception campaigns, health and welfare services, and family and community programs." Gatekeepers sought to "Canadianize" the newcomers and encouraged social and cultural interactions between Canadians old and new.³ Whether they were admitted into Canada as Displaced Persons or as a refugees, Raska argues that many of the 36,531 immigrants who came to Canada from Czechoslovakia did so "with an evolving anti-communist narrative, affected by the culture of the Cold War, including how they thought Canadians perceived them" (p. 1). These "politically engaged refugees," as Raska argues, were critical to the efforts of "public and private gatekeepers" who sought to "integrate refugees into Canada's conservative Cold War consensus" (p. 15). Canadian officials encouraged "the immigration of Czech refugees who espoused anti-communist and pro-democracy sentiments" (p. 138). In turn, these refugees (among other Eastern European arrivals) legitimized the Canadian government's Cold War vision of the world.

The Soviet-led Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 spurred another refugee crisis that reinvigorated the 1948ers and the ideologies that enabled them to achieve social and cultural citizenship in Canada. In contrast to the 1948ers who fled communist ideology, Raska argues that the "1968ers" fled a communist reality. In so doing, the 1968ers strengthened the anti-communist identity of the 1948ers and reinforced the efforts of Czech ethnocultural community organizations to influence Canadian foreign policy towards the Soviet Union and their allies.

² See also Thirstan Falconer, "Building an Ethnic Coalition?: The Liberal Party of Canada, Ethnocultural Communities, and the 1962 and 1963 Federal Elections in Metro Toronto," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 48, 3 (2018): 281-296 and Thirstan Falconer, "Andrew Thompson, Liberal Party Reforms and the Engagement of Ethnocultural Communities, 1957-1961," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 50, 3 (2018): 111-129.

³ Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 10.

Czech Refugees in Cold War Canada makes a valuable contribution to the literature on immigration, belonging, and politics in Canada after 1945. Raska's work is strongest when the Czech community in Canada is meticulously dissected through its three major waves of migration to Canada. The author effectively differentiates between old and new Czechs, the differences between Czechs and Slovaks, and the enduring capacity of the Cold War paradigm to dictate the contours of Canadian policy over immigration, citizenship, and external affairs. Nonetheless, in consideration of the heavily charged Cold War politics, Raska fails to make a contribution to the political power of Czechs in Canada during this period. While the book frequently references the efforts of Czech ethnocultural community organizations to influence Canadian foreign policy, no serious and profound consideration is given to the community's interaction with political parties. This period was especially important to the politicization of non-English and non-French ethnocultural communities in Canada. How did social and cultural citizenship affect their role as partisan political actors in Canada? Nonetheless, this book immediately rises to the top of ethnocultural histories in Canada and will be a must read for those teaching or writing about the Cold War, immigration, and belonging in the post-war period.

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