

## REJOICING IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

by **Paul Bock**

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The church bells are ringing again in Czechoslovakia. For 40 years their pealing was forbidden. The new sounds symbolize the change that has taken place. It is a time to celebrate. But it is also a time to be concerned about the future.

My wife grew up in Czechoslovakia, and we have been getting very enthusiastic letters from her close relatives. Here are a few comments from those letters:

"We have never entered the new year with so much joy . . . We are grateful to the Lord that He has not forgotten our nation and that He led us through all the monumental changes without violence and bloodshed . . . The Czech television broadcast a worship service for the first time . . . The students were simply marvelous. We can hardly believe that they fought with such vigor for truth and for human rights, as if the moral decadence of the last four decades had not touched them. We know that life will return to normal after these days of euphoria and that there will be many difficulties that we will have to overcome, but we firmly believe that with the economic and ecological improvements we shall see also a spiritual renewal."

"But most of all we are thrilled to have our new president, Vaclav Havel . . . He is a morally pure man and lives constantly by his principles . . . He is being compared with Thomas Masaryk, and he openly claims Masaryk's legacy. Tell me, is all of this not like a dream?"

Along with the Czechs, we Americans are rejoicing about the leadership of Vaclav Havel. Like Lech Walesa, he made a great impression upon our Congress and upon our country. How refreshing it is to see persons of moral integrity in political leadership.

It is great to know that censorship is over and that the Czechs can speak and write freely. It is a joy for me to correspond freely with an old friend, Jack Trojan, one of the signers of Charter 77 who, like the other signers, suffered for his action. His preaching license was taken away years ago, and only now is he free to teach and preach. He writes "The events are running like mustangs over prairies in ancient times. The fresh air in the political sphere is encouraging even when not all problems are solved. The next five or six months will be of extraordinary importance."

Like Havel, Trojan is greatly concerned about what will happen next door in the Soviet Union. He is hopeful, however, that the events there will not prevent the central European countries from following their independent path.

I asked him about the future of socialism in his country. In 1968 Alexander Dubcek planned to keep socialism and to blend it with democracy. He called it "socialism with a human face." But present leaders are talking about free enterprise. Jack Trojan replied that the combination of socialism and democracy is no longer a possibility. He writes, "The events of the so-called real socialism have been so horrifying that particularly the young generation has lost any enthusiasm to follow the socialist path. I think that the mixed economy will generally be accepted. Whether this inevitably involves the danger of losing some of the benefits of socialism is very difficult to say now. It is up to us, the old 'socialist fossils,' to prevent this."

There will be a need, of course, for reconciliation within the church. There are still hard feelings between people who were silent and those who took risks during the difficult times. Jack Trojan sees a need for repentance for past failures. It is a time of crisis for faith and theology.

There are indeed serious problems ahead in every area--ecclesiastical, political, environmental, and educational. All of Eastern Europe is far behind western Europe in technology and economic development. Czechoslovakia is better off than some of the others but it, too, will face many problems. It is important for us to stand with our fellow Christians and with all citizens of Eastern Europe in these exciting but demanding times.