

## 'Small Gold Mine of Talent': Integrating Prague Spring Refugee Professionals in Canada, 1968-1969

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Résumé de l'article

Suite à l'invasion menée par l'Union soviétique en Tchécoslovaquie en août 1968, 11 200 réfugiés du Printemps de Prague ont été relocalisés au Canada. Ce mouvement comprenait plusieurs professionnels expérimentés et ouvriers qualifiés. Cet article examine comment ces réfugiés ont composé avec la formation linguistique et les obstacles à l'emploi, y compris l'accréditation professionnelle, et examine comment cette expérience a façonné la vision bureaucratique et publique de l'intégration des réfugiés. Cet article se concentre principalement sur les efforts de réinstallation et d'intégration en Ontario, étant donné qu'environ la moitié des réfugiés du Printemps de Prague ont été réinstallés de façon permanente dans la province. Cet article décrit comment, dans le cadre de leurs efforts pour favoriser l'intégration économique et sociale des réfugiés, les autorités canadiennes leur ont fourni une aide au transport, un hébergement initial, de l'aide pour obtenir un emploi au Canada et une formation linguistique en anglais ou en français. Les réfugiés du Printemps de Prague ont été confrontés à des obstacles professionnels, notamment en ce qui concerne l'accréditation de leurs diplômes étrangers et le sous-emploi dans leurs domaines respectifs. Le succès de leur relocalisation et de leur intégration reposait sur la coopération intergouvernementale entre le Canada et ses provinces et sur le soutien apporté par les communautés tchèques et slovaques locales à travers le pays.

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# “Small Gold Mine of Talent”: Integrating Prague Spring Refugee Professionals in Canada, 1968–1969

JAN RASKA

## **Abstract**

*Following the August 1968 Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia, 11,200 Prague Spring refugees were resettled in Canada. This movement included many experienced professionals and skilled tradespeople. This article examines how these refugees navigated language training and barriers to employment, including professional accreditation, and examines how this experience shaped bureaucratic and public views of refugee integration. The focus of this article is primarily on resettlement and integration efforts in Ontario, since roughly half of the Prague Spring refugees were permanently resettled in the province. The article outlines how, as part of its efforts to help the refugees with their economic and social integration, Canadian officials provided assisted passage, initial accommodations, help with securing Canadian employment, and English- or French-language training. Prague Spring refugees navigated professional obstacles, including securing accreditation of their foreign credentials and underemployment in their respective fields. Their successful resettlement and integra-*

*tion depended on intergovernmental cooperation between Canada and its provinces, and the assistance provided by local Czech and Slovak communities across the country.*

## **Résumé**

*Suite à l'invasion menée par l'Union soviétique en Tchécoslovaquie en août 1968, 11 200 réfugiés du Printemps de Prague ont été relocalisés au Canada. Ce mouvement comprenait plusieurs professionnels expérimentés et ouvriers qualifiés. Cet article examine comment ces réfugiés ont composé avec la formation linguistique et les obstacles à l'emploi, y compris l'accréditation professionnelle, et examine comment cette expérience a façonné la vision bureaucratique et publique de l'intégration des réfugiés. Cet article se concentre principalement sur les efforts de réinstallation et d'intégration en Ontario, étant donné qu'environ la moitié des réfugiés du Printemps de Prague ont été réinstallés de façon permanente dans la province. Cet article décrit comment, dans le cadre de leurs efforts pour favoriser l'intégration économique et sociale des réfugiés, les autorités canadiennes leur ont fourni une aide au*

*transport, un hébergement initial, de l'aide pour obtenir un emploi au Canada et une formation linguistique en anglais ou en français. Les réfugiés du Printemps de Prague ont été confrontés à des obstacles professionnels, notamment en ce qui concerne l'accréditation de leurs diplômes étrangers et le sous-emploi dans leurs domaines respectifs. Le succès de leur relocalisation et de leur intégration reposait sur la coopération intergouvernementale entre le Canada et ses provinces et sur le soutien apporté par les communautés tchèques et slovaques locales à travers le pays.*

### **Introduction**

Overnight on August 20–21, 1968, Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia to crush the Prague Spring—a period that lasted over seven months in which civic freedoms were restored, press censorship was abolished, and the economy was liberalized, all in an effort to reform the communist regime from within. The sudden crisis forced approximately 27,000 Czechoslovak nationals to seek refuge in the West. They joined close to 80,000 compatriots who were in Austria, Yugoslavia, West Germany, Italy, France, and the United Kingdom at the time of the Soviet-led invasion. Many of these individuals were on holiday, studying at universities abroad, or conducting business as representatives of state companies. As a result of the invasion, many individuals and families decided that they could not return home and looked for permanent resettlement in the West. Conversely, Czechoslovak nationals who left their homeland after the invasion did so because they refused to live under Soviet occupation. Many of them sought United Nations (UN) convention refugee status and asylum in the West (Holborn, 1975, pp. 516–517).

Many Czechoslovak nationals did not meet the conditions for UN convention refugee status since they were outside of their home country at the time of the invasion. While the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) declined to label them as convention refugees, the Canadian government chose to manipulate the convention definition and later deemed them as refugees. Manpower and Immigration officials viewed the Czechoslovak refugees (also commonly referred to as the Prague Spring refugees) as “good material” as a result of their post-secondary education, training, work experience, professions and skilled trades, and linguistic abilities (Madokoro, 2009, pp. 165–167). Canadian officials also believed that this “small gold mine of talent” would be able to rapidly assimilate into the fabric of Canadian society and make a significant contribution to Canada’s economy (Whalen, 1968).

Several reasons underpin the Canadian government’s decision to resettle approximately 11,200 Prague Spring

refugees between September 1968 and January 1969 (Canada, 1970, p. 524). Scholarship has claimed that political self-interest, economic considerations, and international humanitarianism played an important role in the federal government’s decision to bring mostly young and well-educated skilled workers and professionals to Canada because they could make an immediate contribution to Canadian society and its economy (Troper, 1993, p. 271). Scholars have also pointed to Cold War ideological considerations to explain Canada’s resettlement of these refugees. Canadian officials relaxed immigration criteria, including medical examination and security screening, to embarrass the Soviet authorities for propaganda purposes and to politicize the Eastern Bloc as a group of refugee-producing communist states (Dirks, 1977, p. 255).

Humanitarian organizations and supporters of refugee rights criticized the Canadian government for playing Cold War politics in its selection and admission of refugees fleeing communism in Eastern Europe, while other individuals in search of refuge from right-wing regimes were ignored (Troper, 1993, p. 272). Others suggest that federal officials used the pretence of humanitarian intervention to disguise economic self-interest and bring refugees to Canada who did not pose a security risk to Canadian society. In addition, the Canadian government sought to maintain good relations with its Soviet counterparts and to promote détente without further heightening Cold War tensions (Madokoro, 2009, p. 168).

The Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia caught Canadian officials by surprise. Initially hesitant to implement a military or humanitarian response, the Canadian government was criticized by the mainstream press for its perceived inaction. Coupled with the lobbying efforts of the Canadian Czechoslovak and nationalist Slovak communities, Canadian officials were pressured to establish a resettlement scheme for the Prague Spring refugees. In the context of the Cold War, Canadian officials were aware that many of these individuals and families held pro-democracy and anti-communist values that fit into the conservative Cold War consensus found in Canada. Similarly, Canadian officials deemed the Prague Spring refugees to be highly desirable immigrants—as a result of their political beliefs and economic backgrounds as skilled workers and professionals—who could adapt rapidly to Canada’s culture and economy (Raska, 2018, pp. 146–147).

The Prague Spring refugee movement occurred during a period of immigration policy formulation that sought to address labour shortages in Canada’s economy. Coupled with the liberalization of Canadian immigration with the introduction of Order-in-Council P.C. 1967–1616—commonly referred to as the points system, in which racial and

geographic criteria limiting immigration were removed—immigrant selection was based increasingly on education, skills, work experience, and the linguistic ability of the prospective immigrant. Meanwhile, bureaucratic efforts to integrate newcomers were organized into a framework beginning with immigrant selection, followed by short-term integration—helping immigrants access services, including language training, orientation, and employment—and completed with these individuals obtaining citizenship (Griffith, 2017, pp. 5–6). Nearly a decade before the special program for Prague Spring refugees, the Canadian government articulated in its 1959 *Canada Year Book* that Canadian integration recognized and respected the cultural contributions of immigrants from diverse ethnic backgrounds because these newcomers cared for the welfare of their new country. Federal officials further suggested that ultimate responsibility for integration rested with the Canadian public, because without their support and acceptance of immigrants into their communities, no integration could occur. However, immigrant integration remained a voluntary process between the state and the newcomers themselves (Canada, 1959, p. 177).

Canadian officials could turn to a historical precedent to inform their decisions on the admission and resettlement of Prague Spring refugees in Canada. In November 1956, Soviet forces crushed the Hungarian Revolution and forced over 200,000 Hungarians to seek safe haven in Austria and Yugoslavia. The events in Hungary drew widespread attention from the Canadian public (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010, pp. 345–347). As mainstream press outlets referred to the Hungarian refugees as “freedom fighters,” the Canadian government saw an opportunity to embarrass the Soviet Union by resettling them in Canada (Dirks, 1977, p. 255). Federal officials willingly received individuals who espoused a pro-democracy and anti-communist identity, but also viewed the refugees—in economic terms—as an excellent source of skilled labour due to their post-secondary education, previous work experience, and established professions in medicine, law, academia, and the arts. The Canadian government responded by relaxing immigration admissions criteria to bring approximately 37,500 Hungarian refugees to Canada. Along with provincial authorities, voluntary service agencies, and the Canadian Hungarian community, the 1956 Hungarian refugee movement represents the first instance of public-private collaboration in refugee resettlement during the postwar period (Hawkins, 1988, pp. 115–116).

Twelve years later, the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia once again garnered widespread public attention and forced Canadian officials to respond to the plight of the Prague Spring refugees. The Canadian government

recognized that Czechs and Slovaks had fled communism in their homeland, which helped to establish their Cold War desirability within Canadian society. Federal officials believed these refugees would promote the Cold War consensus and help prevent communist infiltration in their ethnocultural communities and across Canada (Raska, 2018, pp. 225, 230–231).

Ethnocultural communities play an important part in the social integration of recently arrived refugees in Canada. The 1961 Canadian Census reported over 73,061 Czechs and Slovaks in Canada, with nearly half of them born overseas (Gellner & Smerek, 1968, pp. 82–83). Following the 1948 communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, approximately 4,000 anti-communist and pro-democracy refugees arrived in Canada (Raska, 2018, p. 86). These Czech and Slovak refugees were met by local members of the Czechoslovak and nationalist Slovak communities, many of whom were interwar immigrants and espoused a belief in a common “Czechoslovak” ethno-lingual heritage between Czechs and Slovaks or advocated for a separate Slovak national identity. The two ethnocultural communities were represented separately across Canada by the Czechoslovak National Association of Canada and the Canadian Slovak League. Both organizations were instrumental in assisting Cold War arrivals with access to federal and provincial services.

In the context of the Prague Spring movement, the social and economic integration of these refugees in Canada consisted primarily of assisted passage, initial accommodations and funds for basic necessities, assistance in transitioning to Canadian employment, and English- or French-language training. Similar to the Assisted Passage Loan Scheme implemented in 1951, federal officials considered providing transportation loans to the Prague Spring refugees. In subsequent Cabinet discussions, the refugees were placed in the same category as the 1956 Hungarian movement, which had received free transportation and resettlement support (Canada, 1968, September 5). While newly arrived immigrants also had access to English- and French-language training across Canada, federal officials provided the Prague Spring refugees with allowances during their language courses (Raska, 2018, pp. 140, 155). The federal Cabinet later concluded that the refugees had been invited to resettle in Canada. Since they had not been treated as regular immigrants at the time of their admission, the Canadian government had “incurred a special responsibility” to look after them during their resettlement (Canada, 1968, October 3).

The Prague Spring refugee movement to Canada poses important questions: How did this movement of refugees from Czechoslovakia navigate language training and barriers to employment, including accreditation? Did their experiences shape bureaucratic and public views of refugee



integration? This article focuses primarily on the resettlement and integration efforts in Ontario, since roughly half of the approximately 11,200 Prague Spring refugees were permanently resettled in the province (*Globe and Mail*, 1969).

### ***Language Training and Financial Assistance for Prague Spring Refugees***

Approximately half of all individuals who arrived in Canada through the special refugee program opted to resettle in Ontario because they had extended family, business contacts, economic opportunities, and established Czech and Slovak populations. Given this reality, the provincial government believed that the needs of the incoming refugees from Czechoslovakia could be adequately met through the establishment of a provincial action committee comprising representatives from the Department of the Provincial Secretary and Citizenship, Department of Trade and Development (Immigration Branch), Department of Labour (Apprenticeship Branch), Department of Education (Arts and Technological Branch), and Department of University Affairs. The function of the provincial interdepartmental committee was to establish contact with community leaders and the refugees themselves to determine their needs: to communicate to provincial and federal agencies and departments the special needs of the refugees; to cooperate closely with the federal Department of Manpower and Immigration (DMI) in securing accommodation, employment, and counseling for refugees; to recommend to local and provincial authorities the necessary language and citizenship training that refugees required upon arrival; and to liaise with immigrant aid and social services agencies that worked closely with refugees from Czechoslovakia. In addition, provincial authorities attempted to acquaint the Prague Spring refugees with proper business practices to assist them in succeeding in their professions in Canada (Colombo, 1968).

In some cases, the level of assistance given to the refugees did not meet their specific needs and was insufficient in furthering their socioeconomic integration in Canada. In early October 1968, Ontario's minister of labour, Dalton Bales, received a letter from a constituent in his Greater Toronto riding of York Mills. The subject of the correspondence was the resettlement of three Prague Spring refugees who had arrived in Toronto three weeks earlier. The two young men and one woman were promised six months of schooling in English, with a small living allowance, by Canadian immigration officials in Zurich, prior to leaving for Canada. The men were sent to the Cooksville area of Mississauga with no directions or money and were given cards informing the public that they were refugees from Czechoslovakia who could not speak English. One of the men was a welder by

trade while the other was a university student. After reporting to a local Manpower office, they obtained employment as workers in a plastics factory for \$1.75 per hour and moved to downtown Toronto, where they shared accommodations with Italian and Polish immigrants. Both refugees had yet to be paid and had already received a letter from the DMI informing them that \$28 was due each month to pay for their assisted passage to Canada. Conversely, the young woman who was trained as a display artist and window dresser received \$60 from the Manpower office for expenses as she attempted to secure employment after attending several unsuccessful job interviews. The letter to the minister argued for more spaces in English-language classes so that these three refugees and their compatriots could acquire employment befitting their training and experience (Unknown [redacted], 1968).

The Ontario Department of the Provincial Secretary and Citizenship investigated the available language-training facilities in the province and concluded that programs for immigrant children were more than adequate, while English-language programs for adult newcomers were lacking. Provincial officials were surprised to learn that complaints recently brought forward by Czechoslovak community leaders had confirmed a lack of adequate language-training facilities for adults. Referrals to language-training programs for newcomers in the adult training centres had been reduced from 150 to 25 individuals per week, and then recently increased to 40 positions. The lack of adequate referrals was amplified by a waiting list of several hundred people. Additionally, the waiting period to begin such programs was over six months—excluding refugees from Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, provincial officials were informed by their federal counterparts that the federal budget for English as a Second Language training under the Manpower Retraining Agreement was already overspent by three months. Given these circumstances, the Ontario government was aware that if settlement allowances were terminated for refugees without knowledge of English, these individuals would be forced to apply for welfare, as they had no previous work experience in Canada and could not qualify for unemployment insurance. Experts at the adult training centres noted that a majority of the recent arrivals from Czechoslovakia required 22 weeks of full-time language training to “function effectively in our society” (Yoerger, 1968, October 18). Consequently, many of the Prague Spring refugees were admitted into English classes sponsored under the Ontario Manpower Retraining Program (Welch, 1968, November 1).

Soon after, the Ontario government began to focus its efforts on providing financial assistance to the Prague Spring refugees. Provincial Secretary and Minister of Citizenship Robert Welch informed his colleague, the minister

of social and family services, John Yaremko, that many of the refugees from Czechoslovakia had requested financial assistance while they attended full-time English-language training. Although financial assistance was available only to the unemployable, Welch noted that many ethnic groups across the province were concerned with the preferential treatment that the Prague Spring refugees were already receiving in their initial settlement in Canada. Welch agreed that these recent arrivals were receiving more assistance than previous groups of newcomers, as English-language training was being offered daily at adult training centres across the province, and several days per week through school boards. Similarly, free tuition was offered to refugees who wished to enrol in a university program, along with a full living allowance for up to six weeks after their arrival. Provincial officials were aware that very few refugees from Czechoslovakia had been unable to find work after arriving in Canada. However, Welch remained concerned that the precedent of reasonable assistance could not be maintained for future arrivals (Welch, 1968, November 19). Some of the refugees most in need of assistance were professionals who sought to continue their practices in Canada.

### *Managing the Expectations of Refugee Professionals*

Seizing upon newspaper coverage of the plight of five Prague Spring refugee dentists attempting to practise their profession in Canada, in early October 1968, Robert Norman Thompson, Progressive Conservative MP for Red Deer and Opposition critic for employment and immigration, asked the minister of manpower and immigration, Allan MacEachen, whether the federal government was investigating their situation (Canada, 1969, p. 986). The dentists from Czechoslovakia were qualified to practise their profession in their homeland but were now being prevented from opening a practice in Ontario for a period of 18 months in order to attend a mandatory retraining program. While dental school graduates with diplomas from American, Australian, British, and New Zealand institutions were permitted to take licensing tests in the province of their residence, graduates from all other countries were required to study two or more years at a Canadian dental school (Curry, 1968, October 15). MacEachen was aware of the situation, but noted that the issue of professional standards in dentistry was a question for the provincial governments and their respective provincial associations. Thompson wondered whether the refugee dentists had been told of the situation in Canada prior to immigrating. MacEachen replied that Canadian immigration officials overseas attempted to inform every immigrant about the conditions they would find in Canada after resettlement (Canada, 1969, p. 986). Following the media cover-

age of Question Period in the House of Commons, officials within the DMI requested that Canadian immigration offices overseas provide Ottawa with any available information on the counseling of refugee professionals and any advice given to dentists on any retraining they may have needed to complete after arriving in Canada (Couillard, 1968).

Under normal immigration procedures, prospective immigrant professionals, including doctors, dentists, nurses, engineers, and architects, were required to submit their credentials to provincial professional licensing bodies before their immigration was approved. As a former Canadian immigration officer who was posted to Vienna in 1968, Michael J. Molloy notes that in response to the sudden crisis in Czechoslovakia and the emergency nature of the Prague Spring movement, the Canadian government wanted to be sure that the refugees understood that they would not be able to work or would be underemployed in their professions upon arrival in Canada (personal communication, April 10, 2019). In mid-October 1968, Canadian immigration officials in Vienna informed Ottawa that each refugee from Czechoslovakia was now receiving a standard 20-minute interview and was being counselled on what to expect after arriving in Canada. Immigration officials assessed applicants' personal backgrounds and indicated any difficulties they might have upon arriving in Canada. Refugee professionals interested in resettling in Canada signed a statement of preparedness to undertake alternate employment.

In the case of medical professionals, doctors were advised that they could expect to become medical laboratory technicians, while dentists were informed that they were likely to assume positions as dental technicians upon resettling in Canada. Doctors and dentists signed an additional statement:

I fully understand that my acceptance in the medical profession in Canada is at the sole discretion of the licencing authority in the province in which I wish to work or practise. I further understand that acceptance by the licencing authority in any province or provinces in Canada is not an assurance of acceptance in other provinces. (Curry, 1968, October 16)

Canadian officials in Vienna translated the above statement into the Czech and Slovak languages to avoid any confusion on the part of the applicant. Canada's European regional director of immigration in Geneva wrote to Ottawa, confirming that all refugee professionals from Czechoslovakia were carefully informed of the difficulties they might encounter in Canada, including the fact that they might not be able to practise their profession or trade and had to be willing to accept alternative employment until they were able

to return to their industry through recertification (Curry, 1968, October 16).

Meanwhile, Canadian immigration authorities in Europe had received 8,207 enquires from Czechoslovak citizens for immigration to Canada, of which 6,344 (or 77.3%) resulted in applications. The largest number of applications was filed with Canadian immigration officials in Vienna. However, 38% of all refugee applicants in Vienna did not attend their scheduled immigration interview and cancelled their flights, thus forcing the Canadian immigration team to find other successful applicants to keep each chartered aircraft full of refugees on their way to Canada (Curry, 1968, October 15). The DMI originally estimated that only 500 to 1,000 individuals would apply for permanent resettlement from Austria and Yugoslavia during the special program. The demand of refugees fleeing Czechoslovakia soon outpaced Canadian officials' expectations for the resettlement scheme. The federal government responded by allocating some of the special program's \$2 million fund to support the charter flights. In the first eight weeks after the Soviet-led invasion, 14 flights arrived in Canada, bringing refugees without a preference for settlement to every region of Canada. Soon thereafter, many of the Prague Spring refugees were enrolled in language classes and special courses designed to teach them about Canadian customs and lifestyle, and had secured temporary and permanent employment. More than 1,900 of these individuals were receiving government assistance to support daily costs until they received their first pay cheque (*Globe and Mail*, 1968, October 24).

In addition to the linguistic difficulties that the newcomers faced, many of them—including doctors, dentists, engineers, lawyers, accountants, and skilled tradespeople—were certified professionally in their chosen fields but faced challenges in having their credentials recognized in Canada. This issue was raised by community leaders in Toronto during their meetings with provincial officials in mid-October 1968. The Ontario government later recommended to Ottawa that its language programs be expanded to include professionals rather than limit them to unskilled and semi-skilled refugees (Welch, 1968, October 30). Provincial officials noted that 300 locations in Toronto alone were open and ready to receive refugees for language training (Yoerger, 1968, October 21).

Meanwhile, the five refugee dentists who sought to re-establish their practices in Ontario continued to ignite public debates about resettlement support and the recognition of foreign professional certifications. The Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) lobbied the provincial government to assess each incoming dentist's skills and knowledge with a practical examination under the auspices of the Royal College of

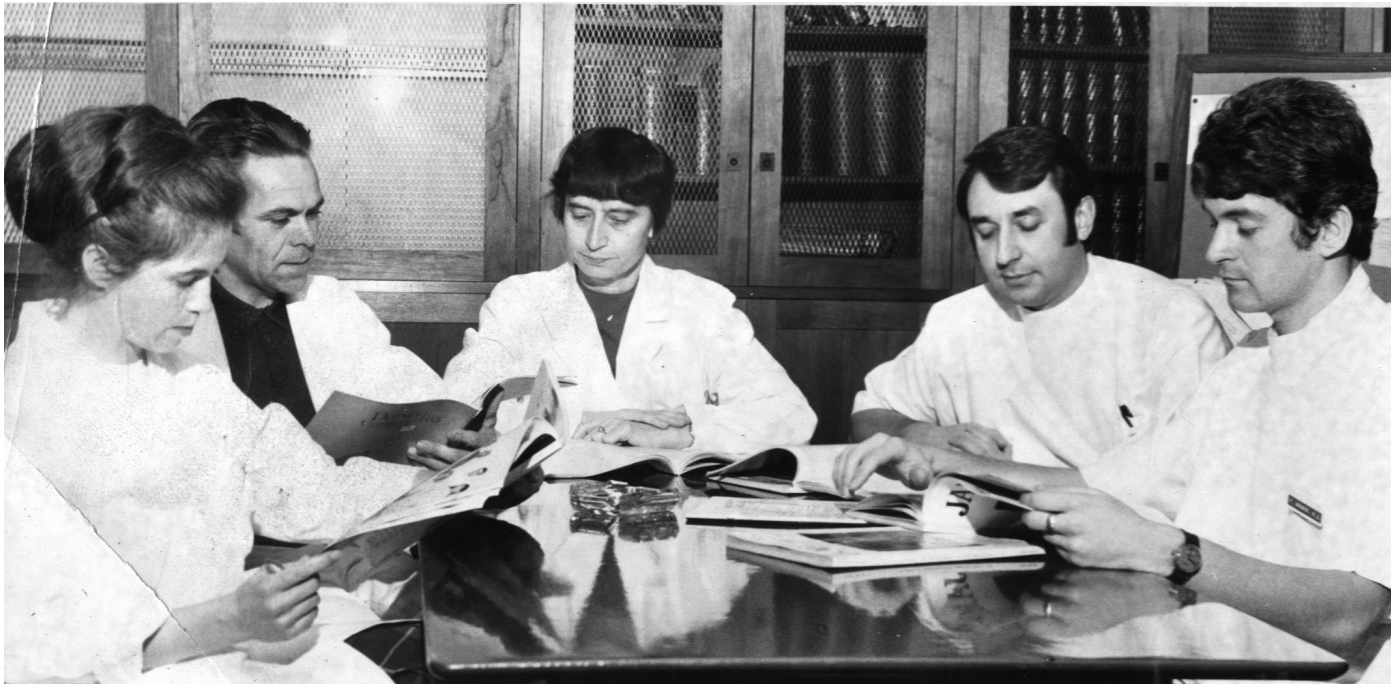
Dental Surgeons instead of forcing them to enter a university dentistry program for more schooling. The president of the OFL, David Archer, had sent Premier John Robarts a letter criticizing the college's insistence that refugee dentists undergo Canadian training in order to be fully licensed. Archer suggested that the college was involved in practices that discriminated against individuals by country of origin (*Globe and Mail*, 1968, October 21). Incidentally, officials in Ottawa could only locate the name of one of the dentists, Ján Vávra, who was residing in Hearst, Ontario (Head of Immigration Secretariat, 1968). According to Canadian immigration officials in Vienna, Vávra had signed a statement confirming that he understood he would be expected to work as a dental technician before he could meet the professional requirements in his province of residence. Vávra was offered employment as a dentist, but could not accept the position because he had yet to complete his Canadian training. The newly arrived refugee from Czechoslovakia claimed that he would need only one year to improve his English-language capabilities and become acquainted with the types of drugs, instruments and materials, and medical terms used in Canada. Like other newcomer dentists from Czechoslovakia, Vávra did not understand why he should be forced to attend university dentistry courses for two years.

The situation was much the same for doctors. A group of 30 medical doctors was required to take special examinations administered by the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons. For the refugee doctors whose English-language abilities were good and who were able to pass the examination, the college indicated that they would be permitted to undertake one- or two-year internships at hospitals across the province (*Globe and Mail*, 1968, October 2, p. 8). In St. Thomas, the *Times-Journal* published an article with an accompanying photograph describing the recent resettlement of five refugee physicians to the area (see Figure 1).

In mid-November 1968, Ontario's College of Dental Surgeons finally bowed to public pressure and agreed to allow the refugee dentists from Czechoslovakia to practise in the province if they passed a licensing examination. Six months later, sixteen refugee dentists failed the special licensing test, subsequently claiming that the result was due to not having been permitted to acquire sufficient practice in Canadian dental techniques after arriving. The group of dentists remained divided over their futures. Some of them agreed to take the exam again in November, while others considered moving elsewhere or enrolling in a two-year dentistry program at a Canadian university. While Canadian dentistry graduates received their licences upon graduation, licensing examinations were for the benefit of



**Figure 1.** Five Recently Settled Refugee Physicians



Ludmila Hilbert, Anthony Snopek, Olga Laczová, Peter Greščo, and Jiří Veselý—undergo a two-year internship at the local St. Thomas-Elgin General Hospital in southwestern Ontario. Courtesy of Elgin County Archives.

incoming dentists from other countries (Lind, 1969). The college's decision directly affected the five refugee dentists who were already living in Ontario, including Ján Vávra, and any others who had applied for a licence to practise in the province before 1969. Under the college's newly relaxed licensing rules, the refugee dentists were placed in the same category as dentists from Commonwealth countries and Scandinavia and had their qualifications and experience accepted. As a result, they were only required to pass a licensing examination. The college encouraged the five dentists—three in Toronto and two in Windsor—along with Ján Vávra to increase their English-language proficiency and to shadow local dentists at their offices (*Globe and Mail*, 1968, November 13).

Throughout 1969, refugees from Czechoslovakia continued to arrive in Canada, but no longer under the special program. They were now subject to more stringent regulations, particularly with regard to their professional status, as exemplified in the case of 17 doctors from Czechoslovakia who arrived in Canada from France, Germany, and Italy later that year. Unlike their professional colleagues who had arrived prior to the conclusion of the special program, the newly arrived doctors were required to complete a foreign

medical graduate exam, while their compatriots who had arrived earlier were required only to complete a screening test before assuming hospital internships. Although the recently arrived doctors were specialists in their fields—including anesthesia, epidemiology, gynecology, pathology, pediatrics, and surgery—their level of English comprehension was minimal. As a result, provincial authorities did not permit them to assume internships.

*Toronto Life* showcased the resettlement experience of an established surgeon with 23 years of professional experience (Hicks, 1969, p. 43). As one of approximately 100 doctors who were interviewed in Toronto by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, Anton Haninec passed an oral clinical knowledge examination and was permitted to apply only for a junior internship at a local hospital. The 48-year-old experienced surgeon found an internship at the Lakeshore Psychiatric Hospital as a clinical clerk, a position that would normally have been filled by a fourth-year medical student. Haninec had left Czechoslovakia aware that he had another two decades of work left in him, and he did not want to do it under communism. With the understanding that he could work another 20–25 years, Haninec recognized that in order to practise medicine again, he would have to



seek Canadian certification by writing the Medical Council of Canada examinations (Hicks, 1969, p. 43). Like him, the majority of the doctors who were resettled in Canada with their families were in their 40s. Advocating on their behalf was Ruth Petříček, president of the Women's Council of the Czechoslovak National Association of Canada (CNAC). She notified provincial officials in Ontario that these refugees were informed that Canada needed medical professionals and that they were encouraged to come to Canada. Petříček hoped that health officials in Ontario would afford the same privileges to the 17 medical professionals as they had to those doctors and dentists who had arrived a year earlier during the special program (Petříček, 1970).

### ***Evaluating the Resettlement and Integration of Prague Spring Refugees***

Following the termination of the special program for Prague Spring refugees, six Ontario-based Canadian Czechoslovak organizations—CNAC, Women's Council of the CNAC, Canadian Fund for Czechoslovak Refugees, Masaryk Memorial Institute, Permanent Conference of Slovak Democratic Exiles, and the Czechoslovak Branch No. 601 of the Royal Canadian Legion—distributed a report entitled *Suggested Provincial Action and Programs Designed to Ease the Adjustment Problems of Czechoslovak Refugees* to the Department of the Provincial Secretary and Citizenship in Toronto (Colombo, 1969). The report sought to raise awareness of the unique problems involved in the integration of the Prague Spring refugees in Ontario. It argued that the existing programs to which government agencies reverted were designed for “sponsored” or “open-placement” immigrants, and the recently arrived refugees could not “be easily fitted into the two above categories as they have had hardly any time to consider immigration to a new country. Their decision to leave their own country is a move to[ward] survival and not a plan to settle in another country” (Colombo, 1969). Despite this criticism, the six organizations commended federal and provincial officials for using their established networks of immigrant aid services to provide the refugees with a relatively smooth transition to Canadian life.

The report recognized the work of the DMI for implementing the special program that had provided for the initial reception, financial assistance, and counselling of refugees from Czechoslovakia between September 1968 and January 1969. In cooperation with provincial and municipal authorities, every possible means of assistance was given to newly arrived refugees. The formation of an intergovernmental and interdepartmental committee was instrumental in facilitating the exchange of information necessary for the aforementioned resettlement program. The report also listed several examples of the intergovernmental cooperation

undertaken to facilitate the resettlement and integration of Prague Spring refugees in Ontario. In London, for example, the London International Services raised awareness of refugee issues among the local population. Using news outlets and personal networks, the voluntary service agency was able to assist recently resettled Prague Spring refugees in the area with housing, employment, clothing, and basic needs. In Cornwall, local agencies quickly recognized that the 20 refugees resettled to the area had existing professions and trades, but lacked much-needed winter clothing and footwear. Before they could begin their work placements, resettlement support workers sought out the necessary apparel. A small number of Prague Spring refugees were resettled in summer cottages in Northern Ontario. In the region, women's organizations were instrumental in securing clothing and basic necessities for the upcoming winter season. While the report applauded the work of the authorities and non-governmental organizations, it also pointed out that, in some cases, refugees were unsuccessful in adjusting to their new Canadian environment, while others continued to face difficulties in their new home (Colombo, 1969).

Given this reality, the DMI initiated its own study of the Prague Spring refugees' integration in Canada. The study consisted of a sample of 2,734 out of 6,639 heads of households and spanned the initial three-year period after resettlement in Canada. The results were based on the responses of 813 refugees (791 men and 22 unmarried women) to three questionnaires sent to them. Whether intentional or not, the study reaffirmed Cold War social norms by focusing on male heads of households. Immigration officials noted that the results were “reasonably representative,” even though respondents were largely male, middle-aged, technically skilled, and well-educated professionals. In addition, the respondents comprised less than 10% of the approximately 11,200 refugees who were brought to Canada under the special program (Ziegler, 1972). Unsurprisingly, the study found that the refugees were generally older and better educated, and consisted largely of professionals and craftspeople. Many were also married. Their employment conditions and level of income improved over the length of the study, and many reached the same level of employment as in Czechoslovakia. Most of the refugees were also able to maintain their employment and attained a higher level of income than the average immigrant in the same period. According to the surveys, the Prague Spring refugees worked 140 out of a possible 156 weeks. Over the three-year period, their monthly earnings increased from \$518 to \$726, and the average family income increased from \$6,620 to \$10,349 annually, slightly more than immigrants who had arrived in Canada at the same time. Unlike these same immigrants, many of the refugees from Czechoslovakia struggled with

underemployment, especially professionals who sought work in their respective fields. These included doctors, dentists, engineers, and lawyers who had to undergo additional training, examinations, and re-certifications in order to practise in Canada. This was due in part to the refugees' lack of acceptable qualifications and the state of the labour market at the time (Heatley, 1975, pp. 1–3).

In terms of social adaptation, approximately 85% of the refugees undertook courses—on life in Canada, for example—whereas only 50% of immigrants did so. When it came to language training, 80% of the refugees were enrolled in English-language courses across the country, while 41% of refugees in Quebec chose French-language training at the time. As they learned either of Canada's two official languages, only 29% of respondents indicated that they participated in social groups and associations. Within this group, 67% preferred organizations frequented by other Canadians. The study noted that a sizeable minority of the Prague Spring refugees began to identify more with Canada and slowly "relinquished" their cultural identity. By the third year of resettlement, 18% of refugee households spoke English rather than their mother tongue. In all, 67% of respondents claimed a greater sense of belonging to Canada than to Czechoslovakia. When compared to other newcomers who arrived in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the refugees from Czechoslovakia felt far more Canadian than did their immigrant peers in their first three years in Canada (Heatley, 1975, pp. 5–6).

### **Conclusion**

During the special program for Prague Spring refugees to Canada, provincial and municipal agencies and services dealing with the resettlement of newcomers were more diverse than those that existed during the 1956 Hungarian refugee movement. Nevertheless, the successful resettlement and integration of the Prague Spring refugees depended on intergovernmental cooperation between Canada and its provinces, and the assistance provided by local Czech and Slovak communities across the country. In Ontario, refugee professionals from Czechoslovakia navigated language training, professional obstacles including securing accreditation of their foreign credentials, and underemployment in their respective fields. Their early experiences helped to shape bureaucratic and public views of refugee resettlement and integration.

The resettlement in Canada of approximately 37,500 Hungarians refugees, from 1956 to 1958, and 11,200 Czechs and Slovaks, from 1968 to 1969, demonstrated that federal refugee policy needed to move away from ad hoc responses to sudden Cold War crises and towards formalized programs

that offered admission and provided specific resettlement assistance according to the individual needs of refugees (Molloy & Madokoro, 2017). Less than five months after the termination of the special program for Prague Spring refugees, in June 1969, the Canadian government ratified the 1951 UN Convention Relating to Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol thereby recognizing asylum as an international right.

During the 1970s, Canadian officials relied on institutional learning gained from the two aforementioned special programs to better respond to successive refugee crises. While the resettlement of 228 Tibetan refugees in 1971 and 1972 was coordinated with provincial officials before their arrival in Canada (Raska, 2016, p. 571), efforts to bring expelled Ugandan Asians—who did not meet the convention refugee definition—to Canada in 1972 required the use of an earlier federal Cabinet directive. The Oppressed Minority Policy, which permitted the resettlement of displaced individuals who had not fled their homeland, was used to admit more than 7,000 Ugandan Asians to Canada (Molloy, 2012).

As Canadian officials recognized that refugee resettlement was becoming a necessity in Canadian immigration policy, Cold War ideology remained a major discriminatory factor in refugee admissibility, as evidenced by the Canadian government's initial reluctance to admit leftist Chilean refugees to Canada after the 1973 coup d'état (Dirks, 1977, p. 258). In response to lobbying by refugee advocates, churches, and humanitarian organizations, nearly 7,000 individuals were brought to Canada under a special Chilean movement (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010, pp. 367–368).

In the mid-1970s, the Canadian government formalized its immigration policy on refugees with the creation of the 1976 Immigration Act. Under this legislation, Canada solidified its obligations under the UN refugee convention by implementing a humanitarian class for convention refugees, and other persecuted and displaced peoples who did not qualify under the UN convention definition (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010, pp. 388–389, 395). The new immigration legislation permitted private groups (of five or more individuals) and organizations to participate in refugee resettlement by signing sponsorship agreements with the Canadian government. Under this groundbreaking initiative, between 1979 and 1980, over 60,000 Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees were brought to Canada, of which 34,000 were privately sponsored by some 7,000 groups (Canada, 1982, pp. 5, 7–8, 13–14). The successful resettlement of this latter group of refugees, which remains the largest refugee movement to Canada, evolved from lessons learned from the earlier special programs for Hungarian and Prague Spring refugees.

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