

## Geology in the Czech Republic

Geologists who were attending the XXIVth International Geological Congress in Prague in August 1968 remember the unsettling political developments surrounding it. The Russian invasion brought an end not only to the Congress, but to freedom of thought in that country for nearly the next 20 years.

Recent political changes all over Eastern Europe have created an entirely new environment in the Czech Republic for geology and life in general. Potential exists for interaction between Czech geologists and their colleagues around the world in teaching, research and exploration. This interaction may now be done freely without the burden of any ideological constraints.

Freedom of thought brought about three interrelated problems. First and foremost among these is the fact that many geologists cooperated to varying degrees with the former communist regime as agents in various capacities. The situation in some respects resembles that in Germany after World War II. Compounding the problem is that many communists, now disguised as democratic socialists, remain in high positions in government and elsewhere, thereby influencing both directly and indirectly various matters including those related to geology.

Second, nearly a half century of communism has left the Czech Republic impoverished, and the overall problems with the transition to a market economy are well known. The geological establishment in the Czech Republic, as in the other newly free Eastern European countries, finds itself strapped for funds at a time when salaries are low and equipment is not up to Western standards or is nonexistent.

The third terrible legacy of communist rule is a devastated environment. That is the result of the careless exploitation of resources and thoughtless disposal of waste and other pollutants. Reversing this particular problem is a mammoth undertaking that is impossible without foreign aid.

Despite all of this, the Czech Republic has much to offer in the field of geology. The Central Bureau of Geology, modelled after the Soviet Ministry of Geology, has been abolished, and now responsibility for various aspects of geology is divided among four ministries. The Ministry of Environment controls the Czech Geological Survey, which has responsibilities similar to those of the U. S. Geological Survey. The primary responsibility at the moment is environmental and health issues, a concern widely shared by the entire Czech geological establishment. Geofond, the geological archive system, is also subordinated to the Ministry of Environment. Geofond collects internal reports, master's and doctoral theses, and any other unpublished geological data, and makes them available

for researchers. The Ministry of Economy is responsible for long-term strategies regarding the development of mineral resources, and the Ministry of Industry and Commerce bears responsibility for mining and processing of mineral deposits.

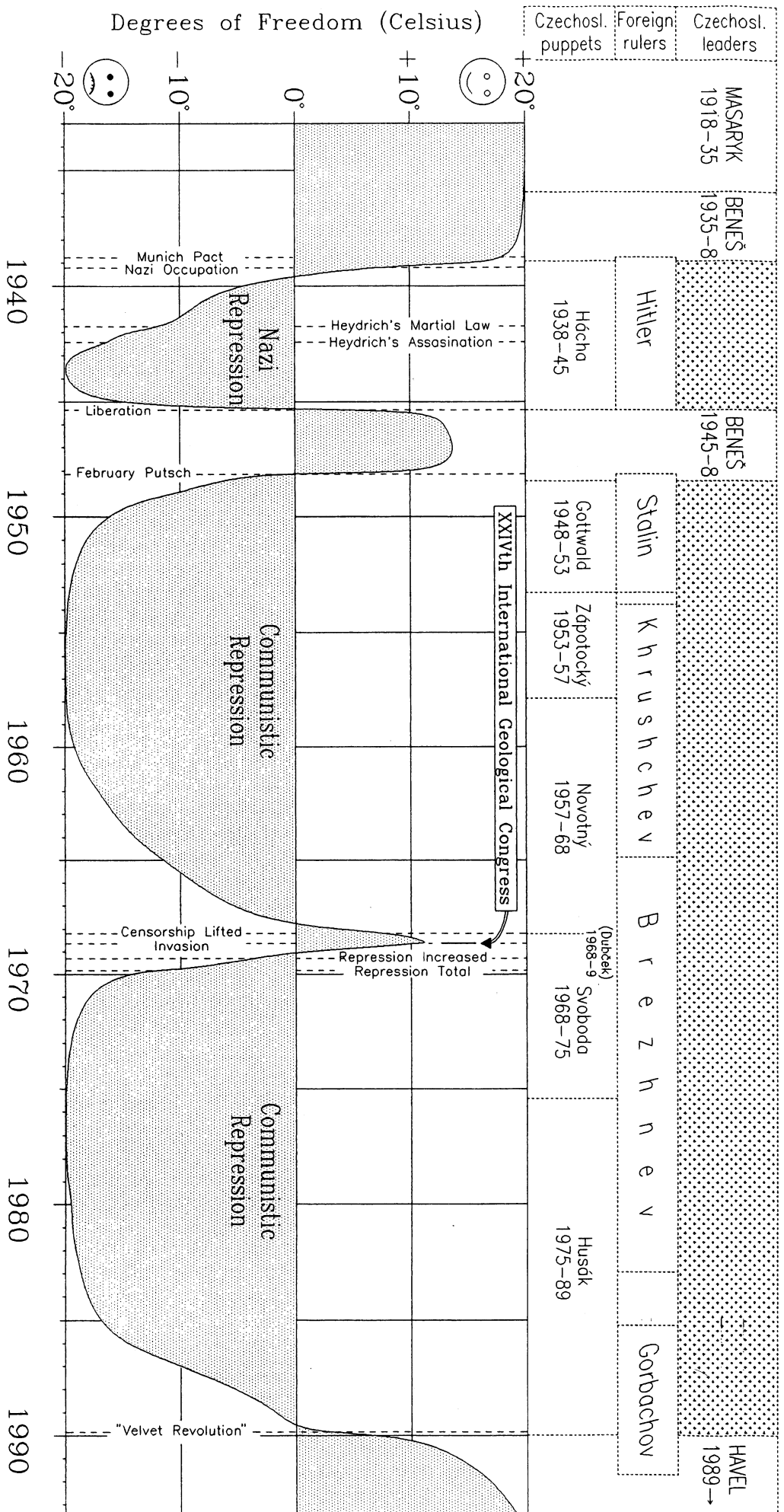
Under the auspices of the Ministry of Schools fall Charles University in Prague, Masaryk University in Brno, the Technical University of Mining and Metallurgy of Ostrava, and Palacky University in Olomouc. Each is a center of basic academic research in geology, and all offer undergraduate and graduate degrees.

The Czech Academy of Science retains several geologists who conduct basic research in many areas of geology. The Czech Grant Agency, equivalent to the National Science Foundation, is now responsible for awarding grants to institutions and individuals for deserving projects in any aspect of geology. The National Museum in Prague houses some of the finest collections of local minerals and fossils, as well as material from classic worldwide localities.

The Czech Republic is renown for the Silurian/Devonian Boundary Stratotype section near Suchomasty, and the parastratotype locality near Karlstejn. Strata of the Barrandium, in particular the Devonian, are famous for their finely preserved fossils. The recently closed mines of Pribram were the deepest in Europe, and supplied much of the wealth of the Bohemian Kings throughout the centuries. Today, a small mining and mineral museum and extensive mine dumps in that town offer interesting excursions. Other mineral localities include the pegmatites of western Bohemia and southwestern Moravia, and the former mining district of Jachymov. Tours of the long closed underground mining operation in Kutna Hora east of Prague provide a glimpse not only of the local geology but of mining technology from the Middle Ages to the present.

The political situation allows visitors easy access to all geological institutions and classic field locations. Foreign scientists are welcome to examine specimens in the institutions mentioned. Also, maps and other publications, many in English, are available from the bookstores of the Geological Survey, Academy of Science and in the National Museum for a small fraction of their Western price. The majority of Czech geologists are fluent in English and several other languages. International cooperation is strongly encouraged, and the February 1994 joint Congress of the Czech and German Geological Societies in Prague is an example. Unlike the recent two decades of repression, the future looks bright for geologists.

*Contributed by Jiri Brezina, University of Maryland, Unit 29 216, APO AE 09102.*



*The level of personal freedom in Czechoslovakia has frequently changed. The temperature scale expresses this subjective quantity by degrees of freedom in Celsius. Pre-1938 democracy of Czechoslovakia is used as a reference at +20°. A high degree of freedom similar to pre-1938 level now prevails in the post-communistic era.*