A PERSONAL REPORT ON THE MASARYK COLLECTIONS IN PRAGUE

By Spencer L. Taggart

At the Utah State University in Logan, Utah, I unexpectedly discovered a previously unpublished manuscript by Thomas G. Masaryk, as well as the third part of his often-cited work, Rußland und Europa *(both the German-language original and the Czech translation), which has been published in English only.* I thus became curious about the origin of the collection containing these items.*

The "Special Collection" of the Merrill Library at Utah State University, which carries Masaryk's name, comprises some one hundred of Masaryk's writings, including numerous first editions; about two thousand volumes of secondary literature, and many sources – which have not been used until now – on Masaryk's life and work. Spencer L. Taggart is responsible for the existence of this collection.

Taggart, a former student at Utah State University, lived in Czechoslovakia between 1931 and 1934, and again between 1946 and 1948. From the first time he encountered Masaryk, Taggart was deeply impressed by the personality of Czechoslovakia's First president. Taggart believes that this impression led to the lifelong influence on him of Masaryk and his work. His admiration for Masaryk is expressed in this collection.

In 1977, Taggart donated his private collection to Utah State University. His notes which are published here reconstruct what he knew about the Masaryk collection in Prague, as it was before the communist coup d' état. At present, many of the surviving materials from this collection are housed in the Archiv ústavu marxismu-leninismu Ústředního výboru KSČ (AÚML), where they are available to researchers.

Libuše Volbrachtová

This article concerns the Thomas G. Masaryk library, archive and museum, or the Masaryk Collection. It deals with the collection as it was in the early 1930s, its fate under German occupation during the Second World War, and its status at the beginning of 1948, prior to the commonist coup d' état in Czechoslovakia. For sources, I

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* *T. G. Masaryk: The Spirit of Russia, vol. 3. Ed. by George Gibian. London 1967.*

have relied entirely on my own notes, which were taken in 1947 from information in three unpublished documents in the archives of the Thomas G. Masaryk Institute in Prague. In addition, I have notes based on conversations with Dr. Oskar Odstrčil, then the librarian in charge of the collection, who kindly granted me access in order to pursue research on Masaryk.

The three documents I used, all prepared by Odstrčil, can be described briefly as follows: the first, "The Institute of T. G. Masaryk and the Man Behind It," was for private circulation by the Board of Trustees of the Institute in Prague in 1936; the second, "Report on the Institute of T. G. Masaryk, 1938–1945," was presented to President Edvard Beneš in the form of an aide-mémoire at a conference in Prague on 4 June 1945; and the third, likewise presented to President Beneš, was "Report on the Activities of the Institute of T. G. Masaryk from 9 May 1945 to 31 December 1946."

In 1932, President Masaryk donated his entire library, archive, and museum for the establishment of a center to be known as "The Institute of T. G. Masaryk." Broadly, its purpose was to promote the continuation of educational and scientific research in those fields in which Masaryk himself had labored so diligently during his lifetime. In the view of Masaryk's close associates, the aim was to establish a center that would preserve Masaryk's spirit and tradition, and promote the desire to follow in his footsteps.

Masaryk established the Institute in the firm belief that such a center would perform the same service to his nation and the world at large that his library and his own research had for him. A document dated 23 July 1932, which established the Institute, set forth in Masaryk's own words the aims and methods of the work to be pursued:

> The desire that my personal library, archive, and museum continue to function as an independent unit and working nucleus in those fields in which I myself have labored, has led me to the decision to establish an endowment, which will insure the existence and functioning of these undertakings in an independent cultural institute in the future. Therefore, I herewith establish an endowment, defining its name, site, financial possessions, purpose, and principles of administration. I hope to be able to enlarge this fund by further gifts and that, in case of need, my friends at home and abroad will do likewise[1].
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> The aim of the endowment is to create and preserve, in a building erected specifically for this purpose, the Institute as a working center, which will:
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> 1) Preserve and systematically complete the library and archive along the same lines as have been indicated by work and experience. If need be, according to definite directions, worked out by the Board of Trustees and myself.
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> 2) Have both the material entrusted by me and that which is acquired later organized by the staff of the Institute, with suitable portions of it prepared for publication; according to the need, conduct lectures, courses, and extension work, and in like manner utilize the results of study.
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> 3) Continue revising and publishing my own works.
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> 4) Make comprehensive study and research possible for all scientific workers according to regulations set forth by the curators of my library and archive, which are to be worked out in

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[1] Masaryk's endowment, in addition to his library, archive, and museum items, included a donation of 13 million Czechoslovak crowns, or almost 400,000 U.S. dollars.

agreement with me, all the work in the library and the archive is to be done within the premises of the Institute.

5) Publish and contribute to the publication of the results of the research and contribute to other publications, insofar as in the judgment of the curators, they have a similar subject matter and direction.

6) As far as the museum is concerned...preserve the gifts and relics which I have been presented and make them accessible to the public according to the regulations agreed upon by the Board of Trustees[2].

At the time of the establishment of the Institute, Masaryk's library contained 100,000 volumes, organized under 340 headings. It was especially rich in books on sociology, logic, philosophy, history, psychology, ethics, and religion. There was also a lot of material on the national economy of Czechoslovakia. The Slavic section comprised works on all of the Slavic nations with emphasis on Russia. Further, there was a wide range of literature on the First World War. In addition to his wide scholarly interests, Masaryk found time for fiction. He had a fine collection of American and British novels and poetry and personally corresponded with several American and British authors. Finally, Masaryk owned many classics on American democracy – concerning Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, and others.

Masaryk always selected the books he purchased. Being an exceptionally rapid reader and well acquainted with leading writers both past and contemporary, he chose with ease the best books for every section of his library. Thousands of books in the library contained Masaryk's penciled markings, underscorings and notes; many carried whole critiques of their contents on their title pages. Masaryk was once asked what was the greatest pleasure the presidency afforded him. He promptly replied: "The possibility to buy as many books as I like."

Masaryk's archive contained 200,000 different pieces, including the manuscripts of his own writings and his vast correspondence with leaders in both Czechoslovakia and foreign countries[3]. The archive also contained documents relating to the cultural struggle of the Czech nation dating back to the 1880s, as well as documents pertaining to Czechoslovakia's struggle for independence between 1914 and 1918. In addition, Masaryk's endowment included approximately 10,000 miscellaneous articles: gifts, souvenirs, photographs, paintings, statuettes, handiwork, and other tokens of Masaryk's popularity at home and abroad. Masaryk wished to have these articles displayed in such a manner that the general public could enjoy them.

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[2] Masaryk named the following to the Board of Trustees: his daughter, Dr. Alice Masaryk; President Edvard Beneš; Professor Emanuel Rádl of Charles University in Prague; Dr. Oskar Odstrčil, his librarian; and V. K. Škrach, Odstrčil's brother-in-law, and the custodian of President Masaryk's personal archive.

[3] A short paper that I drafted in the summer of 1947 contained the following: "Masaryk's library at the time of his death in 1937 consisted of some 150,000 books and an estimated 250,000 archival units." I reviewed this paper with Odstrčil in his office at the Institute and recorded his corrections in pencil. He had me strike, "at the time of his death in 1937," and add "an estimated," but he left unchanged the totals as given. I have no way of reconciling this discrepancy in total numbers of books and archival units. My paper never progressed beyond the first draft.

Although Masaryk's endowment included provisions for erecting a building to house his library, archive, and museum, it was never built. The collection remained housed in the presidential office and residence, the Hradčany castle in Prague, where President Beneš set aside seventeen rooms for this purpose.

After the Munich Settlement in September 1938, it became evident that, in the interest of its preservation, the collection could no longer remain in the Hradčany. There was fear lest the Curatorium of the Institute be ordered to clear the rooms and, if satisfactory accomodations were unavailable, that the collection might be broken up and damaged as a result of improper storage. To safeguard against this possibility, in October 1938, at the suggestion of Odstrčil, the Curatorium purchased a building for 2,400,000 crowns at 9 Verdunská ulice in Bubeneč, a new residential section of Prague. The recently completed building was a five-storey apartment house, with four apartments per floor, and a basement. During November and December of that year, the Masaryk library and archive were moved to Bubeneč. In addition, a special collection known as the Hirsch Library was moved there from Pilsen. It had been purchased by the Institute in 1937. For the time being, the museum was left at the Hradčany in the hope that it would somehow survive. But after the German occupation of Prague in March 1939, and the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Masaryk Institute was required to remove the museum from the Hradčany. It, too, was moved to the building in Bubeneč.

Without consulting the Curatorium, the Beran government issued a directive (6 April 1939) that the Masaryk library was to be deposited in the Charles University Library which was housed in the Clementinum, an eighteen-century cloister. A few months later, Dr. Reinhold, the official in charge of culture for the Protectorate, visited the Institute with the directive in hand to familiarize himself with its work and its holdings. Then in October he telephoned Odstrčil indicating that he would like to see the directive carried out in some way. Odstrčil replied that it had been set aside and would not be carried out. "I also hope," Reinhold said, "that the officials will undertake nothing against the will of President Masaryk." The Ministry of Education had delayed carrying out the decree because of its ambiguity and because it was believed to be no longer operable, especially after the closing of the Czech universities – including the University Library – in November 1939, for three years by the German occupation authories.

Also in the fall of 1939, it was rumored that Karl Hermann Frank, the violently anti-Czech Sudeten German appointed State Secretary by the Protector, was studying Masaryk's writings and that he wanted at that time to take a definitive stand. In the summer of 1940 the first steps were taken against the memory of Masaryk. For example, the monuments that had been erected to him were taken down and streets named after him were changed. In the spring of 1940, Dr. Josef Navrátil, an official of the Masaryk Institute, was arrested but was released after three weeks' detention. On 23 June 1940, the Gestapo arrested Škrach at his apartment. These were the first overt acts against the Institute.

To save the Institute the Eliáš government, successor to the Beran government, sought to embody the Institute within the Academy of Science and Art. Minister Jan Kapras of the Ministry of Education authorized V. Komorous, a Ministerial Counse-

lor, to make arrangements with the Academy's Directorate for its incorporation, but that body delayed lest such action endanger the academy itself. Finally, on 10 July 1940 the Ministry of Education dissolved the Institute's Curatorium and changed the Institute's name to the neutral, "Library for the Study of Philosophy," with Komorous as curator.

Komorous had been a charter referent and had cooperated in the founding of the Institute during the years 1932–34. During his service as curator of the newly renamed Institute, he behaved very correctly towards it – in keeping with the tradition of President Masaryk. With his knowledge, in fact, the Curatorium continued to meet.

Research and other work within the Institute quietly continued until 30 April 1941. On that day two members of the Gestapo, Fritz Dannert and a certain Walter, came to the Institute. "Now I'm the master here," declared Dannert. "Before doing anything else I'm going to confiscate everything." Dannert and Walter searched the building from the roof to the cellar, declaring that this "trash" would be sent to the crushing mill and the building would be occupied by tenants. After some two hours they ordered all personnel to Odstrčil's office. There Odstrčil was permitted to advance them wages for the month of May. Dannert and Walter released all personnel, including Odstrčil, saying they would call him if they needed him. The two then locked up all the rooms and took the keys and cash box, leaving only the caretaker in the building.

From Odstrčil's office, Dannert called Komorous ordering him to the Petschek Building, Gestapo headquarters in Prague. There Dannert bitterly attacked Komorous – why had he retained forbidden books in the Institute and why had he not had them destroyed? Komorous defended himself by arguing that he was not permitted to have them destroyed because they were part of a private, scientific library. Dannert sharply disagreed, insisting that it was merely a private library, not a scientific one. Komorous succeeded, nonetheless, in having his view entered into the minutes.

The Gestapo's actions were reported immediately to Dr. K. Strnad, then a member of the Curatorium, and to Dr. A. Schenk, who later informed Dr. Havelka. Strnad proposed saving the Masaryk collection by returning it to the Hradčany. But he was completely without support. For instance, General Eliáš, who had followed the matter closely, told Strnad that his relations with the Germans were of such a nature that any intervention by him would likely cause damage to the collection rather than assist in saving it.

In May 1941, the Gestapo paid the Institute's personnel their salaries in advance for the month of June. The Gestapo further informed them that by this action the Institute was to be regarded as having been liquidated and that whoever wanted to could apply at the German office for employment[4].

The following month Dr. Zdekauer of the "Allgemeine Treuhand" came to the Institute to have the building cleared and apartments set up in it. After consulting Strnad,

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[4] Odstrčil obtained work as a consulant in the Archive of the Synod Council. While there, he was able to collect materials that would be added to the Masaryk library after the occupation. For example, he was able through the kindness of a Masaryk supporter to purchase copies of books which indicated where the departure from Czech tradition, as it was understood by Masaryk, was leading. Thus, a new division, "The period of Degradation," was added to the library. It also included copies of magazines which were characteristic of the period.

Odstrčil went to the Ministry of Education, where he reported Zdekauer's visit to Dr. Morávek and Dr. Roubík. These two contacted Minister Kapras who called the President's office, reporting that the government had confidential information that the Gestapo was taking action against the Institute and that it was necessary to do something.

Dr. Popelka, of the President's office, instructed Strnad to intervene with the Gestapo but not in the name of the President's office. Accordingly, Strnad went to see Horst Böhm, chief of the Gestapo in Bubeneč, whom he tried to win over to leaving the library in Prague, i. e., returning it to the Hradčany. After listening very courteously, Böhm indicated that the library could remain in Prague.

Believing it was dangerous to delay longer, Odstrčil put into operation his own plan which called for alerting the German librarians in case of grave danger to the collection. Odstrčil based his plan on his belief in the desire of all librarians to collect as many books as possible. He also believed that he could rely on the assistance of the always loyal German director of the Technical Library, Dr. Antonin Moucha. Miss Schreilová, the German employee of the Masaryk Institute in charge of the Hirsch Library, was also to be of great assistance to Odstrčil in carrying out his plan.

Odstrčil's faith in Moucha proved to be fully justified. He went immediately to Zdekauer to seek clarification of his proposed action. Further, disregarding his own safety, he went to the Gestapo where he requested them to turn the Masaryk library over to him. At first the Gestapo demanded a large sum of money as compensation, but in the end was satisfied with 500,000 crowns, which Moucha secured from the Ministry of Education.

It was also about this time that Dr. Becker, General Commissar of all Reich libraries, came to Prague. Moucha fully succeeded in winning him over to saving the Masaryk library. Becker in turn convinced Konstantin von Neurath, Reich Protector, that Masaryk's library, archive, and museum should be deposited in the Charles University Library – without any compensation to the Gestapo – as soon as everything was in order.

Sometime later in June, the Gestapo called Odstrčil back to the Institute as two men from the University Library wanted to look over the Masaryk library. Dr. Karl Wehmer, the Commissar of University Books, and librarian Emil Franzel, a Czechoslovak German, were accompanied by Dannert. Wehmer and Franzel asked for the subject catalogue (odborový katalog), which Odstrčil in 1938 had hidden at Chochola's, a book dealer in Kolin. There was nothing else for Odstrčil to do but say that the catalogue had been lost during the mobilization prior to Munich in 1938 and to stick to that story. The catalogue, which survived the war, was to be of great importance in the reconstitution of the library.

During this visit, Dannert again declared that this "trash" would best be disposed of by sending it to a crushing mill[5]. Summing up the situation in an aside to Odstrčil, Franzel observed that it was crucial to get the library out of the hands of the Gestapo.

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[5] My notes indicate that the Gestapo had actually destroyed some 1,400 to 16,000 volumes of Masaryk's writings which had been at the publishers, "Čin." As my notes question the figure 1,400, the correct figure may have been 14,000.

Dannert was also interested in the archive from Lány, Masaryk's country residence. Addressing Odstrčil, he demanded to know what kind of "fortress" (Festung) it was. He kept repeating over and over: "You are sad aren't you, you are very sad" (Sie sind traurig, nicht wahr, sie sind sehr traurig).

In August 1941, the Gestapo again searched the Institute, sometimes with as many as eight men at a time. At one point, the search centered on the keys to the Lány archive, but was without success. Dannert threatened to lock up Odstrčil so he could recall "in peace" where the keys and the subject catalogue were. At the initiative of Wehmer, Schreilová got in touch with Odstrčil to let him know that the Gestapo was furious and had no intention of giving up the library to the Clementinum. Averring that he would never use such naive methods as hiding keys, Odstrčil asked her to take this message back to Wehmer – that there was only one key and that it was in a white packet in his desk, where it should be. That same day the Gestapo with Wehmer in tow went to the Institute and as Wehmer later related: "The first place I put my hand there was the key and everything became quiet." (Das erste worauf ich die Hand legte war der Schlüssel, und so haben sich die Wellen gleich gelegt). The crisis about things being hidden thus came to an end.

In September 1941, the Masaryk collection was moved to the University Library. There were over two hundred moving-van loads. Wehmer personally moved several valuable items by cab. He was also able to safeguard a number of valuable items which Odstrčil with the help of Dr. Hrozný, Director of the University Library, had called to his attention. Odstrčil's precaution was well founded: the movers tried to steal one load and sell it.

Masaryk's desk from Lány, his chair, and archive were locked in special rooms. The library was also stored in locked rooms, while the museum articles were stored in the basement. In this way the bulk of the Masaryk collection was saved from destruction. Hrozný took care to see that it suffered no damage. Wehmer himself commented: "I am glad that the library was removed from the house in Bubeneč intact."

Wehmer highly praised the bibliographical division of Masaryk's library and immediately found space in the work rooms of the University Library for about 3000 volumes from it. About 1943, Wehmer directed that books from Masaryk's library which were not duplicates of those already in the University Library to be placed in it. By the end of the German occupation, sixteen to seventeen thousand books from Masaryk's collection had been placed in the University Library. To protect the collection, Hrozný had all these books listed in a special register, "so that their re-assembling will not be a great task."

Duplicates among Masaryk's books were for the most part returned to the storage rooms. A great many were sold, however, to the University Library in Berlin and to Dr. Eduard Winter of the German University in Prague. Hrozný also had a list made of all books that were sold.

After the removal of the Masaryk collection, the building in Bubeneč was converted into apartments which were rented to families of the Gestapo. Most of them fled at the time of the liberation in May 1945. On 19 May 1945, the building was officially set aside by Prague authorities, at the request of Odstrčil, to house once again the Masaryk Institute.

It took until September to remove the furniture left by the Germans. The first attempt to move back from the Clementinum was made in October but it fell through because of lack of workers. Finally by the beginning of 1946 a work force was assembled of ten employees of the University Library. They expertly moved the collection back to Bubeneč but it took them until November to complete the task.

Altogether they moved 61 loads of books weighing 152 metric tons, plus 37 loads of archival material, museum articles, and odd pieces of furniture. Sixteen to seventeen thousand of Masaryk's books, which had been integrated into the University Library, were left at the Clementium. Various museum articles such as sculptures and vases were also left there.

Only four members of the prewar staff who had survived the occupation were willing to return to the Institute, among them the loyal German employee, Schreilová. The others were Odstrčil, Navrátil, and Soukupová, an assistant. These four had the job of putting the collection back in working order.

Navrátil had managed to survive three imprisonments, the last until his release in May, 1945. But three of the staff had been less fortunate: Dr. Dora Říhová had died in a concentration camp, and both Škrach and Strnad had been hanged (25 May 1943, and 25 November 1944, respectively). Both had been members of the Curatorium, which had met secretly at least once a year under the chairmanship of Dr. Kloudová, who succeded Škrach as vice chairman[6].

The Curatorium was re-activated with the following as members:
Dr. E. Beneš, President of Czechoslovakia, Chairman, Dr. Alice G. Masaryk, Dr. O. Odstrčil, representative of the Institute, Dr. A. Schenk, Dr. Kloudová, and Dr. F. Fajfr, first alternate (a second alernate had not been appointed).

Fajfr had been a member of the Curatorium at its secret meetings during the occupation. All the Institute's office furnitures, equipment and money had been confiscated by the Gestapo in 1941. More than 16,500,000 crowns were confiscated[7]. New funds and office furnishings had to be obtained.

With respect to the fate of the collection itself, most of it survived the occupation intact and in good condition. In his first report to President Beneš (4 June 1945), Odstrčil estimated that at least ninety per cent of the books, archive, and museum articles deposited in the Clementinum had been saved. About two years later (May 1947), he estimated the loss to the collection as a whole to be perhaps no more than one per cent quantitatively, but possibly more qualitatively.

Almost all items that had been hidden by members of the staff and by people outside the Institute were returned in good condition. The subject catalogue, manuscripts of Masaryk's books, e. g., *Základové konkrétné logiky* (Foundations of Concrete Logic), and all of his unpublished writings were returned intact and undamaged. There remained something of the original manuscripts that had been hidden in Německá Rybná by the painter, Miloslav Hegr. Insofar as the staff could determine, there had been no losses from the archive. The Lány archive had also remained complete and entirely undamaged.

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[6] 13 March 1942, 29 July 1943, and 16 June 1944.
[7] Confiscated 23 May 1941.

In December 1946, the Institute received the cases of material on Masaryk that had been on exhibit in the town of Trnava at the time of Munich. This material had been kept in a safe place by the District of Trnava during the occupation.

In his report to President Beneš (4 June 1945), Odstrčil commented that one of the greatest losses was the removal of about three thousand books, all beautifully bound, to the Černín palace. Their removal had been approved by State Secretary Frank. Odstrčil further reported that none had been found. About eighteen months later, however, he was able to report to President Beneš that 395 of them had been located and returned to the Institute.

My notes contain no information about how many books were sold to the University Library in Berlin or to Professor Winter. They do show, however, that 145 of the Winter books had been recovered. My notes also show that twenty-three of thirty books that had been carried off were found in the Russian offices in Berlin (Major Pakevič), among them nine first editions of Masaryk's writings.

With the collection safely back in its own building, the Institute's main efforts were directed toward publishing the selected works of Masaryk in forty-eight volumes. Completion of publication was set for 7 March 1950, the centenary of Masaryk's birth. But this commitment was never kept because of the communist coup on 25 February 1948.

Plans were also made to resume publishing the *Masarykův sborník* (Masaryk's Journal), with Fajfr, Navrátil, and Odstrčil as the editorial staff, a magazine devoted to the study of the life and work of Masaryk, the first issue of which had appeared in 1924 with Škrach as editor. By 1932, six volumes had appeared, containing such materials as both old and new articles about Masaryk, articles by Masaryk himself, as well as correspondence, speeches, and documents from his files.

With a view to assuring the permanence of the Masaryk collection, Odstrčil apparently gave considerable thought to establishing an extension of the Institute in the United States. During a conversation with me at the Institute (15 May 1947), for example, he asked what I thought of the idea. By way of background, he explained that he had already discussed it with J. L. Hromádka, a well-known Czech scholar and theologian who had taught at Princeton for a number of years. Hromádka was said to have already approached the president of Princeton on the subject and he in turn was said to be receptive.

My answer was to the effect that I believed that such an extension of the Institute should be located at the University of California at Berkeley and that Dr. Robert J. Kerner, University Sather Professor of History, should be enlisted to help with it. He was best qualified by virtue not only of academic training and specialization but also of ethnic background as an American of Czech descent to head such a project.

Odstrčil's reaction was enthusiastic. He concluded that the Institute's extension should be in two places in the United States – "after all it was a big country". Odstrčil noted that he was mainly concerned lest in another war the whole Masaryk library and archive be destroyed. He felt that he and others connected with the Institute had been extremely lucky in the last war to get off with so little damage to the collection. He went on to observe that the probability was great there would be another war; Masaryk himself had frequently talked about this period as being a time of political and

social upheaval or of transition and revolution. Moreover, he added, the Beneš' library had been completely destroyed by the Germans.

Odstrčil believed it to be his prinicipal duty as head of the Institute to keep it entirely non-political. His aim was to keep it completely detached from the current political situation in Czechoslovakia – to avoid any action which would link the Institute with a political party or political tendency. His objective was to let Masaryk speak for himself – to speak for himself through his work as symbolized by the Institute. Odstrčil felt very strongly about the importance of the Institute's maintaining a neutral, non-political posture. For example, in view of the precarious political position of his country, he perceived it to be of utmost importance to avoid any act which would risk prejudicing people against Masaryk, without their ever having had – as he expressed it – actual access to him. Finally, Odstrčil was convinced that Masaryk had to be listened to, that he could not be disregarded.