

The Rise of Antonín Čermák

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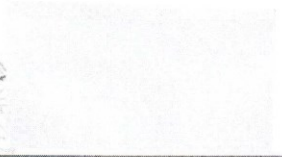
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ABSTRAKT

Tato práce popisuje život a politickou kariéru Antonína Čermáka, od jeho skromných začátků až po největší úspěchy. Práce přináší přehled jednotlivých etap v jeho kariérním vývoji, který vyústil ve zvolení prvním neamerickým starostou Chicaga. Zároveň je kladen důraz na vnější okolnosti jeho kariéry jako byla například světová hospodářská krize, prohibice a s tím související vzestup kriminality v Chicagu. Kromě Čermákovy politické kariéry je v práci zmiňována jeho podpora nově vznikajícího Československého státu. Práce prezentuje Antonína Čermáka jako schopného a respektovaného člena Demokratické strany, a aktivního odpůrce prohibice, jehož život byl předčasně ukončen atentátníkem. Z celé práce vyplývá, že Antonín Čermák svého politického úspěchu dosáhnul tím, že si od začátku své podnikatelské činnosti budoval dobré jméno ve své komunitě čímž dosáhnul důvěry spoluobčanů, kteří byli převážně imigranti

Klíčová slova:

Antonín Čermák, starosta, Chicago, Spojené státy americké, světová hospodářská krize, organizovaný zločin, prohibice, Demokratická strana (USA), politika.

ABSTRACT

This thesis describes the life and political career of Antonín Čermák, from his humble beginnings to his greatest achievements. The work provides an overview of the various stages of his career development, which resulted in his election as Chicago's first non-native mayor. At the same time, emphasis is placed on the external circumstances of his career, such as the Great Depression, Prohibition, and the related increase in crime in Chicago. In addition to Čermák's political career, the thesis also mentions his support of the newly emerging Czechoslovak state. The thesis presents Antonín Čermák as a capable and respected member of the Democratic Party and an active opponent of Prohibition, whose life and career were cut short by an assassin's bullet. It shows that Čermák achieved political success by building a good reputation in his community, especially among immigrants and the lower class.

Keywords: Antonín Čermák, Czech, Mayor, Chicago, United States, Great Depression, Organized Crime, Prohibition, Democratic Party, Politics

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I hereby declare that the print version of my bachelor's thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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INTRODUCTION

Many Czechs have made names for themselves, both at home and abroad. One such example was Antonín Čermák (1873-1933), who rose from humble immigrant beginnings to become mayor of Chicago and to leave a lasting mark on the Democratic Party. He came to America from Kladno, Bohemia, as a two-year-old with his parents, who were hoping for a better life. After a short time spent as a miner, Čermák moved to Chicago to open his own business. There, he made friends, who were predominantly immigrants like himself. By the time he decided to enter politics, he had earned the respect and trust of his immigrant friends. He became precinct captain, then an alderman, and in 1931 he was elected the first non-native mayor of Chicago, defeating his Republican opponent William Thompson.¹ For this, he predominantly had his immigrant supporters to thank. They repeatedly voted for him because he championed the idea of equal opportunity for all, including immigrants like himself. With their support, and making use of their power, he rose to be the boss of the Chicago Democratic Party machine. In his roles as mayor and boss, he fought against Prohibition, organized crime, and the effects of the Great Depression. Čermák proved capable, even securing a federal loan for the city.² The effects of organized crime resulted in Čermák being accused of graft, poor performance as a chief bailiff of the Chicago City Court, collecting membership fees under duress, and of wasting saved funds on various bribes more than two times during his life.³ After declaring war on Capone's Mob and his imprisonment, Čermák was accused of giving out a direct order to assassinate Capone's successor, Frank Nitti, in 1932. These allegations were never proven and therefore he was never convicted. Antonín Čermák, being a Czech at heart was a supporter of many Czech organizations and events, so it was no surprise when Čermák supported Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk by organizing events and establishing various clubs and organizations that supported Masaryk's efforts to establish an independent Czechoslovak state.⁴ He was also a supporter of the 1933 president-elect F.D. Roosevelt. At first, Čermák doubted Roosevelt's abilities to persuade the United States Congress to repeal the eighteenth amendment,⁵ which prohibited the sale, manufacture, and distribution of intoxicating liquors. His life, however, was cut short by an assassin's bullet in 1933, before he could achieve his political ambitions.

¹ Alex Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago: A Study of Political Leadership* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), 235.

² Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 257-8.

³ Ivan Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone* (Prague: Knižní klub, 1998), 51-105.

⁴ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 96.

⁵ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 233.

1 ANTONÍN ČERMÁK

The American dream has influenced many lives, among them, Czech immigrant Antonín Čermák, who moved to Chicago with his family at age two. The Čermak family struggled to make a living, and Anton, with few prospects, ended up working as a miner. Not satisfied with this lot in life, he took a chance and opened up a business, which proved successful. He parlayed this success into political power, becoming one of the most successful and respected politicians in Chicago, and ultimately the city's mayor. Although an assassin's bullet cut his life short, he is still remembered for his many and varied political accomplishments.

1.1 Childhood in Bohemia

Antonín Josef Čermák, later just Antonín Čermák, was born to Antonín and Kateřina Čermák on 9 May 1873 in Kladno, Bohemia, a mining and metallurgy town west of Prague.⁶ Exactly one year later, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of which Bohemia was a part, suffered an economic crisis triggered by a crash of the Vienna stock exchange. As the economy worsened, jobs disappeared. In response, the Čermák family made the difficult decision to seek a better future in the United States.⁷

1.2 Immigration and Early Years

In April of 1875, the Čermáks joined a steady stream of Czechs in moving via New York City to Chicago, which already over 100,000 Czechs called home.⁸ There, they settled in nearby Lower Braidwood, where Anton's father began working as a miner. The family expected to get help from other Bohemian immigrants, but little was forthcoming. It was survival of the fittest for immigrants, especially those of Eastern European origin.⁹ Antonín attended school for a while, but soon announced his intention to quit school, on the grounds that he already knew more than his teacher, so it was time to go out and earn some money. Antonín joined his father in the mines when he was only 9 or 10 years old. There, he drove mules and horses pulling carts of coal and tailings. At that time, Braidwood was home to about one hundred saloons. Saloons were where the miners hung out, drank, and played

⁶ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 6-8.

⁷ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 8.

⁸ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 8.

⁹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 4.

cards after their laborious shifts. It was in such saloons that Antonín made connections and developed his first political opinions.¹⁰

1.3 Into Politics

When Antonín Čermák was 16 years old, he became a spokesman for miners, who were striking for higher wages. For his actions, he was fired, prompting him to move to Chicago and settle in a Czech neighbourhood called Pilsen. He quickly managed to find a job with a street railway company. He also became a member, and later the leader, of a Czech street gang.¹¹ At age 18, Antonín had saved up enough money to buy a pair of horses. Antonín knew that he would have to take as many job opportunities so that his own business could take off. Thanks to a deal with International Harvester Company, he obtained a contract for the removal of wooden waste, which he then distributed on the streets and sold to households for heating purposes. The selling of the wood meant that Antonín came to close contact with the majority of the people living in the neighbourhoods. He invested the money which he made by selling the wooden waste into his own business which began to expand quickly. By the time he was 19, he owned 40 horses and had established his own transportation business, moving furniture, wood, coal, etc. With his business earnings, he bought and sold real estate. Soon, he was rich.¹²

This was at the time called the Gilded Age. During this time, the North of the United States was being industrialized and urbanized. It was a period of new inventions, such as the telegram, the telephone, the camera or the lightbulb. At the beginning of the 19th century, there was a massive influx of immigrants to the United States.¹³ Political machines (organizations whose main aim was to win elections and exercise their power) welcomed the immigrants because they saw them as being easily manipulated into voting for them. In 1893, Chicago held the World Fair. It was called the World's Columbian Exchange and the fair celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in America in 1492. For this opportunity, the Chicago World Fair Fairground was designed.¹⁴ On September 18, 1889, the Hull House was established by Jane Addams in Chicago. It was a settlement house which

¹⁰ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 8.

¹¹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 15.

¹² Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 16-18.

¹³ Rydell, Robert W. "World's Columbian Exchange." Encyclopedia of Chicago, 2005, accessed May 1, 2020, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1386.html>.

¹⁴ Rydell, "World's Columbian Exchange."

supported the immigrants. The immigrants were taught English and helped in adjusting to life in America.¹⁵

1.4 Life outside of politics and business

In 1894, Antonín married Marie Hořejšová, a seamstress also of Czech origin. In quick order, they had 3 daughters: Lillian, Ella and Helen. While Marie raised their girls, Antonín attended night school, studying business and law, with the goal of entering politics.¹⁶

1.5 Political career

Coming from a poor immigrant family, Antonín did not get any proper education. Among his peers, he was considered a bully, a fighter, a dominant personality. The fact that he came from a poor immigrant family excluded him from obtaining any form of basic education. But lucky for Antonín, to enter business or politics, one does not need a diploma. As he decided to open up a business of his own, simultaneously, he entered politics. He always thought of himself as of a businessman. He chose to enter politics to get his business off the ground.¹⁷ For power demanding Čermák, politics was the right choice. Čermák used the Czechs as a vehicle in his rise to power and prestige. By 1908, he was ward boss of the Twelfth Ward which was predominantly Czech. He kept the position for well over twenty years. The ward elected him alderman five times.¹⁸ Čermák was soon considered a spokesman for all the Czechs. All these positions ensured him a sizeable amount of votes. Often, when some of Čermák's peers made it in their business or politics, they left Lawndale. Lawndale is a community area which can be found in the West Side of Chicago. Čermák understood that while the Czechs accepted the American middle-class standards and values, they insisted on retaining their cultural individuality. Čermák was able to spend three decades in Lawndale because of the Chicago Czechs, and so he did. Čermák was fortunate enough to rise among an ethnic group that was ready to take political power. The Czechs set a great value upon participation in the process of government. In spite of exclusion from political processes that they had suffered in their history on both sides of the Atlantic, their tradition also included ancient memories of independent ethnic government, as well as more

¹⁵ Johnson, Mary Ann, "Hull House," Encyclopedia of Chicago, 2005. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/615.html>. (accessed May 1, 2020).

¹⁶ Anton J. Cermak, "Why Business Men Fall Down in Politics," *Nation's Business*, January, 1933: 24. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/231620595?accountid=15518> (accessed December 9, 2019).

¹⁷ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 338.

¹⁸ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 339.

recent demands for recognition. The Czechs were highly literate, stable, self-sufficient and showed great skill in adjusting themselves to American life. Since the 1890's, the Chicago Czechs had been mostly Democratic. The Democratic party was the party of immigrants. The minorities that were most abundant in the party were the Irish, the German, the Jews and the Poles. Strangely, the Negroes and the Scandinavians were Republicans at heart. The Czechs, who were predominantly Democrats, were eager to keep their identities but quite easily learned and accepted the American ways of doing things.¹⁹ Čermák, from the beginning, acted as leader to the entire foreign-born population. His earliest vehicle for this role was his office in the United Societies (1906). He acceded to this office in part because of his already acquired status among the Czechs. At that time, the United Societies was a conglomeration of 200,000 people of different backgrounds, societies and ethnicities.²⁰ To be liked among those people was very important. What bonded the people of the United Societies was the issue of the 18th Amendment (Prohibition) and their resistance to antiforeign legislation.²¹

Čermák's position in this conglomeration brought him contact with other ethnic leaders and other ethnic groups. The Society gave him space to promote himself and declare his opinions regarding the issue of personal liberty (prohibition). The oppression of one's personal liberty was taken care of by the support of the ethnic minorities and also most of Chicago voters. The minorities and the majority of Chicago was against prohibition. These people were called Wet. Čermák was one of the wettest of the Wet.²² He was also good at converting Republican people and their leaders to Democracy. He did so with some of the Germans, many Poles, and some Scandinavians and Italians. These groups often felt aggression towards the Irish which played into Čermák's cards when campaigning later.²³

Čermák held every position successively. From being assistant precinct worker to boss of the local and state party and national committeeman from Illionis. What was beneficial was his amount of experience. All the experiences he accumulated as an office holder were later very important. This gave him valuable information concerning the structure of the government.²⁴ The way he managed to become a respected individual can be assigned to his personality and work ethic. After claiming the spot of the ward committeeman, the ward

¹⁹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 343.

²⁰ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 344.

²¹ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 32.

²² Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 345.

²³ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 345.

²⁴ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 346.

remained one of the best Democratic wards. Later, he became spokesman for all of Chicago and Cook County Czechs. When Čermák joined the Cook County Czechs, the organization shared the same ideas as the Harrison faction. This is how Čermák became a Harrison man.²⁵ Carter Harrison was a Mayor of Chicago from 1875-1879. He wanted to create a centralized Democratic Party Machine that would cooperate with local Democratic party. He never managed to complete his mission. During this time, Čermák made contacts with other Democratic factions and became an important member of the Regular Democrats which he was until his last days. For years, Čermák was thought of as the boss of the Democratic bosses. His qualities and prestige in the party were highlighted by his abilities to get as many votes as possible. Čermák's fellow politicians were impressed by his willingness to devote himself to party affairs, political know-how, physical strength and seemingly endless fund of energy.²⁶

One of his chief techniques as an officeholder was his continual use of citizens' advisory committees. Through these committees, Čermák went through the motions of public consultation and power sharing. He always made sure political debts were paid off. Once he made a promise, he rarely failed to abide by his pledge. Čermák was a conservative. He shared the same economic, political and social views and values with the dominant groups in America. But he differed in his attitude when it came to prohibition.²⁷ During the Depression, Čermák quickly realized the need of federal assistance.

Čermák started as a miner and worked his way up. He was ambitious and he knew he had the support of his people. He saw an opportunity which he had to take. He knew that he was good and capable and that his immigrant supporters will stand by him. But he did not make any risky moves. He always thought about the situation he was in and tried to be as rational as possible. Maybe corruption helped him get out of the mines, but nothing has been proven.

1.5.1 Beginnings in politics

Čermák's first contacts with the Democratic party lead back to a neighbourhood called Pilsen where he was a saloon gang leader. Still being under-age to vote he was still able to procure himself a job of tacking up tax notices. After his move to Lawndale, he turned his attention to relating himself to the existing party structure.²⁸ Anton's first political job was when he

²⁵ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 346.

²⁶ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 347.

²⁷ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 341-51.

²⁸ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 19.

was only 19 years old. In an article for the Nation's Business which came out in January of 1931, he wrote: "Our part of the city was flat prairie, grown up to weeds, undeveloped and unkept. We needed sewers, streets, sidewalks. I circulated around and got in touch with various people, and we organized a little improvement association to fight for these improvements. I was made secretary and was thrown for the first time into work of a semi-political nature."²⁹ Antonín never accepted the idea that someone should be on top and another down at the bottom.

After Antonín moved to a neighbourhood in Chicago called Plzeň (Pilsen), he opened a business of his own. Later when he started making money, he was able to employ about forty people and his business expanded even more. It was known that Antonín was a capable young man and many people went to get advice from him.³⁰ He was approached by his Czech-American friend, Vladimír Červený, who was the Democratic candidate for the aldermanic position. Červený asked Antonín for help. Antonín ended up supporting Červený by spreading leaflets when the aldermanic elections were approaching. He later became Červený's right hand and stood by the Boss' side. This ensured Čermák wide recognition of his name in the political sphere and showed that he was very capable and reliable. In 1900, Antonín became precinct captain. Precinct captain is the basic unit of the urban political machine and the worker having the most direct and frequent face-to-face relationship with the citizens. Their duties revolve mostly around election campaign but he was able to attend This political education and face-to-face communication with voters provided hm with understanding and knowledge of people.³¹ The precinct captain position also allowed him to participate in court proceedings, obtain valuable information and to have the chance to get to know influential people. This position meant that Čermák could be trusted and was a respected citizen. He knew that if he was to fail in this position, it would leave a mark on his business. Čermák took this job very seriously, making sure not to fail to perform his duties. At that time the top officials of the Democratic Party's urban organization in Chicago were Roger Sullivan and his assistant George Brennan.³² Sullivan was a very ambitious man who was mainly interested in getting the favour of the wealthy. He always put his own interests first instead the interests and needs of the public. For that he was criticized by Fletcher

²⁹ Cermak, "Politics," 24.

³⁰ Barnard H.K. *Anton the Martyr* (Chicago: Marion, 1933), 23.

³¹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 21-3.

³² Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 25-6.

Dobnys in his book *The Underworld of American Politics* which came out in 1931.³³ Brennan used to be Čermák's teacher.³⁴

Another big success for Antonín was when he won a seat in the state legislature. In 1902 he was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives. He served four successive terms in this elective office until 1909. That year he became alderman of the Twelfth Ward and in 1908 he was elected Ward Committeeman. A position which he was to hold for the rest of his life. In 1912 Antonín was campaigning for the office of bailiff of the Municipal Court of Chicago. Turning the campaign into victory, this was his first city-wide office.³⁵

He gradually became a leading figure among the Democratic Party MPs. In 1922, Antonín Čermák, 49 years old, became the president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. The Cook County was at the time the largest county in the world. It also included the city of Chicago. In 1922, Čermák gave out an order for a big hospital and jail to be built.³⁶

When Antonín began his bid for the position of Mayor of Chicago, the city was headed by a descendant of Irish immigrants – William Hale Thompson, also known as Big Bill.³⁷ At the beginning of 1931, Čermák was unanimously proposed as a mayoral candidate by his party.

1.5.2 The 1931 mayoralty election

When Antonín began his bid for the position of Mayor of Chicago, the city was headed by a descendant of Irish immigrants – William Hale Thompson, also known as Big Bill.³⁸ Thompson was approaching the close of his third four-year term. At the beginning of 1931, Čermák was unanimously proposed as a mayoral candidate by his party. On his previous electoral campaigns, Antonín always explained to his potential voters the four main reasons why prohibition is bad for the whole nation. The first reason was that by illegal alcohol manufacture and distribution, prohibition opened doors for organized crime. The second reason was that it enabled for tax-evasions and creation of immense differences among the people. The third reason was the rise of diseases and the fourth reason being the decline in morality of the citizens.³⁹ Antonín was always very vocal about the problem of prohibition,

³³ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 20.

³⁴ Barnard, *Anton the Martyr*, 29.

³⁵ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 78.

³⁶ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 127-32.

³⁷ Brož, *Čermák versus Chicago*, 34-5.

³⁸ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 19.

³⁹ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 135.

promoting discussion about this topic. But surprisingly, he did not decide to make this his main campaign point.

Antonín Čermák was very lucky when his closest friends – Jewish leaders – came together and supported him throughout his campaign. The treasurer of his campaign was a Probate Judge Henry Horner. Horner was a politician who was elected as a candidate for Governor of Illinois by Čermák himself. Others were Adolph J. and Joseph Sabath. Adolph J. Sabath was a member of the US House of Representatives from 1906 until his death in 1953 and his brother Joseph Sabath was also a prominent Czech political leader. But probably the most active and supportive were the west-side Jewish leaders Jacob Arvey, an alderman of the Twenty-Fourth Ward and Moe Rosenberg, committeeman and a businessman. In 1929, Rosenberg was known to have given Čermák over 30,000 dollars as a gift to help liquidate the Democratic organization's debts. Also, between the years 1929 – 1930, Rosenberg gave the Democratic Party around 500,000 dollars of which 95,000 was given directly to Čermák.⁴⁰

As Čermák was campaigning across the country, his opponent was William Hale Thompson who was looking to win the elections and start his fourth term as a Mayor of Chicago.⁴¹ For the Chicago Democrats, the thought of this man being in charge of their city was unbearable. That was a big advantage for Čermák. Čermák embodied a stream of new ideas and approaches. He wanted to cleanse the society of afflictions and, in combination with liberally conceived approaches with state intervention, revitalize the crisis of a decimated economy and give people new lives.⁴² One big group of people who supported Čermák in this election were women. Being very appreciative of Čermák's efforts to better his city, they became his supporters. Some of the women-clubs in Chicago were the Women's City Club or Chicago Women's Clubs. What helped Čermák was the fact that years before his campaign he appointed Amelia Sears a member of the Cook County Council.⁴³

Other points of Čermák's electoral program were important as well. Čermák wanted to rid the city of crime and to restore the city's reputation. By 1931 Chicago lost its magic. The city was known for organized crime and corruption of the highest calibre. Čermák

⁴⁰ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 207-8.

⁴¹ Dorn, Jacob H. "Religion and Reform in the City: The Re-Thinking Chicago Movement of the 1930s." *Church History*, September 1986: 332. www.jstor.org/stable/3166821 (accessed March 28, 2020).

⁴² Brož, *Čermák versus al Capone*, 172.

⁴³ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 214.

wanted the city to be led by a new face. Someone who would be able to help Chicago blossom, as a lotus, out of all the mud it was in. At that time, it was known that in 1933, the city would again host and organize the World Fair. Čermák believed that by restoring the trust of the citizens, the city would be more prosperous. Another point of his program were tax cuts. Čermák was determined to cut the city's spendings by the dismissal of city employees. He wanted to keep only the employees who were absolutely vital for the running of the city. Antonín decided to keep prohibition out of his main points. He did not want to unnecessarily irritate large groups of the Dry people.

During the campaign, Thompson took an anti-immigrant stand and the press reacted strongly. The Polish *Dziennik Zwiazkowy* newspaper informed its readers of Thompsons ideas and asked them to vote for Čermák. The same happened with the newspaper *The White Russian* (Russian newspaper), four Greek newspapers and the largest Hungarian newspaper. The newspaper *Jewish Courier* made sure to highlight the fact that Čermák has created many jobs for Jews, promising bright future. Even the Irish relocated to Čermák's side. They accused Thompson of exploiting ethnic groups for his own purposes, the same was with the Germans. The Italians and the blacks stayed with Thompson.⁴⁴

Tough fight was imposed by the religious people. It was known that Čermák seldomly goes to the church. But it was known that he did not do anything bad and was always respectful. Good relations with the Catholic Church were guaranteed by the fact that his late wife and all daughters were raised as Catholics. When it came to the comparison of Čermák and his opponent Thompson, a pastor said that Čermák is bad, but Thompson is worse.⁴⁵ Thanks to Čermák's relations and friends from his time in Cook County, Čermák had earned a good credit among the people of Cook County. They knew of his successes. This way, the public could compare Thompson and his accomplishments in the City Hall and Čermák's accomplishments in the District Council. Very obvious were the financial differences between the City Hall and the District Council. While the city's finances were sinking, the District Council which was led by Čermák was enjoying the best financial balance of the last few decades. As the city's taxes were growing, the Council's taxes were doing the exact opposite.

A week before the elections, a scandal was revealed. The people of Chicago learned that 54 million dollars were embezzled by a group of Chicago entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs

⁴⁴ John M. Allswang, *A House for All Peoples: Ethnic Politics in Chicago 1890-1936* (Los Angeles: California State College, 1971), 157-9.

⁴⁵ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 184-5.

gave Thompson a considerable amount of money in exchange for total discretion regarding this embezzlement. Obviously that the group of entrepreneurs was Capone and his gang. That helped make up the Chicagoans mind about who should be the head of the city. The state attorney's police raided Thompson's city sealer, Daniel Serritella.⁴⁶ The state attorney was John Swanson, with whom Čermák had a very good relationship from the past. Čermák tipped the state attorney's police off which granted him victory in the elections.

On April 7, 1931, the elections took place. Antonín Čermák received total of 671,189 votes and his opponent, William Thompson, received 476,922 votes. The difference of 194,267 votes made Čermák's victory the biggest election victory ever.⁴⁷ Another victory for Čermák was that 82% of all registered voters came to cast their vote. Another interesting fact is that 40,4% of the total amount of votes were cast by women. Čermák won the victory in 45 out of 50 city districts. Even the majority of the Irish community stood by Čermák's side and supported him in elections. A month after his victory, he celebrated his fifty-eight birthday. The main instrument of his victory was a big coalition made out of perfectly organized Democratic machine with a considerable amount of past-Republicans, who were not satisfied with the Republican party's policy, the undecided who gave their vote to Čermák, ethnical groups and minorities and basically everybody who has had enough of Thompson.

Čermák took office on April 27, 1931. He became the forty-fourth Mayor of Chicago, taking office from William Thompson, a corrupt Republican with connections to the mafia.

When Čermák was competing with others for the post of Mayor of Chicago, he was denounced for taking bribes and ridiculed by his Republican rival William Big Bill, as the Czech upstart. Thomson also called Čermák Tony Pushcart to draw attention to Antonín's past as a miner and a carter. But Čermák did not let Thompson get to him. In fact, when Thompson was publicly humiliating Čermák and making fun of him and his origin, Čermák defended himself saying: "We couldn't all come over on the Mayflower. But I got here as soon as I could, and I never wanted to go back, because to me it is a great privilege to be an American citizen".⁴⁸ Čermák also decided to bet on the quiet and explanatory election campaign among the ethnic minorities, which formed a large part of the city's population.

⁴⁶ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 234-5.

⁴⁷ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 186-7.

⁴⁸ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 226.

Al Capone was sentenced to 11 years in prison on October 24, 1931, ending up in Alcatraz.⁴⁹ In prison, Capone was diagnosed with advancing syphilis. When he reached his freedom, he was a terminally ill man. Al Capone died in 1947, being only forty-eight years old.⁵⁰

1.5.3 William Thompson

William Hale Thompson was a descendant of Irish immigrants. He was born in Boston in 1867, making him six years older than Čermák. When he was young, he left school and after some time, he settled in Chicago. Sports was his strong side. He was a very valued sportsman and so he gained the respect of his teammates and the club functionaries. One day he was asked by the Chicago officials to stand for the position of city alderman.⁵¹ This is when he entered politics. He was very competitive, ostentatious and harsh, as he was when doing sports, which he was so good at. After some time, he became an owner of a business which bought and sold land and later housing. He was also known as Big Bill Thompson. The city of Chicago was always controlled by the Republicans. In the years 1907-1911, the Democrats were not unified which Thompson made use of and on February 6, 1915 Thompson was elected Mayor of Chicago and took the office on April 26, 1915. He also had a lot of money and always wanted more. His money-driven mentality was an advantage for gangsters who have later worked with Thompson. But Thompson was not only supported by whites. At that time, a lot of African American people were Republicans and that is why they supported Thompson.⁵² They longed for better social conditions and thought that Thompson would keep his promise and make their lives better. The group of people who supported Thompson the most was the Irish. He got most of their support by rude comments on his royal highness George V. who was the British monarch at the time. In Dublin, Ireland, people were oppressed for wanting to declare Ireland as an independent state. Thompson also spread lies such as that the British were planning an invasion in the United States. The people of Chicago believed it and Thompson made an advantage of it. He was never a good man, always looking to get more power, money and votes. If he had to do something illegal, he did it. Nothing stopped him. It is known that Thompson made deals with Capone and mafia. Showing his avidity for money.

⁴⁹ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 227.

⁵⁰ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 268.

⁵¹ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 37.

⁵² Sterstein, Malynne. *Czechs of Chicagoland* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2008), 86.

1.6 Čermák's relationship with Czechoslovakia

Čermák was a spokesperson for the immigrants of Chicago, but he always seemed to care most for Czechs and Slovaks. He never forgot to mention mutual history of these two nations. When he spoke of the foreign resistance in Bohemia, he always used the expression Czechoslovakia, showing his wish for the establishment of a new independent country. He attended a congress held by the Bohemian national association (České národní sdružení), which took place in Cleveland from March 13 – 14, 1915.⁵³ This congress was the first place where the Bohemian minority expressed their support of the foreign resistance. In the same city, the Cleveland agreement came to life.

Čermák did not only attend such congresses or gave speeches. He became the leader of Czech and Slovak-Americans which made it their priority to support the allies' war effort. He helped promote the idea of Czechoslovakia which later contributed to recognizing Czechoslovakia as an independent country. Čermák admired Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and the work he did for his country. When Masaryk came to Chicago on May 5, 1918, a parade was held in his honour.⁵⁴

1.6.1 Masaryk and the idea of Czechoslovakia

Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was on a tour of the world. After visiting Russia, it was obvious he would come to the United States. A ship called Empress of Asia docked in the Vancouver harbour on April 29, 1918 and Masaryk with his team headed for Chicago.⁵⁵ This was not Masaryk's first time in the windy city. In the summer of 1902, he served as a Visiting Professor in Slavic Studies at the University of Chicago. His lectures became very prestigious and he received honorary doctorate from the university.⁵⁶ It was believed that Bohemia was a great country, which gave life to a great man, Professor Masaryk. During First World War, Masaryk fought to obtain support from other influential countries (such as USA) for the founding of a Czechoslovak state. Knowing he had supporters in Chicago, he made a short visit to the windy city. Masaryk made use of influential people who were a part or leaders of Bohemian clubs or organizations in the United States. The Czechs were excited and supported the idea of an independent Czechoslovakia. Čermák helped aid the Masaryk group and was involved in activities that supported the rebirth of this independent state.

⁵³ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 50.

⁵⁴ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 50.

⁵⁵ Jan Herben, *T.G.Masaryk* (Prague: Sfinx, 1946), 278.

⁵⁶ Herben, *T.G.Masaryk*, 114.

Čermák was also one of the leading organizers of such events in Chicago.⁵⁷ Masaryk was on a mission to persuade as many people as possible to support his idea of Czech state. He toured a few cities in the United States (his wife, Charlotte Garrigue-Masaryk was from New York, so he was no stranger there) and finally on October 18, 1918, the Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation by its Provisional Government (also known as the Washington Declaration) was drafted in Washington D.C. and published by The Czechoslovak Paris-based Provisional Government. It was announced that Czechoslovakia separated itself from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Washington Declaration of November 1918 was a direct result of two previous Agreements. The Cleveland Agreement from October 22, 1915 and the Pittsburgh Agreement from May 30, 1918.⁵⁸

1.7 Mayor of Chicago

When Antonín took office, he was committed to a program of economy and retrenchment. The city of Chicago was in debt and its financial structure was crumbling down. He started his first day in office by discharging more than two thousand temporary employees. By August, 1,085 people had been discharged at an annual saving of 2,483,041 million.⁵⁹ Another important step on the recovery program was to win the fight against mafia. Even before Čermák became mayor, it was publicly announced that mobsters such as Al Capone do not belong to the society and are public enemies. They have forfeited any constitutional right they may have had because of the crimes they have committed. It was also said that they should be executed for the murders they are responsible. On June 5, 1931, enough evidence was accumulated to indict Al Capone on twenty-two counts of income-tax evasion. Capone's trial attracted a lot of attention. On October 24, 1931, after a ten-day trial, Al Capone was sentenced to eleven years in Federal Prison.⁶⁰ Once Capone was behind bars, Čermák went after his gang-member friends. Namely his brother Ralph Capone, friend and favourite Frank Nitti and Sam Guzik. And while he was trying to convict these men, we went back to his main goal - finding enough money to get Chicago back up on its feet. Another important issue for Čermák was prohibition. Until his last day, he fought to end prohibition, through the support of wet-enough presidential candidates and other political figures.

⁵⁷ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 96.

⁵⁸ Herben, *T.G.Masaryk*, 323-5.

⁵⁹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 259-60.

⁶⁰ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 227.

When it came to the 1933 presidential elections, Čermák did not hide the fact that he would have preferred Hamilton Lewis as a Democratic candidate in the presidential elections than Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Čermák saw Lewis as a man who is wet-enough and a man that would fight the prohibition until his last breath. Despite Čermák's efforts, Roosevelt became the Democratic presidential candidate. ⁶¹

1.8 Trip to Europe as a Mayor

A year after the conviction of the mafia boss, Čermák undertook a trip to Europe. But during this visit, signs of his decaying health were starting to show. These were mainly the effects of the gruelling election campaign. During his visit to Carlsbad, he underwent a short curative stay. Čermák's main goal of this trip was to attract as many Czechoslovaks as possible to attend the upcoming World Expo in Chicago, which was supposed to begin on June 1, 1933. Chicago at that time had 3,5 million inhabitants.⁶² Apart from Prague, Poděbrady, Carlsbad and Kladno, Antonín Čermák also visited Pilsen and Bratislava. On August 18, 1932, Antonín met with the Czechoslovak president Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk in Bystřička u Martina. Čermák knew Masaryk since 1918, when Masaryk visited Chicago. Antonín Čermák also visited Zlín, where he toured Baťa factories and met the widow of the tragically deceased Tomáš Baťa. After his visit to Czechoslovakia, Antonín left for Poland from where he returned to the United States on September 15, 1932.⁶³ Five months after his return to Chicago, Antonín went to Miami to meet the newly elected American president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt on February 5, 1933.⁶⁴ While in Miami, Čermák wanted to persuade Roosevelt to provide his city with a federal loan, which was needed to ensure that municipal employees – particularly firemen and teachers – would get long held-up salaries.

1.9 Miami, Florida

After coming back from his trip to Europe, Čermák was a Roosevelt man. He mentioned Roosevelt in every speech he gave and became the initiator of the founding of the National Association of Roosevelt Czechoslovakian Clubs of America. In support of the campaign, Čermák organized an election fund and he took care of the financial coverage of the election campaign. On November 8, 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected the 32nd president

⁶¹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 299-301.

⁶² Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 353-55.

⁶³ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 238-43.

⁶⁴ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 318.

of the United States of America, defeating Herbert Hoover. Roosevelt was voted for by around 26,7 million people and 17,7 million people voted for Hoover.⁶⁵

In February 1933, Čermák got the opportunity to meet with James Farley in Miami, Florida. James Farley managed Roosevelt's campaign and after the elections he became the leader of the Democratic Party. Čermák was to meet with him to discuss future financial aid for Chicago. At the same time, the President-elect Roosevelt was expected to come back from his yachting trip and greet his Florida voters. Čermák took the opportunity to see the president.

1.10 The Assassination

On February 15, 1933, president Theodore Delano Roosevelt arrived from his yachting trip in Miami. In the harbour, the President-elect got into a car and was driven to a reception which was arranged in Bayfont Park in Miami. Roosevelt was in the back seat of the car, elevated by his people to give a speech of 145 words. After giving the speech from the automobile, Roosevelt sat back and a few people came up to the vehicle to exchange a few words with the President, including Čermák. The vehicle was about to drive off when shots were fired. Five people were hit, including Čermák.⁶⁶

The man who did the shooting, an Italian immigrant called Giuseppe Zangara, was standing about 30 feet away from the President's car. At first, he could not aim properly, so he climbed up on a chair to get a better view. When he fired the first shot, people around him immediately noticed what was happening and a man standing behind him tried to stop him by yanking the shooter's hand in an upward direction so he could not hurt more people. But the shooter resisted and fired four more shots. The crowd immediately took after the assassin, but the police got to him to take him away.⁶⁷

After Čermák got hit, he was walked over to the President's car, which had been halted. He was driven to the hospital supported in Roosevelt's arms. The President took care of Čermák all the way to the hospital, trying to keep him alive and in his senses. In the hospital, the doctors stated that the bullet has pierced the right lung and became lodged in a vertebra.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 247.

⁶⁶ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 318.

⁶⁷ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 252.

⁶⁸ Pappas, Theodore N. "How A Failed Assassination Attempt on Franklin Delano Roosevelt Ended in the Death of Anton Cermak, Mayor of Chicago." *Clinics in Surgery*, January 7, 2019: 1-6. <http://www.remedypublications.com/open-access/how-a-failed-assassination-attempt-on-franklin-delano-roosevelt-ended-in-the-death-of-anton-cermak-mayor-of-chicago-3702.pdf> (accessed April 6, 2020).

After some time, some of the heart fibres became paralyzed. An announcement of pneumonia, gangrene of the heart and septic pneumonia followed shortly after.⁶⁹ On February 21, his condition was described as critical. After February 28, he started to improve. His condition changed every day. On some days he was given solid food, some days he was groaning with pain. As a result of his changing condition, he was placed in an oxygen room on March 1. After being in a coma for a few hours, Antonín Čermák passed away in the morning of March 6, 1933.⁷⁰

After Čermák was placed in the hospital on February 15, President Roosevelt came to see him. Roosevelt talked to Čermák the night of the shooting and stayed to visit him the next day. Čermák expressed his concern to the President about the unpaid teachers. Even after being wounded, he could not forget the well-being of Chicago's citizens or his family. Čermák went on to warn Roosevelt about his safety. Few days later Čermák signed an authorization for a proxy to sign tax warrants which were to be used to pay the teachers. As long as it was possible, Čermák fought for his people.⁷¹

1.10.1 After death

Special train was arranged to bring his body back to Chicago. The casket was first brought to Lawndale, where crowds gathered to pay their respects and tributes. Then the body lay in state in the city hall for twenty-four hours. Around 76,000 people viewed Čermák's body in the city hall any many more thousands in his home. A ceremony at the Chicago Stadium was organized, at least 23,000 people attended this ceremony. The floor of the Stadium was transformed with a sea of lawn and flowers in the form of great cross. Representatives of Czech organizations attended the ceremony as well as Čermák's other ethnic supporters.⁷²

Čermák's friends and supporters wanted to establish more lasting tributes. The Twenty-second Street was renamed Cermak Road, the forest preserves had a Cermak Wood and later a Cermak Pool. This was all the government in Chicago and Illinois were willing to do in perpetuation of the memory of the greatest boss Chicago has produced.⁷³

Antonín Čermák left much more than places named after him. He showed incredible skill in conquering the local and state Democratic machine and showed undying and successful enmity to national Prohibition. He showed the public how to take a stand a fight

⁶⁹ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 254-5.

⁷⁰ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 328.

⁷¹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 326-28.

⁷² Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 328.

⁷³ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 331.

until the end. His tireless campaign of public education and agitation against the Eighteenth Amendment was what is so inspiring. He proved that Prohibition was against the wishes of the majority. He fought hard to ensure this personal liberty be given back to the people.

Antonín did not live long enough to see the repeal amendment come into effect in November. A week after his passing, the Cullen Bill was passed, allowing 3.2 per cent beer and a month after, Illinois and twenty-two other states had the right to legally sell beer.⁷⁴ He did not have the opportunity to celebrate victory after thirteen long years of continuous fighting. Čermák ruled with an iron fist. Being state representative, alderman, bailiff of the Municipal Court, president of the county board and mayor, many remembered him for his strength, endurance and cleverness.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 331-4.

⁷⁵ Glosnell, Harold F. *Machine Politics: Chicago Model* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 13.

2 CHICAGO

Chicago was becoming an important industrial center, and an important center for the processing of agricultural products. The symbol of Chicago - one of the city's biggest businesses - were its slaughterhouses. Chicago was processing tones of meat and requiring a massive labor force to do so. And this is what originally brought young Čermák to Chicago. He quickly realized that the differences between the numerous ethnic groups living there could prove to be politically important. He started to get involved in the Democratic Party.⁷⁶ While Čermák was in charge of the Cook County, he built 1,600 kilo-meters of concrete roads and 26 bridges. He also expanded the area of protected forest reserve from 25,000 acres to 32,000 acres and built golf courses and other recreational areas.⁷⁷

2.1 History and Immigration

On October 8, 1871, a fire began in a barn. Thanks to the force of the wind, this blaze grew into the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. After 36 hours, the blazing fire burned down more than three miles in the centre of the city, demolishing more than 18,000 buildings. Around 300 people lost their lives and 300,000 people lost their homes.⁷⁸ The people of Chicago managed to rebuild the city. They were aided by money given from people around the world.

The city was rebuilt and expanded. It is traditionally understood as the turning point of Chicago's early history, the Great Fire strengthened the reputation of the city, making Chicago a rising city of the future.⁷⁹

After the year 1880, most people who came to the States from Europe were from the south or east. A mosaic of ethnically distinctive neighbourhoods was coming to life in some of the main cities like New York or Chicago. In the years 1921 and 1924, the Congress set an upper limit to the total number of immigrants. It has created a quota system which discriminated against people of the nations from which the most people were immigrating to the states.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 8-9.

⁷⁷ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 83.

⁷⁸ Karen Sawislak, *Fire of 1871*, "Encyclopedia of Chicago," 2005, accessed March 28, 2020, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1740.html>.

⁷⁹ Sawislak, "Fire of 1871."

⁸⁰ Philip Parker, Thomas Cussans, Matthew Parker, *The Times History of the World* (London: HarperCollins, 1999), 224-5.

2.2 Czech clubs and organizations in Chicago

Czech immigrants living in Chicago wanted to keep some of their Czech traditions with them. They were proud of their country and of the country's organizations and clubs which often promoted sport among young people and the right state of mind. One of the most important organizations established in Chicago was Sokol. In the Czech Republic, Sokol is an organization which was founded 1862 in Prague by Tyrš and Fügner. It is a Slav gymnastic society which promotes a communal spirit and physical fitness. The Sokols were primarily physical culture associations but were also involved as transmitters of nationalistic and traditional values. Children of all ages are signed up to all kinds of sporting activities and go to trainings, competitions etc.⁸¹ Čermák was a dedicated member of Sokol. He praised the club for the spirits it was representing.⁸²

Another example of Czech organization is newspaper Svornost (Concord). Svornost came out every Sunday from 1875 until 1957. The newspaper's subject was the life of Czech Americans living in Cook County, Chicago, Illinois.⁸³ Other Czech newspapers were Hlas národa and Nedělní hlasatel.⁸⁴ These organizations and clubs led by people of Czech origin were not only newspaper specialized. Antonín joined a few clubs in his early years in Pilsen. The organizations were: Knights of Pythias, Foresters, Masons and Zoldaks.⁸⁵

2.3 Chicago Politics

Chicago politics often evokes images of a one-party system, dominated by a boss-controlled Democratic political machine whose crafty politicians dangle patronage before competing ethnic and racial groups in return for votes.⁸⁶ It is known that Chicago has always been the centre of organized crime, which has worked its way into politics as well. Corruption scandals, bribes and other kinds of illegal activities were ever present. The city's politics was always a contest between private interests and public needs. After the fire of 1871, the city needed money to build an infrastructure of streets, sewer system, sidewalks, water system and schools and shops. The city had to work out how to obtain money to create jobs and ensure economic growth. Chicagoans differed in opinion about money. Some called for

⁸¹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 19.

⁸² Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 45.

⁸³ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 32.

⁸⁴ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 19.

⁸⁵ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 19.

⁸⁶ Roger Biles, *Machine Politics*, Encyclopedia of Chicago, 2005, accessed March 28, 2020, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/774.html>.

federal government aid for these projects and some preferred private development. Until the Civil War era, private interests largely prevailed.⁸⁷

2.3.1 Corrupt Machine

The city of Chicago was the city of corruption. Even the Party Machines were using tricks how to get more votes than they really would. One of the main tricks they used is the rigging the electoral rolls. They would put names of deceased names on the roll. People would then come and vote instead of the dead person but in their name. The Machine officials even went to the graveyards and would write down the names of deceased people, register them to vote and someone else would later vote in their name. When Chicago was dealing with the Depression, people were desperate for food. The Machine workers would promise desperate people on the streets some food or a drink if they voted for them. It was also noted that people who registered but did not come to vote did not lose their votes. Someone voted for them. Nursing homes were of great interest to the Democratic Machine. The Democratic Ward Committeemen went to nursing homes to help old people with their voting. These nursing homes did not protest and cooperated with the Committeemen because they were inspected by them.⁸⁸ It is known that the Democrats were involved with the criminals but not as much as the Republicans.

2.3.2 Support of ethnic minorities

In the 1931 mayoralty elections, Čermák was voted for by seven out of nine ethnic groups. The Czechoslovaks, the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Yugoslavs, the Germans, the Swedes, the Jews and the Native-American all voted for Čermák. This left Thompson with majority of votes from the Italians and the Negroes.⁸⁹ In 1932, the Negroes remained labeled as Republican. Čermák knew, that in order for his machine which he created to be truly effective, the ethnicities should join together in a coalition. After Čermák's passing in 1933, signs of adversity towards the Republican Party began to emerge. More ethnicities were joining in consensus and leaving the Republican Party and surrendering to the Democrats.⁹⁰ Their main reasons were largely based on the issue of ethnic concern. Support was given to

⁸⁷ Biles, "Machine Politics."

⁸⁸ Kelly, Bauer, "Chicago And Rigged Elections? The History Is Even Crazier Than You've Heard," DNAinfo, October 19, 2016, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20161019/downtown/vote-rigged-elections-history-fraud-stolen-trump/>

⁸⁹ Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, 161.

⁹⁰ Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, 207.

the ethnic Democrats as well as patronage jobs and their representation on party tickets.⁹¹ After the Democrats like Edward J. Kelly or Richard J. Daley recognized the voting power of the Negro-vote, they started sending the Negroes to Capitol Hill. The Negroes started gradually leaving the Republican Party and joining the Democrats because they recognized that the Democrats represented their interests better. While converting the Blacks, local patronage positions and emergency programs during the Depression proved effective. In the presidential elections of 1936, 62 percent of the Negroes voted for the Democratic candidate F.D. Roosevelt and only 28 percent gave their vote to the Republican candidate, Alf Landon. After this considerable change in the Negroes' minds, the Democratic Party started properly valuing their support.⁹²

Ethnic groups of Chicago were always a large portion of the city's population. But not always was their power realized. That meant that the groups were unable to work together and rather than joining together. By the 1930s, the Chicago Democratic Party became a house for all peoples, meaning everybody would find something they were looking for. Every ethnic group was represented and had equal opportunities. This resulted in the expansion of American democracy.⁹³

2.4 Progressive Era

Antonín Čermák grew up in the Progressive Era. It is the time between 1890 and 1920. In those times, America has made enormous progress. Social movements have turned into political movements. The society used education as a weapon against their problems. The people valued safe environment. The public led a battle against corruption of politics and corporations. During those times, people came up with solutions to deal with inequality and injustice. The people of progressive era were most concerned with the social problems that revolved around industrial capitalist society. Owners of companies wanted to maximize their profits, so they kept the wages as low as possible and the working hours as long as possible. One of the most important books of this era is *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. In his book, he describes the meatpacking districts and the conditions there. Descriptions of rotten meat and the treatment of meatpacking workers led to the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat

⁹¹ Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, 207.

⁹² National Archives, "Party Realignment And The New Deal," United States House of Representatives, History, Art & Archives, accessed May 5, 2020, <https://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Essays/Keeping-the-Faith/Party-Realignment--New-Deal/>.

⁹³ Allswang, *A House for All Peoples*, 212.

Inspection Act of 1906.⁹⁴ Child labour in factories was fought against and finally limited. Industrial capitalism was limiting freedom.

Workers at factories were not satisfied with their work-conditions. Unions were being formed. Protests were held. The progressive era was a time when people joined together to make a change. The people wanted to protect the social welfare, promote moral improvement, create economic reforms and foster efficiency. Big part of the moral improvement was prohibition. Child labour was demolished. Women entered public life as reformers and formed clubs of their own. As a result of their efforts, in 1920 the 19th Amendment was ratified, granting women their right to vote.

2.5 Prohibition

History of prohibition in the USA goes back to the start of the 19th century. Around the year 1830, organizations who fought against alcoholism started to form. In 1846, the state of Maine has passed a law banning the production of alcohol. Slowly, Anti-Saloon Leagues in North and South of the United States started spreading the prohibition law. The Congress passed the Webb-Kenyon Act in December of 1913. This law was sent to the President on February 18, 1913. In his last days of being in office, President William Howard Taft vetoed the law, but the veto was overridden by the Senate. The law prohibited the distribution of alcoholic beverages into any state, if by doing so, local laws of the state would be violated.⁹⁵ This act encouraged prohibitionists around the country. Their spokesman was a Republican congressman Andrew Volstead. The prohibition law was later called the Volstead Act, taking the congressman's name. President Wilson vetoed this law but was later outvoted. On January 16, 1919, the Congress passed the Volstead Act as the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America. This law became effective on July 1, 1919 and was repealed by the Twenty-first Amendment on December 5, 1933.

At that time, Čermák was the Chairman of the Licensing Committee. When the prohibition came, the city lost a lot of money because the pubs and restaurants were not serving any alcohol and not paying taxes on alcoholic beverages as a result of that. The amount of money these institutions was ten million dollars annually. Before prohibition,

⁹⁴Kraig, Bruce. "Food Processing: Local Market." Encyclopedia of Chicago, 2005. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/468.html> (accessed May 2, 2020)

⁹⁵ Brož, Čermák versus Al Capone, 58.

Chicago had around 7,000 pubs and restaurants who paid this tax. Right after the Volstead Act came into effect, around 15,000 secret pubs opened.⁹⁶

In 1915, around six months after William Hale Thompson was elected Mayor of Chicago, he decided to close all restaurants and wine-selling places on Sundays. What was interesting was that before the mayoral elections, Thompson signed a petition against Prohibition. What was obvious, was that Thompson's sudden change of mind was based on money. If Thompson was with the Dry (people who support prohibition), he opened the doors for illegal manufacturing and distribution of alcoholic beverages. The Dry were looking forward to that, because that meant they would be making a lot of money. That is why, Thompson, blinded by the idea of money, became one of the Dry people.

Antonín Čermák, being one of the Wet people did not miss this change of Thompson's decision and on November 7, 1915, he organized a march in Chicago to protest prohibition. Thompson did not attend the march, which was taken as an insult to the city of Chicago, because he always attended marches which were organized by the Dry.⁹⁷ This and many other feuds started a war between Thompson and Čermák. The war went on for around sixteen years during which the underworld was living their best life and made a lot of money.

2.6 Depression

Great Depression is time period which will never be forgotten. On what is now called Black Tuesday, in 1929, stock prices on Wall Street collapsed. Cause of this crash is mostly assigned to margin trading. The Wall Street Crash caused millions of people to lose their jobs. People were living from day to day. Chicago was one of the hardest hit of all major cities in the States. By the third quarter of 1932, the amount of unemployed people in Chicago was estimated at 750,000. In the whole country, eight million people were unemployed. By October of 1932, the state of Illinois received 14 million dollars in federal loans. By the year 1935, rents in Chicago were approximately one-half of that they were ten years before.⁹⁸

In Chicago, voluntary charities were unable to meet the demands of the people in need. Being unable to give money, same applied to private fund raising. Chicagoans often made demands upon the authorities, including Čermák. By summer of 1931, thousands of Chicagoans were evicted for not paying rent. By Čermák's own statement, "in September

⁹⁶ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 59-60.

⁹⁷ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 38.

⁹⁸ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 241.

1932, fifty-one out of two hundred twenty-eight city's banks were still open"⁹⁹. Businesses failed. Public employees' salaries were withheld. The crisis pervaded Čermák's entire administration. Čermák had to fight the city's wealthy inhabitants, who resisted any hikes to property tax, making it hard for the lower classes to get any support funds.

Čermák had to tackle fiscal problems. They were caused not only by the depression. By 1929 most local governments were in a deep financial swamp, resulting in a good part from archaic governmental and revenue systems and an impossible tax mechanism. For these reasons, the existence and solvency of the Chicago are governments were threatened. As of May 1, 1931, according to Čermák, there were 670,000,000 dollars in unpaid taxes. These taxes have not been paid mostly by people not willing to accept the discrepancies between taxes on real property and personal property.¹⁰⁰ These governments had to be controlled by the state and funds had to be found to operate these governments. Tax-anticipation warrant was introduced.

"It is a form of a script issued by the municipality to bankers in exchange for cash, to employees in payment of work, and to merchants in payment of deliveries to the city. Its security consists of taxes to be collected in the future, that is, of anticipated taxes".¹⁰¹ During these hard times, Čermák was always looking to find funds to pay city employees. But to make a change and obtain the funds, the bankers insisted on several items of legislation as a requisite for considering any loans.¹⁰² Legislative action was required. Čermák decided to seek federal aid for Chicago, He urged a federal prosperity loan to help his city deal with the depression. The city was denied any loans. Finding this unacceptable, Čermák went to Washington many more times, receiving a small loan. He continued to invoke federal aid regularly until his death.¹⁰³

2.7 Organized crime in Chicago

Organized crime refers to complex relationships among different criminal networks. A group of criminals becomes organized when they start buying off the police and fixing ballots to their advantage. These organized groups of criminals often have connections among people

⁹⁹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 243.

¹⁰⁰ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 247.

¹⁰¹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 248.

¹⁰² Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 248-51.

¹⁰³ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 258.

in high places and can call in favours.¹⁰⁴ At the turn of the century, the United States revolved around organized crime. Prohibition opened doors to illegal distribution alcoholic beverages. Other problems across the country were bribery, gambling and prostitution. In 1920, a third economy opened; the prohibition of the manufacturing, sale and transportation of alcoholic beverages. This amendment lasted from 1920 until 1933. This period of time gave way to crime and mafia. Illegal production and sale of home-distilled alcoholic beverages became one way how to make money. By doing so, these criminals were exploiting the new economic opportunity of alcoholic beverages.¹⁰⁵

Born on the turn of the century, Alphonse Capone, originally from New York, relocated to Chicago. For years, he remained by his at the time boss' side – Johnny Torrio. Capone then took over the business and kept Chicago citizens hydrated.¹⁰⁶

Among all of Capone's crimes, he was ever only found guilty of tax evasion at that time and in 1931, he was imprisoned. But still, throughout the time he was in prison, his Mob still produced and sold alcoholic beverages. Capone managed to run his mob from prison, that shows how complex the syndicate was.

2.7.1 Al Capone and Organized Crime

In 1919 the United States of America passed a law which defined an alcoholic beverage as a beverage with more than a half percent of alcohol content. The Prohibition Law aimed to suppress alcoholism and to increase productivity in American factories. This gave way to organized crime. The main centre of the black market became Chicago. Many people were dying – mostly because of domestic production of alcohol from industrial spirit resulting in poor quality of the liquor.

The mafia boss Alphonse Gabriel Capone, better known as Al Capone, became the central figure of American Prohibition. Capone was never convicted for his murders but was convicted for seemingly trivial tax evasion. In public, Capone built a reputation as a successful businessman dealing in old furniture, which he generously handed out to the poor and needy. He also became popular thanks to the fact that he could provide citizens with the

¹⁰⁴ Smith, Chris M., and Andrew V. Papachristos. "Trust Thy Crooked Neighbor: Multiplexity in Chicago Organized Crime Networks." *American Sociological Review* 81, no. 4 (2016): 645. Accessed March 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/24756448.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, Chris M., and Andrew V. Papachristos. "Trust Thy Crooked Neighbor: Multiplexity in Chicago Organized Crime Networks." *American Sociological Review* 81, no. 4 (2016): 648. Accessed March 29, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/24756448.

¹⁰⁶ Smith and Papachristos, Trust Thy Crooked Neighbor, 648.

alcohol they then craved. His mob had connections with people in high positions in society.¹⁰⁷

Čermák's view on prohibition was that it was pointless, and he considered himself to be wet. (dry – for prohibition, wet – against). Antonín emphasized that this law mainly served organized crime and was a suppression of the citizens' personal liberty to drink alcoholic beverages. And for that reason, he declared war on city gangs any anybody who supported the Volstead Act.¹⁰⁸

2.7.2 Alphonse Capone

Alphonse Gabriel Capone was born in Brooklyn, New York on January 17, 1899, making him 25 years younger than Čermák. When Čermák was elected bailiff, Capone was born. He grew up in Brooklyn, always getting into trouble and wondering around the New York Harbour. He was violent and rude. After some time, he was under the wing of Johnny Torrio. Johnny Torrio was originally from Naples, 16 years older than Al. He was the mafia boss. Although he believed in quietly dealing with things and that violence was totally unnecessary, he never had a problem with giving out orders to kill someone or to hurt people. Capone saw Torrio as a father figure, a companion and a teacher. At first, Capone attended school but got expelled for missing too many lessons and bad behaviour.¹⁰⁹

Al Capone started working for Torrio and learned a lot from him. How to conduct business, how to deal with people and how to push people into doing things he wanted. But Al was more violent than Torrio. Torrio never hurt a man himself. Capone became a member of a street gang of Irish Americans called The Five Points Gang. The gang was responsible for dispersing crowds of protesting people or even fixing the election, when ordered. Capone had many teachers such as previously mentioned John Torrio or Francesco Iole, later Frankie Yale. He learned a lot from them for example how they took care of their employees by paying their insurance for them. In 1909, Torrio moved most of his business to Chicago, main parts of his organization had to move there. Capone started participating in more of the gang-related activities and later took over the mob.¹¹⁰

But even though he was kept in prison, in the year 1931, he still had considerable power from behind bars. Many people thought of Čermák's action of putting Capone in prison as

¹⁰⁷ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 141.

¹⁰⁸ Berdahl, Clarence A. "Party Membership in the United States, I." *The American Political Science Review*, February 1942: 16-50. www.jstor.org/stable/1948385 (accessed April 20, 2020)

¹⁰⁹ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 30.

¹¹⁰ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 40-3.

an application to join the suicide club. That is why Čermák's assassination is still a widely discussed topic. Al Capone passed away on January 25, 1947. He died of cardiac arrest after suffering a stroke earlier.¹¹¹ The Mob was taken over by Capone's cousin, Frank Nitti.¹¹²

2.7.3 Capone and Thompson

Starting from December 1926, Thompson started his mayoral election campaign. He promised that he would expel gangsters from the city and limit prohibition. Thompson was calling for the censorship of textbooks, he wanted to burn undesired books in public. When it comes to the Volstead Act, he left the Dry club and joined the Wet side, saying that he was wetter than the Atlantic and going to open more than 10,000 taprooms¹¹³. Many important and rich people supported Thompson. Namely Samuel Insull, a multimillionaire, who contributed large amount of money to his campaign. Capone made sure to chip in as well and gave Thompson almost a quarter of a million dollars. The day of elections was a chaos. People were getting killed, Democratic Party supporters were threatened, and Democratic Party clubs were being shot up. It was clear that Thompson was supported by the mafia and various gangs from the city. It was then that Čermák realized that his biggest enemy is not Thompson, but Capone.¹¹⁴

Čermák slowly started a battle with Capone. He decided to ask Washington for help when trying to prove that Capone was not paying taxes. At that time, Chicago was reporting debt of 300 million dollars because of people not paying their taxes and aldermen not doing anything about it. Capone never paid a dollar on taxes because he was claiming that his furniture company was not making more than 5,000 dollars per month. If a company was making less than 5,000 dollars per month, the people in charge did not have to pay taxes. But it was obvious that Capone was making more money and this furniture company was only a cloak under which an enormous gangster business was hiding. It was estimated that in 1928, Capone was making around 20 million dollars annually. Over 1,000 secret taprooms were under his control as well as hundreds of illegal bookmakers, 15 gambling establishments and many more.¹¹⁵ Thompson remains the last Republican of Chicago to date.

¹¹¹ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 268.

¹¹² Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 319-20.

¹¹³ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 125.

¹¹⁴ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 125-7.

¹¹⁵ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 131.

2.7.4 Čermák and corruption

In 1917, Antonín was accused by Municipal Judge Gemmill of graft, corruption, extraction of dues by duress and funds turning into graft money.¹¹⁶ Čermák tried to make the judge change his mind and take the accusations back. His attempts included making a fake phone call to Gemill, secretly handing him a document which proved his innocence or even eavesdropping. Ten years later, Čermák was again accused of graft and corruption, when he pointed out that it makes no sense to carry out ill-considered attacks on the mafia without a plan but instead, he proposed to control Capone's organization by permanent supervision and economic pressure. People thought he was in secret meeting up with the Republicans and even with Al Capone and making deals. None of these accusations were ever proven to be true. In 1929, when Čermák was about to be the president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, he had the support of powerful Germans, such as Charles H Weber, who was the boss of the 45th ward, or Michael and Moe Rosenberg, who ran a prosperous company Iron and Metal Company and made considerable financial contributions to the Democrats. Moe Rosenberg who took care of the company after the passing of his brother, gave over 500,000 dollars to the Cook County Democrats between the years 1929 – 1930, out of which 95,000 dollars was given namely to Čermák. In return, Čermák mediated a total of 90% of Iron and Metal Company's scrap metal collection needs, at a discounted price.¹¹⁷ It was through these deals that everybody received what they wanted.

2.8 Assassination: Zangara or Capone

The assassination of Antonín Čermák sparked up few conspiracy theories debating if the assassin was aiming at Čermák or Roosevelt. After Čermák put Al Capone behind bars, his cousin, Frank Nitti, took over the syndicate. In December 1932, Frank Nitti was shot by a member of Čermák's personal police detail during a raid upon the Capone headquarters. Nitti suffered three gunshot wounds but survived. One theory says that Čermák was shot as a revenge for organizing the raid in which Nitti was almost killed. It is believed that Nitti hired an unknown Italian immigrant, Giuseppe Zangara to do the killing, to divert any possible suspicion away from the syndicate.

Another theory suggests that the assassin was hired by Capone himself. This theory lists Čermák's anti-gangster activities as the main cause of the shooting.¹¹⁸ None of these theories

¹¹⁶ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 87.

¹¹⁷ Brož, *Čermák versus Al Capone*, 153-4.

¹¹⁸ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 320-1.

can be successfully supported because there is no evidence of either of them. The third theory is the one which was ruled as the cause of Čermák's shooting. It says that regardless of any connection to the gang, Zangara was not hired by Capone or Nitti.

Giuseppe Zangara was a thirty-three-year-old Calabrian immigrant. He came to America nine years prior to the shooting. A few days before the shooting, he purchased a pistol with the intention of killing President Hoover. After finding out that Roosevelt was expected in Miami, he changed his plans. Zangara stated that was aiming at the President-elect, not at Čermák but could not aim properly because of the crowd of people who came to see Roosevelt. Zangara never changed his story or his attitude. He consistently voiced Nihilist attitudes, saying that he hates all Presidents, no matter where they come from. Same as he said to hate all officers or anybody who is rich. After Čermák passed away, Giuseppe Zangara was sentenced to death. He was executed in an electric chair on March 20, 1933 at Florida State Prison in Railford.¹¹⁹

To say if Čermák's assassination was orchestrated by the Mafia, ordered by Frank Nitti or just the doing of a sick individual is not easy. But the only scenario which offers enough evidence is that Čermák was shot by Zangara by a mistake.

¹¹⁹ Gottfried, *Boss Cermak of Chicago*, 322.

CONCLUSION

This work presents Antonín Čermák (1873 – 1933) as an extremely purposeful person who was able to overcome all obstacles and use all favorable circumstances to achieve his goals. Antonín Čermák came to the United States with his parents at a very young age, settling down in a city near Chicago which was inhabited by immigrants like the Čermáks were. Through Antonín's adolescence, his brave and fearless nature became apparent, and he relocated to Chicago to start his own business. After being a carter and transporting goods around his neighbourhood which was largely inhabited by immigrants, he met a lot of people, some of which later helped him when becoming to be the Boss of the Chicago Democratic Machine. Antonín started his career as a precinct captain and an alderman. During his time as a precinct captain, he realized the power the immigrants had. While establishing himself as a businessman and a politician, Čermák supported T.G. Masaryk's efforts to establish an independent Czechoslovak state. He slowly built his constituency and with the help of his immigrant friends who were important leaders in the urban politics, he managed to create a coalition of immigrants, and lower-class people who were his vehicle in his rise to becoming the first non-American Mayor of Chicago. Since the election of Čermák, no Republican candidate has won the mayoralty elections in Chicago. By bringing representatives from different communities into leadership positions, Čermák managed to join people of different ethnic groups. After being elected Mayor of Chicago, Čermák had to prove his ability to solve problems by tackling the problem of the Great Depression which left thousands unemployed. He secured a federal loan which helped the city greatly and long before becoming mayor of Chicago, he had to face people's personal liberty being taken away. He fought against Prohibition and called for the repeal of the amendment. His devotion to the fight against prohibition resulted in Čermák's support of Hamilton Lewis, the almost-presidential candidate proposed by the Democratic Party in 1931, rather than his full devotion to the 1933 president-elect F.D. Roosevelt. His life was cut short by an assassin's bullet in 1933, when he came to Florida to talk with president Roosevelt about securing another federal loan for Chicago. Čermák was able to organize and unite people and promoted the idea of equal opportunities for all. Through his interethnic ties, he managed to create a powerful Democratic Party Machine which still functions today.

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