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A CENTURY OF THE UNION OF CZECHOSLOVAK MATHEMATICIANS AND PHYSICISTS

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In 1962 the Union of Czechoslovak Mathematicians and Physicists (*Jednota československých matematiků a fyziků*) celebrates its hundredth anniversary. It started in 1862 as the “Society for Free Lectures in Mathematics and Physics”. It was originally a society of students of mathematics and physics, which aimed at facilitating the study of these two disciplines by arranging lectures on mathematics and physics held by its members. In 1869 it was reorganized in order to associate not only students of mathematics and physics but also graduates in these subjects and received the name of “Union of Czech Mathematicians”. It was not until 1912 that the society took the more accurate name of “Union of Czech Mathematicians and Physicists”. It is interesting that at the same time as the Union came into being in this country, the “Moskovskoye matematicheskoye obshchestvo” appeared in Moscow. In 1864 a mathematical circle was formed, which in 1867 became today’s Moscow Mathematical Society. Immediately in the seventies contact was made with the Obshchestvo.

The Union of Czechoslovak Mathematicians and Physicists can justly look with pride on the great work it has done for the development of mathematics and physics and of culture in general in this country. It associated almost all scientifically working mathematicians and physicists and also a large majority of the secondary school teachers of these subjects. It was a great support to scientific workers and struggled for the penetration of new and progressive ideas into education.

In support of science it built up a large mathematics and physics library; since 1872 it has published the *Journal for the Advancement of Mathematics and Physics* (*Časopis pro pěstování matematiky a fyziky*); it created possibilities of publication for Czech mathematicians and physicists and enabled Czech and later Slovak university textbooks, compendia and monographs, as well as books popularizing mathematics and physics, to be published. The old Austrian government gave very

poor financial support to Czech science and research. During the period between the two world wars the sums devoted to science by the government of the Czechoslovak Republic were also quite insufficient. The Union was thus faced with the basic problem of raising the necessary finances for the upkeep of the library and for its publishing work, which, thanks to the sagacity and initiative of the leadership, were successfully found.

From the very beginning the Union was aware of the fact that the teaching standards in mathematics and physics at secondary schools must be raised and that progressive teachers must be aided in doing so. At the beginning of this century the Union published a series of textbooks for secondary schools along the reformist lines contained in the so called Merano programme then spreading throughout Europe, and since that time it has devoted great care to the publication of modern secondary school textbooks. During the first world war it prepared a plan for the reform of secondary schools, which it put before the public after the war. It was based on the following progressive ideas: mathematics and physics are very important sciences for the development of society and should accordingly have their place in the curriculum of secondary schools. Secondary schools should be organized so that they are accessible to children from all strata of the population and not only to a privileged few. These ideas were far in advance of political development in the country and the Union was therefore able to achieve only very little between the two world wars.

After the second world war conditions in the Czechoslovak Republic changed considerably. The Government had at its disposal large funds from production which had formerly passed into the pockets of private businessmen. It therefore took over care for science and provides it with sums of money of which scientists before the second world war did not even dream. The Union does not therefore need to worry about finances for scientific publications, the journal and library. In the reorganization in 1956, therefore, it became an Union of scientists and teachers in which its members exert their efforts and use their own initiative for a better development of mathematics and physics, for better use of the results of these sciences in practice and for an increase in the teaching standards of these disciplines in schools. Today the Union does not consist only of the three original branches in the former three university towns, but has now 20 branches in the most important towns of the country. The Union thus helps the whole population in its efforts to raise the material and cultural level of our socialist society in the spirit of the motto it chose for its jubilee year: *Mathematics and Physics — the Basis of Technical Development.*