

from **BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN**

To most soaring devotees it must be inconceivable that the sport can be ruled by political influence. The following article from behind the Iron Curtain tells of the struggle to develop soaring in Czechoslovakia against both the normal forces of nature and under restrictions of German and Soviet domination.

The Author (who for his own safety is not named) was expelled from the Czech Aeroclub due to his political opinions. Thus he was barred from soaring since a Czech law forbids any but members of the club from soaring activities.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA is just a little country situated at the crossroads of the mighty powers, its territory often occupied and its population persecuted. Even the development of Soaring has twice been interrupted by assaults from abroad; now it is again suffering from restrictions caused by the political jealousy which has become the world's illness.

There was little or no advance in aviation until 1921, when the first "Skips" were made with gliders in Brno by a small group of university students under the leadership of Ing. Hadrabus. Lack of funds, however, cut short this activity. Neither the public nor the officials discovered the great importance of motorless flight and, instead, directed all attention and money toward motor-flying.

Nevertheless, the "Soaring Group" of the Czechoslovak Aeroclub was established and began activities in 1923. The First National Contest in Gliding was held this year and the winner, H. Baitler, achieved these "performances":

Time 54 seconds. Distance 700 yards!

The Second National Contest in Soaring a year later had better results. Col. Skala, flying the French "Dewoitine," set a duration mark of two hours and 21 minutes and this contest probably marked the actual start of Czechoslovak soaring.

The third contest held in 1925 came to grief when a gale blew up during the latter part of the meet and destroyed the tent-hangars and their sailplanes.

This blow resulted in the loss of public interest, and with only aged planes remaining, Czechoslovak soaring settled into doldrums lasting three years.

The year 1928, however, was a year of revival. Lud-

vik Elsní, a young engineer, aroused the public and the authorities. With elementary training in Grunau, Germany, he attained his "C" and became the first civil gliding pilot in Czechoslovakia. This awakened public interest and a meeting to reorganize soaring, held in 1930, was followed by the formation of the first six groups of about 30 pilots who became holders of "A" and "B" licenses.

The first home-built sailplane made its maiden flight in 1932. That year auto and aero-tow take-offs were attempted by pilots in the "Kassel 20" and "Kassel 25" both built in Czechoslovakia under license.

A year later Pilot Stejskal made the first real thermal flight, with a time of 45 minutes. Rodovsky set a duration record of three hours four minutes on a "hang."

The aircraft factory at Zlin began building cheap gliders in 1934 and these became the standard equipment of every soaring group until the beginning of World War II. The Zlin-VII, Praha II and the two-seat El-2-M were quite up to date, even if not comparable to high performance German types.

The National Contests were resumed in 1935 after nearly 10 years. Pittschak set a duration record of 8 hours, 15 minutes, and Rodovsky took altitude and distance honors with flights to 2600 feet and 17 miles. The following year Purok advanced the duration mark to 10 hours, 21 minutes.

Yugoslav entries made the 1936 Contest an international meet, and it was held under the auspices of the new department for motorless flight. The "Tulak" and the "VSB-35" were among the high performance types built in this year. Pitterman set a new altitude mark of 4000 feet.

Czechoslovaks made their first visits to other countries in 1937, flying in Austria and Rhon, Germany. Prachar flew 60 miles and attained the first Czechoslovak Silver "C" while on the German trip, but all the Czech planes were damaged during the contest and two pilots were injured. Czech experience was too "green" for international competition. This year also saw the first winch launching and the development of the first Czechoslovak motor-powered sailplane.

The following year was the year of national tragedy,



Trainers for the youth of Czechoslovakia — "Krajaneks."