

SOKOL SLETS – THE ESSENCE OF GYMNASTICS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA, CZECH AND SLOVAK REPUBLIC (CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF GYMNASTICS)

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Abstract

History of Sokol gymnastics started in Prague in 1862. The most important task of Sokol organization was healthy nation, which can be more productive and self defending. For the purpose of mass national exercise the Slets were organized. Since organized the first Slet in 1882 and the last one 2012, Slets lived ups and downs, sometimes were even bigger event than Olympic Games. Slets were very influential events, therefore politics interfered and adopted aims and means of Slets; changing name into Spartakiada. With democratic changes in Europe, Slets got new design and image. Internationally idea of Slets was adopted by FIG and in 1953 the first Gimnaestrada has been organised. Despite Sokol is not so powerfull as it was, the main idea of national healthy physical exercise lives further.

Keywords: *gymnastics, sokol, slets.*

INTRODUCTION

One hundred and fifty years ago, on February 16, 1862, the „Prague Gymnastic Unit“ came into being at the Prague Normal School, located then on Panska Street, Bohemia (Gajdoš 2012).

The English term of „sokol“ is falcon; a „slet“ is a rally, gathering or demonstration. The term slet is derived from the Czech „sletat se“, a flying together toward a destination from all the Slav Sokol communities in the world. Pan-slet refers to a gymnastic festival in which Sokols from all nations participate.

The Czech Sokol Society and then the Czechoslovak Sokol Union organized the slets in Prague to demonstrate achievements in the Sokol physical education and national cultural programs and, up to 1918, the Slav Sokol aspiration for freedom and democracy

and liberation of their oppressed nations from foreign bondage. The early slet-festivals were staged at Rifleman Island in Prague, Prague-Bubeneč Park Field, Letna Stadium, and Strahov Stadium. Foreign civil and military dignitaries, along with representatives of educational institutions and physical culture organizations, came to the slets to pay tribute to the Sokols and their achievements, and to learn the principles of Tyrs' Sokol system of physical education. Slav Sokol societies, organizations and federations sent to the slets not only representatives but their gymnasts as well to perform in the slet program. Thus, gymnasts came from Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, Bulgaria, the United States, Poland, and Yugoslavia, with larger representations after World War One.

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, June 18-19, 1882

Staged at Rifleman Island and directed by Dr. Miroslav Tyrs, the chief physical director of the Sokol of Prague and the founder of the Sokol movement. 700 gymnasts performed from 76 Sokol units in Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia. Sokols from Paris, Croatia and Ljubljana, Slovenia participated.

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, June 27-30, 1891

This slet was planned for June 1887 but was forbidden by the Austrian authorities. It was then organized two years later and staged at the Prague-Bubeneč Park Field. In its program participated 207 Sokol units with 2373 performing gymnasts and 5520 Sokol members in official uniforms in the grand parade. Two hundred and twenty-four six-man teams registered for gymnastic competitions. Sokols from the United States, Croatia, Slovenia, Galicia and Paris (gymnasts from the French Gymnastic Federation) also participated in the program. At that time the Czech Sokol Union consisted of 229 local units with 24.268 members.

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, June 28 – July 1895

Staged in Letna Stadium which was constructed to accommodate 8.000 performing gymnasts and 50.000 spectators. Directed by the CSU chief physical director, JUDr. Jindra Vanicek. 7.533 members in official uniforms marched in the grand parade with other members from 346 Sokol units. 4.287 gymnasts performed in the program. 439 six-man teams participated in gymnastic competitions. At this time, the Czech Sokol Union consisted of 405 local units with 44.660 members, of which 11.225 were active gymnasts. Sokols from Paris, Croatia, Slovenia and Galicia attended the slet.

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, June-July 1st, 1901

Staged again at Letna Stadium, now enlarged to accommodate 75.000 spectators. Directed by Jindra Vanicek. 11.095 members in uniforms among thousands of others in national costumes marched in the grand parade through the streets of Prague. 6.705 men, 867 women and 19.000 juniors performed in the program. Sokols from the United States, Russia, Croatia, Slovenia, Galicia and Montenegro, along with officials from Denmark and Bulgaria, attended the slet. At the end of 1900, the Czech Sokol Union consisted of 37 districts, 571 local units with 47.420 members, of them 9.808 active gymnasts.

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, June 16 – July 1st, 1907

Staged at Letna Stadium under the auspices of the Slav Sokol Federation, directed by its chief physical director, Jindra Vanicek. 12.415 men and women in uniforms and national costumes marched in the grand parade. 8.100 men and 2.372 women performed in the various gymnastic compositions. In the program was a number, the „Chess Tournament,“ symbolizing the Hussite victory under Jan Zizka over the Hungarian and Czech King Zigmund in 1422 at Nemečky Brod, Bohemia. Its first presentation was on June 8, 1907. The singing society „Hlahol“ presented a concert at the city auditorium to welcome and honor the official guest delegations of the Slav Sokol organizations. The slet was attended by Sokols from Paris, Russia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Galicia, Bulgaria, and the United States. The Slovak Sokol U.S.A. for the first time sent a 7-man team which performed one day in the slet program. On Childrens Day (June 16th) 1.800 boys and girls performed in games, races and various contests. On Juniors' Day (June 23rd) 2.000 boys and 600 girls performed (boys in two divisions: 1.400 students, ages 8-14 and 600 industrial apprentices, ages 14-18) the routine calisthenics, games and races. June

27th Prague Choir „Hlahol“ Concert held at the city auditorium to honor officials from foreign governments and institutions and the Slav Sokol organizations. On June 28th Low and High Divisions and Championship Gymnastic Competitions were held; a concert at the stadium in the afternoon. On June 29th gymnastic competitions continued. In the afternoon there was a joint performance of men and women with Indian clubs; exhibition of gymnastic champions on apparatus, and a performance by French and Belgian gymnasts on apparatus. On June 30th at Letna Stadium there was a grand parade in the morning through the streets of Prague with 12.144 uniformed men and women. Thousands of marchers stopped at the Old City Square in front of the Old Town Hall of Prague to pay tribute to the City Council and the people of Prague for their hospitality, the significant contributions of money, and food, and for the housing facilities. In the afternoon 8.000 men presented their symbolic mass calisthenics; 2.372 Sokol women performed exercises with Indian clubs, and were followed by an exhibition of men's wrestling. At the end of the afternoon program, results of the gymnastics competitions were announced. On July 1st, 1907 at Letna Stadium track and field competitions progressed in the morning along with a Sokol calvary exhibition. In the afternoon selected district groups presented artistic gymnastics and special compositions with gymnastic implements. (Note: Because the programs of the later Pan-Sokol Slets were quite similar to the program of the 1907 Vth slet, descriptions of these later events will include only the participants and their numbers, and special events presented for the first time.)

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, May 25 – June – July 1st, 1912

Staged at Letna Stadium under the direction of Jindra Vanicek, chief physical director. Presented under the auspices of the Slav Sokol Federation commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Sokol movement

(1862-1912). 23.000 Sokol men and women in official uniforms and regional costumes marched in the grand parade. 17.000 men, women and juniors performed in the program. A „Marathon“ tableau was staged in the stadium symbolizing the historic scene in ancient Athens after the battle of Marathon. This spectacle replaced „The Chess Tournament“ that was presented at the previous slet. The cities of Paris London and Petrohrad and their scientific institutions sent their representatives to the slet. Foreign and Slav Sokol organizations participated, among them the Gymnastic Federation of France, the Sokol of Paris, Slav Sokols from Russia, Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, and the Czech and Slovak Sokol of the United States.

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, June 1920

Staged at Letna Stadium under the auspices of the Czechoslovak Sokol Union and directed by Jindra Vanicek. On Sunday, June 6th, students from grammar and high schools opened the slet festivities in the presence of President T.G.Masaryk and 60.000 spectators. About 34.000 junior gymnasts (boys and girls, ages 14-18) participated and performed in their own grand parade, in the Junior Sokol Day, and in one day of the main gymnastic program. With 36 square feet of space needed for one performing gymnast in mass calisthenics, only about 10.000 gymnasts could be squeezed into one performance out of the registered 20.000 men and the same number of women. Divided in two divisions, all the attending gymnasts performed on the main slet days. The human colossus of 36.000 marchers moved through the Prague city sections and through historic Wenceslaus Square (Vaclavske Namesti). Thousands of marchers together with the officials of the Czech Sokol Union and of the General Slet Committee, stopped at the Old City Square in front of the Old City Townhall, to pay tribute to the City Council and the people of Prague for their unprecedented hospitality and contribution to the successful fulfillment of the Seventh Sokol Slet. On the

28th, at the presidential seat at Hradcany, the officials of the Czech Sokol Union's presidium and of its Gymnastic Department, along with representatives of the Yugoslav Sokol Federation, presented to President T.G. Masaryk a marble-based bronze and gold studded plaque of an enlarged Sokol membership emblem with the engraved words: „The Grateful Sokols – June 1920!“ On one of the ribbons was pinned an actual membership emblem. Post-World War One financial, economic, and business conditions in general and food shortages in particular were so serious that there had been strong sentiment in the leadership of the organization as well as among the membership for the postponement of the projected 1920 slet. The main problem was how under such conditions the slet General Committee could secure enough housing facilities and sufficient quantities of food for the slet kitchens, city hotels and restaurants, to feed hundreds of thousands of slet participants as well as the people of Prague and visitors from other nations. The problem was largely resolved through dollar loans and through contributions of flour and foodstuffs by the American Czech and Slovak Sokol organizations and other societies. Moreover, the City Council and the departments of the national governments greatly assisted in terms of housing facilities and food supplies. A tax on the membership helped to relieve the financial burden. Thus, the slet preparations were able to commence in full force.

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, June 3 – July 6, 1926

The extensive and diverse program of the VIII Pan-Sokol Slet was staged at the newly-constructed Strahov Stadium with tribunes and galleries for 135.000 spectators and an arena for 15.000 performing gymnasts in one mass calisthenics composition. It was scheduled for 17 days in the stadium, the city auditorium, various playhouses, the National Opera House, and in various city and school facilities (including swimming pools), on historic city squares

(such as the Prague Old City Square) and in the Slovak mountains for the winter games. The events at the stadium were directed by Jindra Vanicek, assisted by the chief physical directness, Sis. Milanda Mala. Most of the events outside the stadium were directed by the leaders of the performing groups. The slet program consisted of the following elements:

Gymnastics

Mass performances of calisthenic compositions; group exhibitions of exercises with various implements; group performances of guest Slav Sokol organizations; presentation of Czech, Moravian and Slovak folk dances; exhibition of military drills (by units of infantry, cavalry, and artillery); children's games and races; a symbolic gymnastic presentation by thousands of men and women of a „Sun City“ tableau; gymnastic competitions of men, women and juniors; competitive games of Sokol children; water sport contests; track and field contests; Slav Sokol Federation championships; winter sport contests; and combative contests and a decathlon.

Demonstrative

Grand march of all members; juniors' and childrens' grand march; students' grand march; welcoming mass gatherings; tribute to official delegations from foreign countries. Registered for the slet program and performing in individual events were 82.400 Sokol men and women, 63.000 junior boys and girls, and 40.000 Sokol children. The daily performances at the stadium were observed by some 100.000 spectators.

Slav Sokol Official Delegations or Participating Gymnasts

Yugoslavia (3.530 men and women with 220 juniors); Lusatian Croat's Society (150 members); Ukranian Sokol Union from Poland; Polish Sokols (unofficially for political reasons); American Czech and Slovak Sokols.

Following foreign Guest Gymnastic Societies were present: French Gymnastic Union, British Gymnastic Society, Belgian Gymnastic Union, Rumanian Teachers

Association, Dutch Gymnastic Union, Finnish Gymnastic Society.

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, June and July, 1932

Staged at Strahov Stadium under the direction of Dr. Aug. Heller and Prof. Marie Provaznikova, Czechoslovak Sokol Union chief physical directors; and commemorating the 100th birthday anniversary of Dr. Miroslav Tyrš the founder of the Sokol movement. Participating in mass performances such as calisthenics with wands, Indian clubs, etc.; winter and water sports; track and field events; gymnastic competitions; various athletic, fencing, volleyball, basketball, handball and tennis, rowing, and canoeing contests; in the Czechoslovak Sokol Union and Slav Sokol Federation gymnastic championship, decathlon and regular competition on apparatus; contact and combative games; in grand arches and other massive gatherings; and a dramatic tableau „Olympic Feast“ (Hod Olympijsky) were 41.000 men, 38.000 women, 25.000 junior boys, 26.000 junior girls, 13.000 Sokolads, 14.120 Sokolettes, 7.840 high school students plus foreign guests and other Slav Sokol participants, and uncounted thousands of otherwise non-performing Sokol members in the grand marches. The slet's general program was chaired by the president of the Czechoslovak Sokol Organization, Dr. Stanislaus Bukovsky, and the programs on the main slet day was presented in the presence of the president of Czechoslovakia, T.G. Masaryk and the members of his cabinet.

Pan-Sokol Slet, Prague, June – July, 1938

Staged at Strahov Stadium at a time when the Czechoslovak armed forces stood on the border ready for a confrontation with the Nazi aggressors; and was directed by the Czechoslovak Sokol Union chief physical directors, Dr. Miroslav Klinger and Prof. Marie Provaznikova. The Sokol gymnastic festivities were chaired by the Czechoslovak

Sokol Union president, Dr. Stanislaus Bukovsky. The Czechoslovak president, Dr. Eduard Benes, with the members of his cabinet, observed on particular days the performances of the best of the youth and adult citizens of the nation. Present on some days were also members of the Czechoslovak parliament and representatives (ambassadors) of 30 foreign countries. Between 50.000 and 130.000 spectators (on July 3rd some 200.000) observed the various performances of husbands, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, regardless of weather conditions, on the special student, Sokol children, juniors, seniors, army, and guest organization days. (This was the sixth time that Prague heartily welcomed the American Czech and Slovak Sokols). Participating in the festivities and performing their designated mass calisthenics, folk dances and other mass compositions in the slet program, which were arranged similarly to those of the preceding Pan-Sokol Slet in 1932, were the following divisions listed by age of the participants: (Note: The numbers provided are approximations based on the size of the slet field, the normal spacing between performers, and the practice of dividing categories of participants into groups of 15.000 with groups alternating performances on different days):

Student's Day 50.000 students (boys and girls); Sokol Children's Day 40.000 Sokolads and Sokolettes, Sokol Junior's Day 63.000 junior boys and girls, Sokol Seniors' Day 34.000 men and 31.000 women registered performers. On Sunday July 3rd, 27.600 presented Pechacek's mass calisthenics, the „Oath to the Republic,“ to Jan Seehak's music played by a 100-member slet band.

Grand Marches

Students' Day 50.000 students marched (boys and girls) under a forest of national flags and school banners, to music provided by 20 marching bands. Sokol Children's Day 27.420 Sokolads and Sokolettes marched under 423 banners from 50 districts, guided by 2.350 of the unit directors and instructors, with music

provided by 23 marching bands. Junior's Day 60.675 junior boys and girls marched under 665 banners accompanied by 32 bands, guided by 3.900 of their district and local leaders. With them marched 310 boys and girls from the Vienna metropolitan area and 800 Yugoslav juniors.

The Last Slet Day

73.840 men and women in official uniforms, gym uniforms, national costumes and civil attire, marched under 1.000 flags and banners, accompanied by 100 bands (2.953 musicians); as did foreign guest delegations: American Czech and Slovak Sokol (135); British (19); Belgians (254); Bulgarians (939); French (204); Dutch (22); Yugoslavs (4.387); Lithuanians (182); Latvians (87); Rumanians (271); Russians (32); Ukranians (60).

Performances

225.000 registered gymnasts of both sexes participated in mass traditional calisthenics with mass formation entry and retreat marches to and from designated markers; included were students, Sokolads, Sokolettes, junior boys and girls, senior men and women. District and regional group gymnastic exhibitions: mass gymnastic exercises with Indian clubs, wands, hoops, small wooden rings, and other implements. Exhibitions of exercises in building pyramids: foreign guest group combinations and Slav Sokol organizations from America, Belgium, Great Britain, Bulgaria, France, Holland, Lithuania, Latvia, Rumania and the Ukraine. Mass exercises with implements: wands, Indian clubs, etc.; combinations of exercises with Maypole (calisthenics and dances); building pyramids; display of scene „Build and Defend“; gymnastic competitions in apparatus exercises; track and field events; water sports events; winter games; heavy athletic contests; weight lifting; wrestling; hammer throw; tug-of-war; light athletic contests: shot-put, javelin throw, races, relays, fencing, grand marches; gymnastic championship competitions of the Czechoslovak Sokol Union, Slav Sokol Federation, and the International Gymnastic Federation.

Political changes after WWII

A few months after the slet, Hitler invaded and dismembered Czechoslovakia and the Nazi occupants dissolved the Czechoslovak Sokol Union, sent to concentration camps and murdered the Sokol leaders, and confiscated all Sokol funds and properties. The American Czech and Slovak Sokol organizations consequently took over the responsibility for the continuation of the Sokol movement outside the country of its origin.

In 1945 in liberated Czechoslovakia, the Sokol was reactivated and the next XI Pan-Sokol Slet was projected. The slet was staged in June 1948 at Strahov Stadium under the direction of Dr. Aug. Pechlat and Prof. Marie Provaznikova. But earlier in February 1948 another enemy occupied war-fatigued Czechoslovakia. The communists, controlled by the Soviet Union, took over the government during a short and almost bloodless revolution. The Sokol slet thus became a demonstration against the communist aggressors. The communists with the Soviet army in readiness on the border and with an army of their own and Soviet agents let the Sokol go through the scheduled programs. Soon after the slet, the Sokol organization again was dissolved and the leaders persecuted or imprisoned. Some escaped into exile, among them the Sokol national president, Dr. Antonin Hrebik and the chief physical directress, Prof. Marie Provaznikova. American Czech and Slovak Sokols were not represented at this slet, but their organizations carried on the tradition of the Sokol movement founded by Tyrs.

Spartakiada replaces Slet

After 1948 new socialist elements in physical education are beginning to reveal. Artistic Gymnastics in many cases was initially in deep crises. It was reflected in rapid decline in membership and number of experienced coaches and trainers. This reduced also the efficiency of our gymnasts.

Organizational independence of artistic gymnastics made it possible to create a good basis for special training. At the end of 1948 was Army gymnastic club /AGC/ in Prague founded, with 25 associating sports industries, which had very strong gymnastics section. In 1949 at the AGC first army gymnasts representatives of Czechoslovakia were gathered together: L. Sotornik, Zd.Ružička, V. Matlocha, and later, M. Kolečka, J.Škvor, J.Mikulec, J.Houdek, J.Nekola. In 1951 F.Daniš, Vl. Karas, Vl.Kejř and Vl.Prorok joined the AGC. In Czechoslovakia, since 1950 they start to use the name artistic gymnastics /instead of instrumental gymnastics/ and introducing performance classes under the system of unified sports qualification. Domestic competitions are increasingly under the influence of international competitions, sports team training has a higher quality. After 1957, when the Czechoslovak Union of physical education /CUPE / was founded, deepen the socialist system of physical education, whose main features were the Communist ideism, mass of people, scientism. This system lasted until 1989, when a big social change throughout Czechoslovakia was made and this was due to Velvet Revolution.

Every five years, when the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic celebrates the anniversary of the triumphant culmination of the fight for national liberation and the liberation of this country by the Soviet army, the festivities are crowned with the Czechoslovak Spartakiade. Millions of gymnasts, sportsmen and tourists prepare and realize the biggest physical culture festival which has no like in the world. The Czechoslovak Spartakiade means above all else mass physical culture performances. Their origin dates back to the beginnings of the physical culture movement in Bohemia and with the exception of the period of the two World Wars they have been organized for over one hundred years now. Their new tradition dates from

1955, when the mass physical culture performances acquired a socialist character after the victory of the working class in Czechoslovakia. There is no town or even village in Czechoslovakia where the population does not begin to practise the Spartakiade compositions one year before the commencement of the celebrations of the anniversary. These movement compositions, which proved successful in the competition of works by the best physical culture specialists, are intended for all categories of the population — from children of preschool age over youth up to adults. The well proved system of the training and control gatherings of voluntary trainers and teachers on different regional levels ensures that they are thoroughly acquainted with and instructed in the intentions of the creators of the individual movement compositions, this resulting in their training proceeding in the same way, with - out any deviations, throughout the whole Republic. The commencement of the training process is naturally proceeded by the production of printed matter containing descriptions of the compositions, musical recordings, implements and other aids.

The mass gymnastic performances - Spartakiades formed a solid basis of the socialist system of physical culture for its content versatility, variety of forms, time longevity and increasing massification. Spartakiades were always carried out in a huge stadium in Prague's Strahov where could be around 200,000 viewers. Spartakiade first held in 1955 on the occasion of 10-th anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia. At the Strahov trained more than half a million children, youth and adults. They performed in 29 songs, which was a very comprehensive program for trainees and the audience. Therefore, at the second Spartakiade in 1960 the trainees performed in 19 songs.

The Strahov Gate of Strong guys took a title: Socialism is our victory. It reflected the fact that since 1960 our country bears the name Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Third Spartakiade took place in 1965, next Spartakiade should take place in 1970, but due to the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the armies of Warsaw Pact it was not realized, so the fourth Spartakiade took place in 1975. Fifth Spartakiade was in 1980.

The sixth last held in 1985, where trainees performed in 15 songs. "Spartakiade is one of the greatest sporting events I've ever seen in my life" spoke enthusiastically President of the International Olympic Committee Juan Antonio Samaranch.

In all fifteen compositions were created for the Czechoslovak Spartakiade 1985 and practically one million persons learned and rehearsed them twice weekly at physical training clubs and during voluntary physical culture sessions at schools. In the spring of 1985 all these gymnasts performed their respective compositions at one of the 1,400 local and district Spartakiades in front of 2,300,000 spectators. The best of them were then chosen to take part in the final performances at the Strahov Stadium in Prague. This stadium, the biggest in the world, covers an area of more than six hectares and 13,824 can perform on it at once, its surface being marked especially for the purpose. The grandstands and galleries can hold over 200,000 spectators. During the two afternoon programmes of the Czechoslovak Spartakiade 1985 a total number of 172,496 gymnasts took part in the individual compositions, watched by 940,000 spectators during the general rehearsals and four main days. Throughout one whole year sportsmen contributed to the Czechoslovak Spartakiade 1985 with top competitions such as the Druzba (Friendship)

sporting gymnastics event and women's athletics and archery contests on one hand and by means of the realization of over 12,000 mass events in which 9,089,243 persons participated on the other hand. The Sokol competition in military defence skill, for example, was marked by the participation of 556,000 competitors and the trade union contest by 120,000 volleyball players. Over 500,000 young people from the age of 10 to 18 competed for the badge for skill in individual disciplines. The unique swimming relay race of 1,000 x 100 metres was taken part in by the inhabitants of 45 towns and the so-called jeizera. Fifty ski running competition enjoyed the participation of 10,000 skiers. Tourists also played their part in the Spartakiade year. Three and a half million marched, cycled, boated and travelled on skis in the course of 2,751 events of the most varied kinds. Most of the participants already had many an event behind them such as the biggest long-distance march in Central Europe, covering the distance from Prague to Prcice with the record number of over 35,000 participating persons. Many of the events were original ones such as the march held under the name Round the Czech Socialist Republic In One Day. This event actually comprised 48 marches, the destination of one being the starting place of the next. Another meritorious activity was the Spartakiade Forest, during which tourists planted 450,000 forest trees. The tourist activity organized in the framework of the Czechoslovak Spartakiade 1985 culminated in Prague with a national Spartakiade tourist rally at Džbán on the outskirts of Prague, where over 6,000 tourists from all over the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic gathered at a tent town. Numerous cultural events also formed a part of the programme of the Czechoslovak Spartakiade 1985. Days of culture and physical culture took place at all district towns in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic before the district Spartakiades.

During the Spartakiade finale in Prague gala performances of the individual regions took place during which the best artists, professional ensembles and amateur groups appeared. All Prague's theatres gave performances for the participants in the Czechoslovak Spartakiade 1985, every museum, gallery and exhibition hall was open to visitors and, apart from this, dozens of other cultural events took place in all the districts of Prague. Great attention was aroused by the traditional Friendship Evenings in the Sports Hall, where during four evenings 14,000 spectators watched an outstanding international gymnastic festival. In all gymnasts from 10 countries performed in a single, perfectly organized and mastered programme. The Spartakiade is not, however, an event for one year only, but represents the climax of five years of systematic physical culture activity.

At the same time it is also a means of attracting others to regular exercising and sport. Today, when healthy movement is the order of our age, mass forms of physical culture activities are being sought in the world. In Czechoslovakia, however, they do not have to be sought, because in this country it is possible to continue in a tradition of over one hundred years' standing, to observe development and to adapt physical culture to the interests and needs of the individual categories.

Slets are organised again

New period for Sokol's life in Czechoslovakia started after "Velvet revolution" 1989. Czechoslovak Sokol Organisation (ČOS) had to fight to receive its property in Czech and also Slovak Republic. Sokol's movement in both newly developed republics had and still have generational problems. In the 1991 leaders of ČOS decided that Sokols must prepare the great festival - Slet again. The Slets were determined for 6 years period beginning in 1994.

From 5th - 6th July 1994 - it was organized XII. Slet with participation of

23000 gymnasts, among them were 1800 guests from other countries. Slet was organized on the great Strahov Stadium. In July 2000 XIII. Slet was organized at small Rošický stadium in Prague where participated 21 500 gymnasts. XIVth Slet in July 2006 was again at Rošický stadium in Prague with 17000 gymnasts. Last Slet - XVth was held in Prague at Stadium Synot Tip Arena, Vršovice between 1st - 7th July 2012. Gymnasts (from Czech Republic, USA, Canada, Danmark, France, Swiss) all together 10500 from all over the world took part celebrating 150 years of Sokol organization. Again there were many (together 22) special compositions for children and senior group in two days.

Internationally idea of slets was adopted by FIG and in 1953 the first Gimnaestrada has been organised. Despite Sokol is not so powerfull as it was, the main idea of national healthy physical exercise lives further.

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