The health of former President Edvard Beneš has been of minor but persistent concern to students of modern Czechoslovakia. Twice within ten years Beneš was called upon to make decisions that had ramifications far beyond the boundaries of his small country. First was his capitulation on 30 September 1938 to the dictates of the Munich Conference; second was his acceptance of the resignations of twelve non-Communist Czechoslovak cabinet ministers and the appointment on 25 February 1948 of Klement Gottwald as head of a new cabinet. In the case of Munich, no one had suggested that Beneš's personal health played a part in his decision; in fact, most authors defend him on strong rational grounds.1 In discussing the political crisis of 1948, however, numerous writers mention Beneš's poor health in connection with his conduct in those critical days and his surrender to Communist pressure.2 The appended letter throws light on the president's physical condition in 1948.3

At the time of Munich, Beneš was already showing signs of stress. It would have required superhuman strength for him to have borne the enormous burdens of the crisis without after-effect. Several witnesses testify that he was extremely nervous, sad of visage and thin in appearance, pale, and terribly fa-

1. Solid military reasons for Czechoslovakia's submission to Germany, for example, are presented in Jonathan Zorach, "Czechoslovakia's Fortifications (Their Development and Role in the 1938 Munich Crisis)," Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen, No. 2 (1976), pp. 81-94.


3. The author wishes to thank Professor Joseph V. Brumík, M.D., of the New York University School of Medicine for making this letter available to him. At the time of the appended correspondence Dr. Brumík was a member of the N.Y.U. faculty and represented the Czechoslovak government in the medical section of UNRRA. The author gratefully acknowledges assistance with translating the letter by Dr. Brumík and Steve Z. Lintymer, M.D.
tigued. A desire to avoid new complications may have induced him to adopt Spartan habits. He followed a regular work routine save when emergencies demanded extra time and energy, and he shunned alcohol and tobacco. He loathed travel by air and train because he suffered ill effects. Sometimes while traveling he would reserve an entire railroad car for himself in order to lie prone and minimize the motion of the train.

During his wartime exile in London, Beneš as early as June, 1941, began to react to events with nervousness and a tinge of pessimism. On a visit to the United States, probably the one in late May and early June, 1943, he requested a physical checkup from Dr. Joseph V. Brumlík, then at the National Institute of Cardiology in Mexico City. After flying north to examine the president, Brumlík found him to be an uncooperative patient. Beneš was close-mouthed about his physical condition and refused to undergo blood tests and urinalysis. Apparently Beneš felt he could manage his public life so long as there were no immediate threats to his well-being. Indeed, Compton MacKenzie, an admirer, upon meeting Beneš at the president's English country home


6. These details were conveyed to Dr. Brumlík by a late patient, Arnošt Heidrich, one-time general secretary to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Heidrich explained Beneš's travel habits in response to criticisms of them in sections of the Czech press. Mrs. Beneš accompanied the president on many of his trips between Prague and Geneva, perhaps to comfort him; letter of Theodor Procházka to the author, 10 Feb. 1977.

7. Jaromír Smutný, head of the President's Chancellery in London, noted on 7 June 1941 that Beneš "does not have so resistant a nervous system and one so inadmissible to shocks as he used to." See Dokumenty z historie Československé politiky 1939-1943, ed. Libuše Orhálová and Mířa Červinková, 2 vols. (Praga: Academia, 1966), I, 225. Smutný felt that these symptoms did not affect Beneš's judgment, "which is always correct." Beneš's personal physician, the late Dr. Oskar Klinger, agreed with Smutný that "nervous fatigue always appeared in Dr. Beneš some time after great mental and nervous stress"; ibid., p. 240. Several persons have suggested to the author, both orally and in writing, that Beneš suffered from diabetes. They cite comments made to them by physicians who attended him, his appearance during and after the war, family traits (Beneš's brother Vojta had diabetes), and his alleged sexual impotence common to diabetics. This suggestion has been denied to the author by persons close to the president, and he has found no documentation to support it.

8. Interview with Dr. Brumlík, 6 Jan. 1977.