

DANUBIAN REVIEW

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A REVIEW DEVOTED TO RESEARCH INTO PROBLEMS OF THE
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THE SLOVAK AUTONOMIST MOVEMENT

BY

OBSERVATOR

I.

The events of the past few weeks have thrust Czecho-Slovakia's nationality problems into the foreground of international interest. Second to Austria's union with the German Reich, what chiefly concerns the Western Powers today is the fate of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, and in the West the conviction is spreading that, should Czecho-Slovakia fail to solve the Sudeta German question, and her minority problems in general, the disintegration of that new State cannot be long deferred.

In the last issue of this review we published an article of very actual interest on the Sudeta German question from the pen of Dr. Andrew Moravek. From the point of view of international politics that question is undoubtedly Czecho-Slovakia's most burning nationality problem; but it is not her only one. There are others equally grave: the problems of the Magyars, Slovaks, Ruthenians and Poles. More than ever before, in the present circumstances it is incumbent upon this paper to keep its readers informed of all the aspects of the situation. We have decided to open a series of articles with one on the Slovak problem, partly because a number of reports on the lot of the Hungarian minority are to be found in previous issues, but also, and chiefly, because even to a greater extent than the Sudeta German question, that of the Slovaks is shaking the very foundations of the Republic.

The foundations of the Czecho-Slovak State, as we know, rest on the theory of Czecho-Slovak "national" unity, that is to say, on the fiction that the Czechs and Slovaks are merely

two branches of the same tree. We have repeatedly pointed out that Slovak and Czech are not identical tongues: the evolution of the two languages in their literary form has progressed along widely divergent lines. The customs and costumes of the two peoples also show fundamentally different characteristics. In the course of their symbiosis with the Austrians, the Czechs in many respects grew to resemble the Germans, while the Slovaks, whose development until 1918 had taken place within the framework of the Hungarian Kingdom, adopted the forms of Hungarian life and Hungarian society. Their view of life also differs from that of the Czechs: the latter are materialists and rationalists, the Slovaks idealists and of a romantic disposition. But more important than these differences is the fact that the Slovaks feel that they are a separate nation with a different political consciousness. The most typical manifestation of that feeling is to be found in the Slovak Autonomist movement, which dates back already ninety years. Namely, although the struggle for autonomy has been waged with greater *verve* since 1918, in which year the Czechs took possession of Slovakia, the idea itself was first propounded by Slovak nationalists in pre-War Hungary. Let us therefore first cast a glance over the development of the Autonomist movement prior to 1918.

The first political manifestation of the idea took the form of a petition adopted by a popular meeting held on loth May 1848 at Liptószentmiklós (Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš). The men mainly responsible for its adoption were Louis Štur, Joseph Miloslav Hurbán and Michael Hodža, the three leaders of a then youthful Slovak nationalism. This meeting at Liptószentmiklós took place a few weeks after Ferdinand V of Hungary (the first Austrian Emperor of that name) had ratified, on 11th April 1848, the laws which laid the foundations of modern political Hungary and amongst other things established the Government's responsibility to Parliament and liberated the serfs.

The most important of the fundamental principles contained in the Liptószentmiklós petition were as follows: The Hungarian Parliament must be reorganized so as to allow every nationality in the country to be represented, and

the representatives of the nationalities should not merely have the right, but should also be compelled, to address Parliament in their respective mother-tongues. Besides this, the petition demanded the organization of a separate national assembly for each of the different nationalities, which should deal, not only with the affairs of the nationality in question, but also with those of the whole country. These national assemblies were to have determined the ethnic frontiers, and to do so in such a manner as to prevent the Slovaks oppressing the Magyar minority within their ethnic borders and vice versa. The petition demanded the use of the mother-tongue of the inhabitants in the county administration, and in the sphere of education it went so far as to lay claim to a Slovak university. Another demand worthy of note was that Slovakia should have a red and white flag to be recognized as the symbol of the Slovak nation.

The petition of Liptószentmiklós — which demanded autonomy for Slovakia within the framework of the Hungarian State, and was therefore far removed from any conception of union with the Czechs — was acutely at variance with the Liberal ideas providing the motive power of the period, ideas opposed to the autonomy of nationalities; and, of necessity, its drafters found themselves in conflict with a Hungarian Government professing Liberal views. Very shortly we find these men in the service of the absolutistic Vienna Government and making repeated attempts under the leadership of officers of the Imperial Army to invade Hungary with troops recruited in Vienna and Prague, since they were unable to induce the large masses of Slovaks to follow them. At the time most of the Slovaks were fighting against the Austrians in Louis Kossuth's army, which was but natural, since it was Kossuth who had emancipated the Slovak peasants from the bonds of serfdom, and supporting him meant defending the achievements of 1848. It throws much light on the prevailing mood of the Slovaks of that age that almost one-fourth of the Hungarian national defence army was recruited from them, so that more than a proportionate number of Slovaks took part in the Hungarian War of Independence in 1848/49.

When that war came to a disastrous close, Hungary

was incorporated in Austria, and the administration of the country was remodelled on the pattern of Vienna centralism. Vienna, definitely opposed to any form of autonomy, refused to grant even to Slovakia the autonomy demanded by Štur, Hodža and Hurbán, the men who had served Austria. It was only when, following the Patents of October 1860 and February 1861, the Hungarian Parliament had again been convened, that the Slovak nationalists attempted to press their demands anew, and at a meeting held in Turócszentmárton (Turčianský Svätý Martin) on 6th June 1861 carried a resolution to issue a memorandum containing the following principles. Slovakia should form a separate administrative district (*okolia*) the official language of which should be Slovak. In the matter of linguistic rights this memorandum went farther than the resolution of Liptószentmiklós, for the autonomists now demanded those rights for the Slovak language enclave in the Magyar ethnic area. In the sphere of education, on the other hand, they were more modest and would have been satisfied with a Slovak Academy of Law and Slovak Chairs in the Hungarian universities.

John Franciscy, one of the drafters of the Turócszentmárton memorandum, heading a delegation, submitted it to the Presiding Committee of the Hungarian Parliament; then after the dissolution of the Parliament, Moyses, Bishop of Besztercebánya (Báňská Bystrica), laid it before the Emperor Francis Joseph — naturally without result. Here we must lay stress on the point that the leaders of Slovak nationalism at that time too wished to achieve autonomy (which no longer meant legislative powers, but merely administrative self-government) within the framework of the Hungarian State and entirely independent of the national ambitions of the Czechs.

From 1861 to 1918 no more was heard of the idea of Slovak autonomy; it had vanished from the political programme of the Slovaks. After the Compromise of 1867, the followers of the men responsible for the petition of Liptószentmiklós and the memorandum of Turócszentmárton (the so-called Slovak National Party or the Turócszentmárton Group) confined their demands to an insistence on the

linguistic rights of the Slovak nation and later, in the seventies, they ceased to play an active rôle in politics. The Slovak National Party continued to dream vague Panslavistic dreams, but the great majority of the Slovaks were thoroughly content to be loyal subjects of the Hungarian national State. And when at the beginning of the present century Masaryk's Slovak students — the so-called "Hlasists", named after their periodical the "Hlas" — broke away from the passive attitude of their fathers and provided the Slovak National Party with a new programme, no mention was made in it of autonomy. For they knew that no political success was likely to be gained with the slogan of autonomy among a Slovak people the majority of whom, as we have said, were loyal adherents of the Hungarian national State.

II.

It was not until the Great War that the idea of an autonomous Slovakia was broached again. On October 15th, 1915, the following agreement was concluded in Cleveland, Pa., by the Czech National Alliance and the Slovak League of America: —

"We desire a union of the Czech and Slovak nations in a federal alliance of the States, Slovakia to have her own complete national autonomy and Parliament, her own administration of State and complete cultural liberty —, this meaning the full use of the Slovak language —, as well as her own financial and political administration employing Slovak as the official language."

The Cleveland Agreement served as basis also for the Pittsburgh Convention concluded on May 30th, 1918, the signatories to this latter agreement including, besides the organisations referred to above, the Alliance of American Czech Catholics. The Pittsburgh Convention was signed, among others, also by G. Thomas Masaryk (who subsequently became first President of the Czecho-Slovak Republic), Vojta Beneš, brother of the present President of the Republic, and M. Pergler, the first Czecho-Slovak Minister to Japan. In his Memoirs Dr. Masaryk admits that the reason why he signed the Convention was his desire to re-assure the Slovaks of America, who "were dreaming of God knows what sort of

autonomy". From what M. Masaryk says we may therefore conclude that the Czechophile Slovaks of America themselves felt rather anxious concerning the probable future political status of their racial kindred at home, if they were included in the Czecho-Slovak State which it was proposed to establish; and the circumstance that in the following months they both morally and materially supported the movement started for the organisation of a Czecho-Slovak State was due primarily to their presuming that their racial kindred living in the old country would be given complete autonomy.

The text of the famous document in question runs as follows: —

"We approve of the political programme aiming at the union of the Czechs and the Slovaks in an independent State consisting of the Czech provinces and of Slovakia.

"Slovakia shall have her own separate public administration, Parliament and courts of law.

"The Slovak language shall be the official language in the schools and offices and in public life generally.

"The Czecho-Slovak State shall be a republic and its Constitution shall be democratic.

"The organisation and co-operation of the Czechs and Slovaks living in the United States of North America shall be strengthened and adjusted respectively by agreement as required by conditions and by any change that may ensue in the situation.

"The elaboration of the detailed measures relating to the machinery of the Czecho-Slovak State shall rest with the liberated Czechs and Slovaks and their legitimate representatives respectively."

The Pittsburg Convention is not an international treaty in the sense of that term as defined in international law; for treaties of that kind cannot be concluded except by States or formations of the character of States, not by popular organisations. On the other hand, however, it is indubitable that this Convention was one of the documents forming the political pillars upon which the Czecho-Slovak State was erected. For the Czechs to deny its binding character is equivalent to a flouting of the principle of the sanctity of a given word. The Czechs nevertheless do deny the binding force of the Pittsburgh Convention, the arguments adduced by them being wholly or at least in part quite childish. Here these arguments are: —

a) The day on which the Convention was concluded — May 30th, 1918 — was a *Memorial Day*, on which according to the laws of the United States no contracts may be made. This argument is really childishly ridiculous; for the Pittsburgh Convention was not a contract in civil law, but a solemn political document not subject to the rules of civil law.

b) Equally ridiculous is the argument to the effect that the Statutes of the American Slovak League had not yet — on May 30th, 1918 — been ratified by the American authorities, the approval of the latter having been obtained only in the following year. State documents and revolutionary manifestos are not usually issued as provided in the laws of association.

c) More serious in character is the argument that the Slovaks of America, some of whom were already American citizens, had not been entrusted by the Slovaks of the old country to make any statement in their name. However, this is a point to adduce which no right whatsoever can be claimed by the Czechs, who threw themselves on the moral and material support of the Slovaks of America and who are therefore in duty bound under all circumstances to keep their word irrespective of whether the Slovaks of America had received a mandate from the Slovaks of the old country or not. For, even presuming that the Slovaks of America had not received any such mandate, all that follows is that the manifesto in question is a one-sided declaration on the part of the Czechs, whose given word is even then binding on them. Now, though it is true that the Czech National Alliance of America and the Alliance of American Czech Catholics were just as little qualified to speak in the name of the Czechs of Bohemia; but it was certainly in the name of the latter that the Convention was signed by G. Thomas Masaryk. The Czecho-Slovak National Council — immediately upon the establishment of the new State — had declared to be binding all agreements concluded by Masaryk in foreign countries. It follows, therefore, that the Pittsburgh Convention is binding on the Czecho-Slovak State, not only morally but in public law too, and the only people entitled to adduce the present argument are we Hungarians, seeing that it proves that, not being in possession of any mandate given them by the Slovaks of the old country,

the Slovaks of America had no right whatsoever to conclude an agreement relating to the establishment of a Czecho-Slovak State and that in consequence the Pittsburgh Convention cannot be accepted as an act whereby the Slovak people exercised its right of self-determination in favour of the Czecho-Slovak State.

d) The argument adduced by the Czechs to the effect that by virtue of the declaration made at Turócszentmárton on October 30th, 1918, — which decided in favour of a union of the Slovaks and the Czechs —, and also of the circumstance that they voted for the 1920 Czecho-Slovak Constitution, the Slovaks renounced the autonomy guaranteed them under the Pittsburgh Convention, will not hold water either. For the declaration of Turócszentmárton was passed by a group of people assembled at random who had not been entrusted by the Slovak people to make any statement on its behalf. Of the 105 persons attending the meeting 58 were recruited from the small township of Turócszentmárton and the immediate vicinity. 74 were Protestants and only 31 Catholics, though more than 80% of the Slovaks belong to the Catholic Church. The whole of East Slovakia was represented by only *two* "delegates" — those two delegates being also Western or rather Middle Slovaks. Not only did the Slovaks of East Slovakia absent themselves from the Turócszentmárton meeting; they actually adopted a decided attitude against the Czecho-Slovak Republic when, at Kassa (Košice) on December 4th, 1918, they declared the independent Slovak Republic. And the other elements of the population of Slovakia — the Magyars and Germans — also made it quite clear that they did not wish to belong to the new State.

The Slovaks who approved and voted in favour of the Czecho-Slovak 1920 Constitution had not received any mandate from the Slovak people. At the so-called "revolutionary national assembly" which voted the said Constitution the Slovaks were represented, not by men elected by the people, — as were the Czechs —, but by persons appointed by the Prague Government. Consequently those Slovaks who voted for the Czecho-Slovak Constitution represented, not the Slovak people, but the Prague Government. It should

be noted, further, that Monsignor Andrew Hlinka, who was then and is still leader of the Slovak Autonomist movement, was at the time under arrest at Podoly. There can therefore be no question of any legal or legitimate representatives of the Slovak people having renounced the autonomy guaranteed under the Pittsburgh Convention.

In this connection it must be pointed out that some of the persons taking part in the Turócszentmárton meeting referred to above on October 31st, 1918, passed a resolution to the effect that the relations between Czechs and Slovaks should be definitely adjusted by an agreement to be concluded ten years later. This resolution is popularly known as the Turócszentmárton "*secret clause*" — being called so because in the chaotic situation then prevailing it was never put into writing, there not being indeed any minutes recording it. However, the evidence given in the big political trial in which Koza Matejov and Vojtech Tuka were indicted leaves no doubt whatsoever that such a resolution was actually voted and passed. The group then assembled at Turócszentmárton — at that time still unanimously supporting the Czechs — knew nothing of the Pittsburgh Convention, which did not become known to the Slovaks until later, when they were informed of its existence by Monsignor Siška, one of the signatories who had returned from America; but they felt instinctively that the Slovaks were in danger from the Czechs and for that reason thought it necessary to postpone the definitive adjustment of the political status of the Slovaks to a later period. The jealous care with which the authors of the Turócszentmárton declaration stressed the independence of the Slovak nation may be seen from the original text of the declaration itself, point 2. of which demanded the right of self-determination, not for the Czecho-Slovak, but for the Slovak nation and postulated that the Slovaks should be independently represented at the Peace Conference. The original text of the declaration was however arbitrarily modified by M. Milan Hodža, the present Prime Minister, who had arrived from Budapest on October 30th, 1918, and later went to the compositors' room and "corrected" the text — the result being that the present "amended" text speaks of the right of self-determination of

the "Czecho-Slovak nation" and the paragraph relating to the representation of the Slovaks at the Peace Conference has been omitted. Protests against the "amendments" were lodged by Matthew Dula, chairman of the Turócszentmárton meeting, Joseph Škultéty, the eminent Slovak *savant*, and Samuel Zoch, who later became an Evangelical Bishop. All these facts show, therefore, that the history of the origin of the Turócszentmárton declaration does not by any means endorse the argument adduced by the Czechs to the effect that at Turócszentmárton the Slovaks renounced their autonomy: on the contrary, they prove that the declaration was based upon the idea of the independent individuality of the Slovak nation, — as may be seen also quite clearly from the history of the Slovak national movement with which we have dealt above.

What is then the reason why the Czecho-Slovak régime refuses to entertain the idea of Slovak autonomy? The answer to this question was given by Laurence Srobár — the first Czecho-Slovak plenipotentiary Minister of Slovakia — in a letter addressed by him to the American Slovak League which *inter alia* gives us the following information:

"In accordance with the Convention of Pittsburg Slovensko ought to be given a legislature of its own. Let us consider this soberly. Slovensko has about 3 million inhabitants, of whom 1,600,000 are Slovaks, 250,000 Jews, 500,000 Ruthenians, 155,000 Germans and more than 500,000 Magyars. If the Slovak legislature had 300 members, 22 would be Jews, 50 Ruthenians, 15 Germans, and 53 Magyars, so that 140 non-Slovaks would opposed to 160 Slovaks. But the majority of these latter would consist of the so-called "Slovak Octobrists". The Slovaks would have a majority of 20, but this would not be a majority with which the government could be carried on even for four-and-twenty hours. Let us not forget the large number of the Hungarian intelligent classes; nor that Slovensko is overrun with Magyars, and "Magyarones". Can we suppose that not a single Slovak elector will vote for a Magyar or "Magyarone"? Would this be possible at the present day? Has the Slovak nation awakened in these eight months to the fact that it must vote only for Slovaks?! Do our people know who is a Slovak and who has gone over to the other side? There are counties (Bars, Hont, Nógrád, Abauj, Zemplén, Szepes, Sáros etc.) in which there is not one loyal Slovak whom we could entrust with the leadership of the people.

Imagine a Slovak National Assembly where no Slovak member may miss one sitting! And imagine one with an opposition of 140 members! — not a Slovak opposition, but one composed of alien members. Could this be called a Slovak National Assembly? It would rather resemble a pot-house in which the guests are quarreling over their cups."

The above letter shows quite clearly that the Czecho-Slovak régime thoroughly mistrusted the idea of Slovak autonomy already during the Peace Conference. This fact is proved even more clearly by the evidence given in June, 1929, at the trial of M. Tuka, by Dr. Milan Ivánka, the confidential agent of the Czecho-Slovak Government, who said that the very first session of the autonomous Slovak Diet would have decided in favour of adherence to Hungary, that being the reason why autonomy could not be granted to Slovakia.

We have been compelled to deal exhaustively with the above points because the Czechs have resorted to every form of quibbling and quiddity for the purpose of undermining the principles underlying the Slovak Autonomist movement, although — as may be seen from what has been said above — the first Head of the Czecho-Slovak State undertook an obligation to grant the Slovaks autonomy — an obligation the binding force of which the Czechs deny because they are well aware that the Slovaks — and indeed the whole population of Slovakia — in the event of a realisation of that autonomy would put an end to the system which would fain regard Slovakia as a Czech colony.

And now let us see the development of the Slovak Autonomist movement during the past two decades.

III.

In the December of 1918, the Slovak Autonomist movement became organized as a political party. Andrew Hlinka, parish priest of Rózsahégy, founded a Slovak People's Party, Catholic in character, and welded together to the present day, not only by the personality of Hlinka and the Catholic faith of its members, but above all by the desire for autonomy. The organization of the Party was facilitated by the anti-Catholic behaviour of the Czech troops and

Czech officials, who destroyed or desecrated numerous sacred images and statues of saints and treated the ethical principles and traditions of the Slovak nation with a complete lack of tact. The forward impulse of the Autonomist movement was accelerated when Mgr. Šiška, a Slovak Catholic priest from America and one of the signatories of the Pittsburgh Convention, who was on a visit to his native land, acquainted the Slovaks at home with the contents of that document.

By the summer of 1919 the dissatisfaction of the Slovaks had reached such a pitch that Andrew Hlinka and Francis Jehlička, a former university professor, who had been elected member of the Budapest Parliament in 1906 on the Slovak Nationality Party's list, left for Paris to lay the wishes of the Slovaks before the Peace Conference. Beneš, then Czecho-Slovak Minister of Foreign Affairs, induced the French Government to express a wish that these men should leave Paris, but by that time they had been successful in getting their memorandum handed to certain members of the Peace Conference. In that memorandum they demanded political autonomy, a national assembly, a separate government and administration and full liberty of conscience for the Slovaks, and as proof that these were the wishes of the entire Slovak people, they asked for a plebiscite in Slovakia — a plebiscite to be conducted under the protection of Entente troops and not under a Czech reign of terror.

Francis Jehlička never returned to Czecho-Slovakia; to-day he is still in exile, and is the leader of the Slovak exiles. Hlinka, on his return, was imprisoned on 8th October, 1919, by the Czech Government, first in Mirov, from whence he was later transferred to Podoly, and was also deprived of his seat in Parliament. For eight months he languished in gaol, until, at the Parliamentary election of April, 1920, he won a seat and with it indemnity. On his release he devoted redoubled energy to the organization of his Party, and although for the time being it remained in the Czech People's Party under the leadership of Šrámek and thus in the Government Coalition, it never ceased to demand autonomy in the most spirited manner. Even at that date the propaganda of

the Slovak People's Party was considered so dangerous to the Government that on 10th October, 1920, Czech gendarmes opened fire on a popular meeting arranged by the Party at Námesztó (Namestor), killing two and wounding five persons. In the autumn of 1921 the Party abandoned the Czech People's Party and the Government Coalition and went into Opposition.

As we know, the Czecho-Slovak Constitution framed in 1920 was based on the principle of centralism and it divided Slovakia, like the rest of the Republic, into so-called *Župas* (large counties), at the head of each of which a *Župan* (Sheriff) appointed by the Government was placed. The self-governing councils of these counties were made so incompetent to deal with political affairs that they were forbidden even to discuss politics. The old counties with a past extending back over centuries which had been the strongholds of autonomy, were done away with, a measure which evoked a storm of protest, not only from the Hungarians and Germans of those parts, but also from the Slovak inhabitants. The protest of the population against the dissolution of the ancient County of Szepes, for instance, was signed by all the Slovak villages in the County. To add to the dissatisfaction already rife, martial law, a military dictatorship and a system of preliminary censorship prevailed in Slovakia up to 1923. When they were abolished the *Župa* system was introduced but only in Slovakia, and not in the so-called historical provinces. Slovakia was the experimental „guinea-pig“. Prague refused to hear of Slovak autonomy; on the contrary, under the auspices of Czech centralism the Government abolished Slovakia's authorized Ministry, the work of which had in any case been thankless. Czech officials began to pour into Slovakia in ever increasing numbers, and in economic matters the Government discriminated against this territory in favour of the historical provinces, all of which measures merely served to augment the intensity of the Autonomist movement.

One of the first manifestations of the Slovak People's Party's policy as an Opposition was the Autonomy Bill introduced in Parliament on 27th January. The main principles set forth therein were as follows:

Slovakia's domestic affairs shall be administration, education, religion, commerce, justice, agriculture, public works and public welfare and the financial matters connected with these affairs. In these domestic affairs Slovakia shall have legislative, executive and juridical powers. The organs of self-government shall be the National Assembly and the Provincial Government responsible to it. Domestic affairs shall pertain to the sphere of authority of the Slovak National Assembly. Slovak shall be the official language in Slovakia. The 'common' affairs of the Republic shall be the army, foreign affairs, transport, public law and the election of the President, with the financial matters connected with these affairs. One-third of the Common Ministers shall be residents of Slovakia, as shall be also one-third of all officials employed in the offices dealing with the common affairs of the Republic, and their appointments shall be distributed so that only Slovaks are employed in Slovakia and only Czechs in the other provinces. In the Prague central offices the number of officials with domiciliary rights in Slovakia shall correspond to the percentage of Slovaks in the State. The official language and the language of command in the regiments recruited in Slovakia shall be Slovak. In times of peace Slovak regiments shall be stationed solely in Slovakia and the Czech regiments in other parts of the Republic.

Shortly after this Bill was introduced the Party delegated Andrew Hlinka and Professor Tuka to lay the demands of the Slovak nation before the Conference of Ambassadors at Genoa. Owing to difficulties made about their passports, they were not able to reach Genoa, but they managed to have the memorandum of the Party submitted to the Conference. At a congress of the Party held on 2nd and 3rd August 1922, in Zsolna (Žilina) a memorandum entitled "The appeal to the Civilised World of the Slovak nation doomed to extinction" was issued, demanding the enforcement of the provision of the minority treaty of St. Germain which required the Republic to reconcile the Czecho-Slovak Constitution with the fundamental principles of liberty and justice and to ensure these rights to every citizen of the State. In respect of autonomy all the Party asked was that

a freely-elected Slovak Parliament should freely decide the relation between the Czech and the Slovak nations. A year later, at the end of June, 1923, when at Paris the Eucharistic Congress was in process, Tuka on behalf of the Party approached the Council of Ambassadors with the appeal that they should enforce the treaties guaranteeing the Slovak nation the right of self-determination.

The cry of distress of the Slovaks fell on deaf ears in the international tribunals; but the struggle for autonomy went on at home with unabated zeal. The hatred felt in Czech circles for the Slovak movement was so great that not only were numerous nameless heroes of the movement arrested, but, on 29th September, 1925, Czech legionaries even swooped down on a popular meeting arranged by the Party in Kassa (Košice), killing one Slovak autonomist and wounding many. Since 1921 the Protestant Slovak Party has also taken a part in the struggle. One of its leading men, Louis Bazovsky, who after the occupation of Slovakia was appointed *Župan* of Nőgrád (Novohrad) by the Czech Government, but who soon came to realize the danger threatening the Slovaks from the Czechs, very energetically opposed in his newspaper the predatory economic policy of the Czechs in Slovakia.

Here mention must be made of a letter written at the beginning of 1925 by Hlinka to Ignatius Seypel, then Chancellor of Austria. In this letter it was pointed out that in all the Peace Treaties the name of the Republic was written with a hyphen, — Czecho-Slovakia —, that meaning that Slovakia's equality was recognized; and that in terms of the resolution of Turócszentmárton the system inaugurated there was not binding on Slovakia beyond 31st October, 1928. This letter was not allowed to be published and ever since then any newspaper attempting to write the name of the Republic with a hyphen has always been confiscated by the censor.

At the Parliamentary elections in 1925 the Slovak Autonomist movement achieved a great success, but nevertheless in 1927 the Slovak People's Party decided to take office in a bourgeois Cabinet formed of a coalition of Czechs, Germans and Slovaks under the leadership of Svěhla. The

price was a recognition of Slovakia as a self-governing unit. Thus came into being the Administration Act of 1927, in terms of which Slovakia, like Bohemia, Moravia (including Silesia) and Ruthenia, was declared a province and the system of the *Župa* (greater county) which — as before stated — had been introduced only in Slovakia, was abolished. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that this meant a step forward on the road to autonomy. The only difference between the old system and the new was that the authority previously exercised by the six greater counties was taken over by the province, the representative corporation of which, however, is not permitted to discuss politics. In fact self-government suffered a reverse by the change, for in terms of the new Act one-third instead of one-fourth of the members of the Provincial Council are now appointed by the Government. Besides, many provisions of the Act serve to increase the power of a bureaucracy mainly in Czech hands.

Coalition with the Government, however, did not prevent the Slovak People's Party from continuing to insist on autonomy. On 1st January, 1928, a notable article entitled „*Vacuum juris*” appeared in the „Slovak” from the pen of the learned Professor Tuka, who was member of the Czech Parliament and Vice-Chairman of the Slovak People's Party. In this article it was set forth that if autonomy were not granted by 31st October, 1928, — the 10th anniversary of the resolution of Turócszentmárton —, a state of *ex lex* would arise in Slovakia. This article was the ultimate cause of Tuka's arrest on 2nd January, 1929, and the reason why he was sentenced to 15 year's penal servitude in the following October. Immediately after this inhumanly cruel sentence had been passed, the Slovak People's Party abandoned the Government Coalition and went into Opposition, in which it has remained to the present day. The Supreme Courts confirmed Tuka's sentence, and it was only in the spring of 1937 that this martyr of the Slovak Autonomist movement was released from prison. He did not, however, regain complete liberty, for he is now confined at Pilsen.

Although the sentence passed in the Tuka trial for a

time paralysed the Slovak Autonomist movement, we find the Slovak Autonomists nevertheless in full activity again by 1931. At the 1931 general meeting of the "Slovenská Matica" Mgr. Hlinka and his followers compelled this important Slovak cultural association to make a change in its management, the latter having — under the pretext of "a reform of Slovak orthography" — encouraged endeavours aiming at smuggling into the Slovak literary language Czech orthography and in general certain Czech forms.

The economic crisis then in full swing which had destroyed the remnants of Slovak industry and mining which had been left in existence by the Czech policy of depredation operating with the catchword "de-industrialisation of Slovakia", contributed also to intensify the Autonomist movement. Louder and louder — more and more energetic — became the demand for a suspension of the economic inequalities (differentiation in respect of taxation, railway tariffs unfavourable to Slovakia, no Slovaks admitted to the big economic institutions of the State, the ignoring of that province in connection with State investments, etc., etc.) which had been employed in the service of the economic policy of Prague as means of inflicting losses on the population of Slovakia. In his address delivered in the Prague "Karolinum" on November 25th, 1932, Mgr Andrew Hlinka was impelled to refer to the far more favourable treatment in economic matters which Slovakia had received at the hands of the Hungarian régime. The Slovaks then began to watch more closely the treatment of the sons of Slovakia in connection with the allotment of posts in the State and other public services; and after the joint meeting of the two parties held at Trenčsénteplic (Trenčianské Teplice), an increasingly intensive part was taken in the struggle for autonomy also by the Slovak National Party, whose leader was the eminent Slovak poet Martin Rázus, now deceased.

When in 1933, after the coming into power of Herr Hitler, the Sudeta Germans were also swept off their feet by the nationalist tendency, this circumstance naturally affected the other non-Czech nationalities of Czecho-Slovakia too and the Slovaks too were swept off their feet. At the celebrations held at Nyitra on August 15th, 1933, in com-

memoration of Pribina, the legendary prince of Slovakia of the tenth century, — celebrations at which a large number of foreign prelates and diplomats were present too — the masses of Slovak Autonomists had their own way and forced the Prime Minister, M. Malypetr, to yield precedence to Mgr. Andrew Hlinka, whom the Czech authorities had been determined at all costs to prevent from speaking at all. This fiasco — which became a world sensation — combined with the "radicalisation" of the Sudeta Germans, prevailed upon the Prague Government to have recourse to the policy of the "mailed fist" in its treatment of the discontented non-Czech nationalities (and therefore of the Slovaks too).

The first manifestation of this policy was the arrest of Louis Bazovszky — who, in the columns of the "Národné Noviny", had spoken of the revision of the treaties of peace as a "categorical imperative" and at a meeting held at Besztercebánya (Báňská Bystrica) had protested in advance against the idea of the fate of the Slovaks being decided in their absence in the event of a revision, adding that the Czechs must repair all the damage done by them to Slovakia — and two of his friends. The trial of this case, which caused the greatest agitation in Slovak circles, was not held until months later, when the proceedings against Bazovsky — who had been set at liberty on account of the serious illness contracted by him during ten months of imprisonment — were suspended, but his two friends were sentenced to one year's imprisonment each.

The next steps taken by the authors of the "mailed fist" policy were the aggravation of the stringency of the Defence of the Republic Act and the passing of an Act relating to the dissolution of political parties and the prohibition of their activity. The Slovak Autonomist Parties were menaced by the constant danger of prohibition; and their leading organ — the "Slovák" — was placed under embargo in 1933 and in 1934, in each case for a period of three months. The Censor resorted more frequently than ever to the method of confiscation and deletion, using that weapon in particular against the Slovak Party papers, which appeared with blank spaces on an average of two or three times a week.

But even these anti-democratic measures failed to break the power of the Slovak Autonomist movement. The conclusion of the Russo-Czech treaty alienated from Prague still more thoroughly the Slovak Autonomists, who are deeply religious and anti-Bolsheviks. The same was the effect also of the Defence of the Republic Act, under which the greater part of Slovakia was declared to be "frontier zone" and a whole series of restrictions of liberty were put into force. When, after his election as President, M. Beneš visited Rózsashegy (Ružomberek), in his address of welcome Mgr. Hlinka stressed the question of autonomy. In a resolution dated March 29th, 1936, the Slovak People's Party once more demanded the recognition of the individuality of the Slovak nation and of the rights of the Slovak language, the establishment of a separate Slovak legislature and ministry, and decided to further intensify the struggle to obtain autonomy. At their mass meeting held at Pöstyén (Piešťany) on September 10th, 1936, the choirs of the Slovak People's Party — to the horror and consternation of the Czechs — were heard to repeat the names of Horthy, Hitler and Hlinka in one breath. The Pöstyén manifesto once more demanded autonomy — on a federative basis, stressing that "this State will never be a pillar of peace and an oasis of stability until all nationalities alike are satisfied with it and until Government gives the Slovaks what the Slovak people demanded already in 1848 through the medium of Štúr, Hurban and Hodža, — i. e. until the Slovaks have their own Diet and courts of law and schools."

The agreements concluded on February 18th, 1937, between the Czecho-Slovak Government and the German "activist" parties now dissolved — agreements which have not yet been carried into effect — were received with a little enthusiasm by the Slovak Autonomists as they were by the other "nationality" Opposition parties. Nothing illustrates better the opinion of these agreements held by the Slovak People's Party than the fact that the Censor confiscated the issue of the "Slovak" dealing with the said agreements. The Party — in particular the younger members — continued more and more vehemently to demand the recognition of the individuality of the Slovak nation; and in the winter of 1937

the students of the Pozsony (Bratislava) "Komensky" University — which is practically in Czech hands — took part in mass street demonstrations in which they demanded that their mother tongue should be given a fitting place in the university. And on the occasion of the visit to Czecho-Slovakia of M. Delbos, French Foreign Minister, the "Slovák" (December 15, 1937) once more declared that the Slovaks would never renounce national individuality or their claim to political autonomy.

During the current year there has been no abatement of the intensity of the fight being made by the Slovak Autonomists, whose efforts are being enhanced by the rapid approach of the tenth anniversary — on May 30th — of the conclusion of the Pittsburgh Convention. The rash statement made by the Minister of Justice, M. Ivan Dérer, in which he spoke of the radical Autonomists as "snotty-nosed brats" ("Rotzbuben"), merely added fuel to the fire. And then came the union of Austria and Germany, a great historical event which raised the autonomist and anti-Czech feelings of the Slovak people to boiling point.

At the session of the Czecho-Slovak Parliament held on March 28th Mgr. Joseph Tiso, Vice-President of the Slovak People's Party, declared that the struggle of the Slovaks to obtain political autonomy was simply a fight to ensure the application in the Czecho-Slovak Republic of the right of self-determination of the Slovak people, reminding the Czechs that those who in the present critical days refuse to respect that right misinterpret the essence of the Czecho-Slovak State and are guilty of a serious offence against its very existence. This statement on the part of M. Tiso was accompanied by declarations of a similar tenor on the part of the Sudeta Germans, Magyars and Poles; while the Czechs branded this attitude on the part of the Slovak people's Party as treason.

The struggle for autonomy is however not confined to the Slovak People's Party, the largest political organisation of the Slovak people: an equal share in that struggle is claimed also by the Magyars and by the Germans and Ruthenians of Slovakia. Even prior to the realisation of the „Anschluss" the non-Czech nationalities of Slovakia united

in the cause of autonomy, the first manifestation of the unity being the Magyar, Ruthenian and German statements appearing in the February 27th issue of the „Slovák” of which the leading chord was the demand of autonomy.

By way of illustrating the situation it should be noted that the population of Slovakia includes, besides some 2.2 million Slovaks, almost 1,000,000 Magyars, 500,000 Ruthenians and 160,000 Germans, while the number of Czech immigrants entering the country after 1918 is even today a mere fraction. The second largest nationality living in this province — the Magyars — have never allowed it to be forgotten that they were absorbed in the Czecho-Slovak State against their will and without their consent. The Magyar deputies sitting in the Czecho-Slovak Parliament in June, 1920, began their legislative activity with a solemn statement to the effect that they had been allotted to Czecho-Slovakia against their will and without their consent. The attitude of reserve latent in this statement has been stressed on several occasions since. However, seeing that for the present they are compelled to live in the Czecho-Slovak State and cannot hold aloof from the internal political struggles of that country, the Magyars have also been impelled to express an opinion of the constitutional machinery of the Czecho-Slovak Republic; and from the very outset they have endorsed the demand for the autonomy of Slovakia. For they have been guided by the consideration that the Slovaks, with whom they lived in exemplary union and agreement for centuries, will understand them better and treat them better than the Czechs who are strangers to them. As a consequence, at the first Minority Congress held in 1928 one of the delegates of the Magyars of Czecho-Slovakia declared that the Magyars of Slovakia were fighting for the territorial autonomy of Slovakia and for the cultural autonomy of the Magyars. And the policy of the Magyars of Slovakia has not deviated a jot from the line thus demarcated. In the statement made on February 27th, 1938, Count Esterházy — after establishing the fact from the very first moment of their existence the Hungarian parties have fought for the autonomy of Slovakia — expressed his conviction that after achieving their autonomy the Slovaks would not

copy the mistakes made by the Czechs, but would give the Magyars living in the Magyar areas of Slovakia the same rights as those enjoyed by the Slovaks living in the Slovak areas. The significance of the statements made on February 27th is enhanced by the circumstance that it was the first occasion on which the Slovak, Magyar, Ruthenian and German Autonomists had met publicly on the same platform.

The Autonomist declaration of February 27th and March 28th open a new chapter in the history of the struggle for Slovak autonomy. The new international situation brought into being by the „Anschluss" has considerably lessened the diplomatical importance of the Czecho-Slovak Republic and intensified the self-respect of the oppressed non-Czech nationalities. The Slovak people, to which Prague has so far refused to grant the equality to which it is entitled under the Pittsburgh Convention, — having indeed refused to recognise its national individuality —, is today demanding its autonomy more energetically than ever before. Maybe Prague will attempt by the aid of fresh arbitrary measures to weaken temporarily the Slovak autonomist movement, — maybe the present vehemence of that movement will be followed provisionally by a slight abatement of energy —; but here cannot be any doubt that the problem of Slovak autonomy is one of the questions demanding an urgent solution on the satisfactory settlement of which the existence of Czecho-Slovakia depends. The Slovak Autonomists make no secret of the fact that, if Czecho-Slovakia is unable or unwilling to solve the problem, they will attempt to solve it themselves under the auspices of others. On February 22nd, 1934, the „Lidové Noviny" — an organ closely connected with President Beneš — published a statement made by Hlinka to the effect that „*We shall remain Slovaks even at the cost of the Republic.* Our programme is a sovereign Slovak nation and Slovak autonomy with legislative and executive powers".