

# THE CZECHO-SLOVAK SITUATION

BY

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All the things that have happened in Czecho-Slovakia since the Munich Agreement and the Vienna award respectively show that it is just as impossible today to create healthy, viable States by force as it was in the days when the Peace Edicts were drafted which have proved so unsuitable and so unworkable in that respect. Stability and viability can only be shown by State formations — at least that is the lesson of history — in which the will of the peoples is supported by the traditions of the past and by those geopolitical conditions which are alone capable of supplying the indispensable basic foundations of economic viability without which there cannot be either political independence or economic and cultural development.

That the Treaties of Versailles, Saint-Germain and Trianon have disappointed the expectations even of the victors, and that the unfortunate liquidation of the Great War has perpetuated in Europe, and indeed in the whole world, a state of uncertainty and a universal re-armament mania of everybody against everybody else, the result being that the apparent state of peace is in reality nothing more or less than a continuation with other weapons of the Great War, — these circumstances prove that the reconciliation of the world cannot be ensured by the methods employed in 1919. If the world is genuinely and really anxious for peace, a sine qua non of that issue is a complete moral regeneration which shall

base co-operation between the peoples on foundations of justice and absolute equality and ensure that there shall not ensue a clash between the political principles professed and the experiences of everyday life such as the peoples must have observed as being in existence within the framework of the activity of the League of Nations.

In terms of the Munich Agreement and the Vienna award Czecho-Slovakia has been re-constructed, having handed over her German, Magyar and Polish minorities and thereby suffering a shifting in respect of economic and political viability offering little prospect of the process of time bringing into being in the re-constructed State the conditions without which consolidation is impossible. In this new State too the Czechs are anxious to continue to wield the actual power, despite the fact that they have been forced by circumstances to meet the wishes of the Slovaks and Ruthenians and to grant them the autonomy which they had been demanding for 20 years.

The present state of things, and still more so the probable development of the situation, will be bound to induce a conflict between the interests of the provinces wrested from Hungary — Slovakia and Ruthenia — and those of Prague. What has so far happened has shown that the formal recognition of the rights of self-government of Slovakia and Ruthenia has not produced the desired results and has not brought about a harmonious co-operation between Prague on the one hand and Pozsony and Huszt on the other; and we have every reason to expect an even more serious aggravation of the antagonism in the immediate future.

So far the Slovak and Ruthenian peoples have not profited at all by the recognition of their rights of self-government; for the present leaders of those peoples have not yet been able to solve even the most elementary problems connected with the organisation of their State machinery: still less are they in a position to formulate a programme calculated to strengthen the political independence now ceded in appearance by means of the weapons of economic independence and of financial independence of Prague. The only manifest results so far achieved are no results at all, — a petty

scrambling and the assertion of the personal interests of a few individuals. The conflict between the governments of Prague, Pozsony and Huszt respectively at times assumes the most grotesque forms. Unprecedented, for example, is the protest addressed by the Government of the Ruthenian Premier, Mr. Volosin, direct to Berlin against the appointment as Ruthenian Minister of the Czech General Prchala. The energetic criticism and open threats against Prague used by the Slovak Premier, M. Tiso, prove that the present State structure offers no possibilities of constructive co-operation even within this framework of the new Republic itself.

The recognition of the rights of self-government of Slovakia and Ruthenia does not by any means denote the acknowledgment in real life of the legitimate demands of the Slovak and Ruthenian peoples. Both the Tiso and the Volosin Governments are still entirely dependent financially upon Prague, that preventing their efforts to eliminate the hated Czech bureaucracy and to replace the Czech officials by Slovaks and Ruthenians respectively. Another circumstance rendering the self-government of the former Hungarian territories quite valueless and illusory is the continued occupation of these territories by the Czech army. It is these circumstances that have prevented the elimination of the conflict existing between Prague on the one hand and Pozsony and Huszt on the other, which they have actually served to aggravate. MM. Tiso and Volosin are quite unable to show any results likely to meet the expectations of their peoples, and are therefore driven to divert attention from the actual conditions either by abuse of Prague or by confiscating the rights of the minorities entrusted to their care. And in this connection there would appear to be no limit to their excesses. They seem to be serenely ignorant of the existence of international treaties guaranteeing the rights of the Magyar, German and Polish minorities living in their countries. The data of the Census effected by surprise on December 31st last — data the authenticity of which we have no means of checking — cannot possibly serve as justification for the invalidation of the Minority Treaty concluded at Saint Germain-en-Laye in September, 1919, to which Czecho-Slovakia was also a signatory, for the dissolution of political parties,

and for compelling the German and Magyar minorities to figure at the elections on the Government's official list. The object of this procedure was to provide that those minorities should only receive a fraction of the representation due to them in law and even more to force them to make a breach in the system of minority protection guaranteed by international treaty. This is what happened in Slovakia: but the Volosin Government has gone farther still, dissolving the only Magyar party and preventing the Magyars from taking any part at all in the elections in Carpatho-Russia. These are all short-sighted, petty tricks impeding the possibility of tranquillity in the country concerned and calculated to provisionally satisfy the expectations of certain extreme nationalist quarters.

The difficulties in international relations with which Prague is faced are bound to increase in gravity as a result of the financial and economic situation of the State; and the aggravation of those difficulties must be accompanied by a parallel aggravation of the conflict between the interests of the historical provinces and those of Slovakia and Ruthenia, the provinces wrested by Trianon from pre-War Hungary. For Prague will continue to direct all its efforts towards the elimination of its own difficulties (already practically insuperable), the interests involved being absolutely incompatible with those of Slovakia and Carpatho-Russia, which countries — alike for geopolitical reasons and owing to the transport conditions in force — cannot ensure their economic viability except by co-operation with Hungary.

What is going on today in Slovakia and Carpatho-Russia is nothing more or less than a wild scramble. The Tiso and Volosin Governments simply do not know what to do with the mock autonomy which has been given them. They are quite unable to provide the inhabitants with the conditions of subsistence; unemployment is greater than ever before; the receipts cover only a fraction of the expenditure: as a consequence Prague can at all times employ the weapon of financial dependence to force the Slovak and Ruthenian Governments into obedience and subservience. The Tiso and Volosin Governments therefore assert their power against

the minorities in order to divert attention from their utter incapacity and helplessness. Not only the State and the other authorities, but even private undertakings are dismissing from their service employees and officials belonging to the Magyar and German minorities; and expulsions from the countries are everyday occurrences. The Magyar minority — estimated at 150.000 souls — has only one secondary school remaining at its disposal (in Pozsony), despite the fact that in the territory re-incorporated in Hungary 5 secondary schools are at the disposal of the Slovak minority.

Unrest and uncertainty is in evidence everywhere, together with an atmosphere of hatred and chaos, this state of things being due ultimately to the circumstance that the new formations are unviable owing to the fact that the arbitrarily drawn new frontiers — although to a large extent based upon ethnic considerations — do not conform with the wishes of the peoples concerned, which have so far been deprived of an opportunity to exercise their right of self-determination.

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