SLOVAKIA'S ECONOMIC TROUBLES

BY

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Slovakia is finding it increasingly difficult to provide her population with food. Of late, as we learn from the "Slovenska Politika" and the "Slovak", there has been a great shortage of leguminous vegetables. This is indicated by the rapid rise in their price. Hitherto Slovakia imported large quantities from Rumania, but since the latter reduced her exports, the shortage in Slovakia has become increasingly alarming. *The price of lentils, for instance, has risen from 4 to 12 crowns a kilogramme; peas instead of being 5 are now 14 crowns, and millet costs 6 crowns instead of 2.* Imports of rice have fallen off to a remarkable extent. Slovakia cannot pay Italy for the rice required, and the Slovak papers are urging the population to use pearl barley instead. At the present moment, four pearl barley factories are being equipped, in order to supply the people with a sufficient quantity of that commodity to take the place of rice. In the last economic year the bean crop in Slovakia was very poor, and all the stocks accumulated in previous years have in consequence been used up. A kilogramme of beans costs about 6 Slovak crowns. The potato supplies suffered from the frost this cold winter. As a result, the price of potatoes has now risen from 25 to 80 crowns per quintal. So far as certain other foodstuffs are concerned, the situation is so grave that Slovakia is obliged to consume what was set apart as seed. *In April there were practically no supplies of lard or bacon in the country.* Slovak circles complain, for instance, that Yugoslavia is not willing to export lard and bacon to Slovakia when she can get a better price for these commodities from England. The April 24th issue of the "Slovenska Politika" states with some bitterness that "the price of Yugoslav bacon went up

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2 dinars per kilogramme last week." In this connection the "Slovak" remarks that the country's requirements of lard and bacon had to be supplied by the pigs fattened at home, while "the goods imported were stored away." In the month of April Hungary exported 87 wagon-loads of pigs to Slovakia. Hungary also came to Slovakia's assistance with leguminous vegetables. *It is interesting to note that at the very time when the Slovak Press was engaged in a campaign of the most violent anti-Hungarian propaganda, Hungary supplied Slovakia with 20 wagon loads of Victoria and Express peas, as an advance on the next economic year's quota.*

As stated above, the circumstance that it was only by means of the most strenuous efforts that the Government was able to supply the inhabitants with lard and bacon during the past months has given rise to growing anxiety in the country. The population was made entirely dependent on domestic production, and the fat imported was carefully stored away against the lean years to come. The situation is aggravated by the circumstance that *the Schicht factory has reduced considerably the amount of vegetable fats it used to export to Slovakia.* Up till 15th December that factory accepted all the orders placed with it by its Slovak customers, but after that date it stopped practically all its exports. With a view to improving the situation Slovak economic circles entered into negotiations with the management of the factory in an attempt to ensure at least a fraction of Slovakia's former imports. The "Slovak" of 19th May reports that in April Slovakia managed to procure 10 wagon loads of vegetable fats from Germany. *This quantity was handed over to the various Prefectures with official instructions to distribute it equally among the centres of industry in the country.* Responsible Slovak authorities are now trying to improve the situation by encouraging people to grow sunflowers for their seed. On 12th May the "Slovak" published an article containing expert advice on the subject. According to that article, if 2000 villages were to engage in the cultivation of sunflowers on at least 24 cadastral yokes per village, 5000 wagon loads of sunflower seed would be produced. Reckoning that sunflower seed contains 30%

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of oil — says the "Slovak,, — this would yield 1500 wagon loads of fat annually. In this manner Slovakia tries to find a way out of her difficulties. Rumour has it that the first Slovak vegetable fat factory is already under construction in a village on the river Vág.

Because of these difficulties with the food supply, or rather on account of the increasing difficulty of obtaining imports, prices are rising rapidly everywhere in Slovakia. The rise in prices has reached such enormous dimensions throughout the whole country that it has been found necessary to establish a so-called "Price Bureau". This measure has not, however, been effective in checking the upward tendency. Commerce having failed to adhere to the prices fixed by this office, a flood of proceedings were instituted by the courts of justice against price-raisers. Day by day, the Slovak papers publish reports of preceedings against offenders in every corner of Slovakia. Despite the Price Bureau and the activities of the law courts, things have come to such a pass that it has been found necessary to organize so-called "flying committees" for the purpose of controlling prices by surprise visits. A lengthy article in the "Slovak" of 9th May describes the work being done by the Price Bureau. We learn that *one of the flying committees imposed fines amounting to 140.000 Slovak crowns in Nyitra alone on one single day.* There were cases where the flying committee established a rise of 200%. The authorities everywhere are simply trying to cure the symptoms, but do nothing to strike at the root of the evil, namely the lack of commodities. This explains why the measures instituted have not been productive of the good results expected by Slovak official circles.

It is the poorest section of the Slovak population that feels the pinch most. The industrial labouring-class in particular is called upon to make the greatest sacrifices. Employers refuse to take the greatly increased prices of everyday necessities into consideration when fixing the wages of their employees. The old prices, which exist only on paper, are still taken as the basis of their calculations. The workers, who feel the pinch of poverty caused by changed conditions, are forced to put up a fight for an

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increase of their wages proportionate to the higher prices of the necessaries of life. The leaders of the campaign for higher wages are the textile workers. *The "Slovak" of 12th May reports that when negotiating the new collective contracts the union of the textile workers demanded a 20% increase. The same demand was made by the metal workers.* Much unrest has been caused among workers and employers alike by the Government's failure to settle the wage question in a unifcrm manner. The workers are restless and movements are on foot among them. In certain isolated cases employers have shown more sympathy for the working people than has the Government. The "Tibergien" textile mill at Trencsén, for instance, is now paying 15% more to its hands, and the Pozsony metal industries are also making an extra allowance to meet the increased cost of living. It is true that in view of the unrest among the workers employers are well-advised to make concessions.

The Pozsony Chamber of Commerce has also taken steps to cope with the situation. It convened a meeting which, according to the "Slovak" of 16th May, was attended by a large number of the representatives of commerce and industry. There it was established that *"the sternest possible measures must be taken to combat the unreasonable rise in prices, but at the same time, a decent profit must be ensured to legitimate enterprize and the normal activity of industry will have to be guaranteed."*

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