

HUNGARIAN EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA

BY

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Another major grievance, incalculable in its consequences, has been inflicted on the Magyars of Slovakia. The Hungarian Teachers' Training College in Pozsony is being closed.

In the present political circumstances the closing of a school is not a great event; but for the Magyar minority in Slovakia, which numbers over a hundred thousand souls, it is *a vital matter of the greatest importance*. We must therefore note it and discuss it, and must clearly point out the consequences it is likely to have for the Magyars of Slovakia.

Hitherto the Magyars had two higher-grade schools, the grammar-school and the State Teachers' Training College in Pozsony. But these schools were very far away from most of the Magyar settlements. The Magyars of Eastern Slovakia were scarcely in a position to send their children to those schools for education in their own mothertongue. For this reason the two schools in Pozsony were practically dependent for their support on the Magyars of Pozsony and its surroundings. But only about one-third (some 40.000) of the Magyars of Slovakia live in or near Pozsony. The rest, the people of Nyitra and Nagymihály and their surroundings, were debarred from sending their children to Hungarian secondary schools. The major problems of Hungarian minority education arose from this fact. How would it have been possible to solve the problem of education in their mother-tongue for the children who could not go to Pozsony? *The solution would have been to establish Hungarian secondary schools in Nyitra and Nagymihály. But for this to happen the Slovak Government would have had to adopt a different minority policy, instead of which it persisted in the old one.* When it came to solving its cultural problems, the Government wholly ignored its hundred thousand Magyars. It even

went farther, for the anti-minority attitude of the Slovak Administration has made it impossible for the Magyars to keep the schools supported mainly by their own generosity. This is the position in the case of the Pozsony Hungarian Teachers' Training College too, for it should be known that that school was maintained primarily by minority Magyars, the Slovak Government merely playing a secondary rôle in its maintenance. *The State, then, instead of promoting and encouraging minority education by establishing new schools, is closing those in existence.*

In the present instance the school being closed is one the importance of which for the Magyars of Slovakia is wellnigh incalculable. It was in this school that minority Magyar teachers for the elementary schools were trained. If now it will be closed, it will not be possible to replace the Magyar teachers who die or retire. It logically follows that the Magyar pupils who go in for teaching will have to obtain their certificates in a Slovak college. They will not be taught in their own tongue, and we may well ask how they will be able to teach the Magyar elementary pupils in Hungarian. In these circumstances the next stage will be that Slovak teachers who do not speak Hungarian at all, or speak it badly, will be sent to the Magyar elementary schools. The result of this will be denationalization, assimilation, and assimilation in its most ruthless form, which operating in the schools will, by tearing the children away from the Magyar sphere of culture, reduce the numbers of the Magyars of Slovakia.

How great is the danger expressed in figures?

Before replying to this question it should be stated that *the number of Magyar children who for lack of Hungarian schools are forced to attend non-Hungarian ones is already very great.* Now for the question itself. The Magyars of Slovakia numbering over a hundred thousand souls have only 36 Hungarian elementary schools with 103 classes. These schools are all overcrowded, and the teachers have to make superhuman efforts to cope with their work.

And now, *the step taken by the Slovak Government is in point of fact an attack on these 36 schools, which in Slovakia are the last outposts of Hungarian culture.*

The gravity of the position and the cruelty of the Government's measure is doubly emphasized by the circumstance that Hungary grants the fullest liberty in cultural and other fields to all her minorities, including of course the Slovaks of Hungary. Whereas therefore the Slovaks of this country are free to establish schools and maintain cultural institutions, in Slovakia a death sentence has been pronounced on Hungarian education.

The joint Parents' Society of the Hungarian grammar-school and Teachers' Training College in Pozsony met on 3rd May to discuss the problem of the training of Magyar teachers. The conclusion arrived at by the meeting throws a very sad light on conditions in Slovakia. When the president announced that in future there would be no Hungarian Teachers' training college in the country, consternation was naturally general. The matter was debated and in principle it was decided that representations should be made to the Government demanding that the school should be maintained. The general opinion, however, was that it was useless to do anything, for the Ministry of Education was determined not to maintain it on any account. When the College has been closed all its assets will pass into the possession of the Slovak Teachers' Training College.