



PROTECTION OF MAGYAR INTERESTS IN SLOVAKIA

BY

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An important event in the political and national life of the Magyars of Slovakia was the great organizing tour undertaken by Count John Esterházy in April. The occasion on which this eminent leader of the Magyar minority visited all the places in Slovakia inhabited by Magyars was afforded by the circumstance that, after three major campaigns, the Magyars of Slovakia were at last successful in obtaining permission to form a political Party recognized by the State, which involved the necessity of establishing local organizations. As Chairman of the Party, Count Esterházy visited all the Magyar districts and entrusted leaders of local organizations with the task of directing the political life of their own circuits. From reports received we learn that *his tour amounted to what was practically a triumphal procession*. It must be remembered that during the three years of Slovakia's independence Magyar district organizations had hitherto not been allowed to function independently and were falling into a decline. From a state of coma lasting for three years they came to life again with startling vigour when Count Esterházy appeared among them with the welcome news of their freedom to organize.

Among the districts to join the movement were some of which it had been long said by anti-Hungarian propaganda that there was not a single Magyar living in them. The behaviour of these scattered districts is the most eloquent proof that the Magyars of Slovakia are not a negligible and dwindling quantity, but are an important factor that must be reckoned with. In all the scattered districts where the Magyars welcomed the opportunity to organize the most touching zeal was manifested at *Dobsina, Beszterce-*

bánya, Gölnicbánya, Lőcse and Késmárk. At Dobsina, in the fervour of organization, another aim was broached: the establishment of Hungarian education, for at present the Magyars of Dobsina are forced to send their children to alien schools. At Stósz, too, the urgency of obtaining permission to establish Hungarian schools was stressed. But the greatest achievement following Count Esterházy's tour was that contact was restored between the Magyars of Eastern and Western Slovakia and existing links were strengthened. Because of the difficulties of communication the Magyars in the Eastern regions, who live in more widely scattered districts than the Magyars of Pozsony and Western Slovakia, were not able to get into touch and maintain contact with the latter. From this it followed that Magyar Party life and all Magyar political activity was confined to the capital, Pozsony, and could not spread to the Eastern parts of the country. On Count Esterházy's tour the elimination of these difficulties was discussed and a uniform plan of work agreed upon.

When the local organizations had been established, the Party, under Count Esterházy's guidance, immediately began a widespread work the object of which is to make the protection of Magyar interests more effective. Count Esterházy made several suggestions and spoke more than once in the Slovak Parliament on questions affecting the Magyar minority. Recently a Bill was introduced dealing with a labour community of workers. *This Bill makes no provision whatever for the protection of the Magyar working classes*, in point of fact it exposes them to a certain degree of denationalization. It was drafted by M. Csavojszky, leader of the Slovak Christian Socialist Trade Union, and on recognizing the dangers to which its provisions exposed the Magyar working classes, Count Esterházy criticized it in the Slovak Parliament.

Count Esterházy's Speech.

"When I received the text of the Bill dealing with a labour community of the Slovak workers, which has been drafted by my honoured colleague M. Rudolph Csavojszky,

I was delighted to think that the important questions affecting the lives of the workers and employees were at last to be settled. I am given to understand that official circles are not very much in sympathy with the Trade Union system, which savours of Marxism, but for lack of anything better it has on the whole persisted, since provision of some kind had to be made for the protection of workmen and employees.

"We are a social State professing Christian brotherly love; it is therefore natural that we should make every effort to see that the workers are protected, adequately provided with supplies and that their livelihood is assured, and besides this provision must be made for the members of their families. Hitherto the Slovaks have had their own organization for workmen and employees, and I understand that the Germans also had and still have their Arbeitsfront, only we Magyars have never been able to organize the status of our working classes, because the competent authorities have consistently refused to approve our Trade Union rules. *Within the framework of the Party we have, it is true, gathered our workmen, our private and public employees, pensioners and the Magyar members of the liberal professions, but as no adequate steps were taken by the authorities, we could not create for them an organization that would have protected their interests.* I regret to say that the Bill drafted by my honoured colleague M. Csavojszky would provide no solution of the question in the case of the Magyar working classes. So far as it applies to the Slovaks, it is adequate in every respect, and the Slovak working people will probably hail with delight a solution that makes definite provision for the protection of their interests and saves them from the possibility of unpleasant surprises. The Constitution guarantees full and equal rights to all the nationalities, affords all registered Parties the possibility of participating in the executive power of the State and prescribes that the Parties shall co-operate with the organizations mentioned in Articles 60 and 63 of the Constitution. *The labour community is an organization of the kind with which, in the spirit of the Constitution, the co-operation of a nationality is conceivable only if that*

nationality enjoys the same rights in it as do its other members.

"I must therefore protest against the provision contained in the Bill according to which the members of a national minority that has no organization to represent its interests may, if they wish, become members of the Slovak organization. I cannot imagine this, for the Slovak organization is in fact a constituent section of the Hlinka Party, and only Slovaks may be members of that Party. How therefore can a non-Slovak join that organization voluntarily or otherwise? This would be at variance with the Constitution and also contrary to the whole structure of the State, for that structure does not tolerate any mixture of the nationalities, prescribing, as the Constitution does, an entirely separate sphere of influence and field of operation for each of the several nationalities. It is true that the Magyars have always been at a disadvantage. The provision in question affords opportunities for denationalization, a process that in terms of Article 92 of the Constitution is to be avoided at all costs.

"To my deepest regret I cannot therefore accept in its present wording M. Csavojszky's Bill. I would be willing to accept it with an amendment to the effect that every nationality is entitled to establish within its own Party a labour community indetical with that belonging to the Slovaks, i. e. to the Hlinka Party. This would present no difficulty, the less so since the Magyars could easily create such an organization in the shortest time, either on the basis of the Trade Union rules submitted for approval, with perhaps slight alterations, or by establishing Party departments corresponding to the protective organizations mentioned in § 2 of the Bill. *We certainly cannot resign ourselves to seeing our Magyar working classes being left unprotected because there is no Magyar Trade Union or Magyar labour community, or to seeing them forced to join the organization belonging to another nationality.* Already it has been greatly to their disadvantage that the authorities keep on postponing the approval of their Trade Union rules. In some places a most unfair advantage has been taken of this state of matters, and decent, harmless, industrious men

have been treated with much less consideration than those who belong either to the Slovak or the German associations. Magyar workmen do not receive the extras paid to the others because of rising prices and they are being made to feel that they must suffer for being loyal to their race by refusing to join non-Magyar organizations. I am convinced that this is not in accordance with the intentions of the President and the Government, but this sort of thing will continue and cannot be stopped so long as the status of the Magyar working classes is not established. Considerations of consolidation also demand a settlement of this question. I therefore beg the Government to agree to this proposed amendment of the Bill."

The Magyar working people of Slovakia hope that the Bill will be amended so that it will not deprive them of the possibility of their interests being increasingly protected.

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