

# PROSPECTS OF SLOVAK INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

BY

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**T**he importance of the question as to the prospects of Slovak industrial production lies in the fact that those prospects determine the future welfare and prosperity of the whole Slovak State and of the whole Slovak people.

We are not compelled to outline those prospects; they have been outlined by Slovak experts of sober judgment. As a consequence, it is quite out of the question for the reader to adopt the very convenient method of attributing the conclusions drawn with reference to the prospects of Slovak industrial production to some supposed or alleged prepossession on the part of the persons drawing those conclusions.

The February number of the Slovak economic periodical "*Hospodárska Obroda*" ("Economic Renaissance") contains an article from the pen of Dr. Vincent *Cserhelyi*, one of the leading Slovak economic experts. In the course of his article Dr. Cserhelyi *inter alia* makes the following exceptionally surprising statements: — "Slovakia must realize that the conditions of successful development must be ensured within the frontiers eventually demarcated by the Peace Conference. Is there any means of determining these frontiers in a manner enabling future Slovak generations to achieve subsistence for centuries within the framework of those frontiers? This is a difficult question hardly answerable in the affirmative. For we see that with her population at its present numerical strength *Slovakia is incapable unaided of producing food enough to satisfy normal requirements.* The procural of the articles of food required over and above Slovakia's own production is possible only in exchange for certain of her own products; but in this connection we are

faced with the difficulty resulting from the circumstance that our barter trade can be carried on only with European States (partly with Turkey) which do not themselves possess sufficient surplus stocks of the products needed by us which could only be obtained by way of exchange. There are indeed persons who are of opinion that by perfecting or ameliorating our agrarian production, — by parcelling out the land and regulating our rivers —, we shall be able to increase our agrarian production to an extent ensuring our ability to be self-providing for a considerable period; but in the eyes of the practically minded observer and research student this view is nothing more or less than unjustified optimism. Statistics show that we must reckon on an increase of population. Even if we presume that it will be possible to materially enhance agrarian production in Slovakia, there are limits also to the possibility of such enhancement. Not even the most inveterate optimist believes, for instance, that we could actually double our agrarian production. It is quite possible that in the years immediately following the present Great War we shall prove able to increase our agrarian production to an extent corresponding percentually to the increase of the population; but that production will not be able for long to keep up that rate of increase. Perhaps we shall be able to continue the process for 10—20 years; but there is not much likelihood of our continuing to do so *ad infinitum*. And after all what are 10—20 years in the life of a nation which has to secure the conditions of existence for centuries ahead? It will therefore be clear to every one that within her present frontiers Slovakia will be incapable of providing her population with a normal supply of food even for fifty years. *Should we desire to provide the food supply of an increased population by enhancing industrial production, we should find ourselves unable to do that either. The number of persons earning their living in industrial production is 100.000; including their dependants, the number of persons supported by industry is some 500—600.000. Taking the annual natural increase of population at 20.000 souls, we find that our industrial production would have to be increased by some 4—5%. Those persons who regard such*

a rate of industrialization possible, would — I believe — have to be characterized as optimists. We must not feed on illusions; and we must face realities, realizing that for over a century the surplus population of Slovakia has been compelled to wander abroad and try to obtain a subsistence beyond the frontiers of the country."

This is what Dr. Vincent Cserhelyi's diagnosis has to tell us about the prospects of Slovakia's agrarian and industrial production. With regard to the past, Cserhelyi's diagnosis makes it quite evident that the emigration from Slovak districts was due to the adverse natural character of the territory. In the period prior to the first Great War the Hungarian industrial authorities endeavoured to restrict the migration to Slovakia itself by a large-scale industrialization of the Slovak areas. At the same time large quotas of the surplus population were settled in the flat regions of Hungary proper, — in the "Bácska" district, for instance, where the Slovak settlers have preserved their own separate ethnic entity. By ruining the industry of Slovakia the Czech Government undid the work done by the Hungarian Government, thereby driving the Slovaks once more into the maelstrom of emigration. *During the twenty years of the existence of Czecho-Slovakia emigration from the Slovak districts was seventeen times in excess of that from the Czech districts.*