

PRAGUE PURSUES ITS OLD POLICY UNDER A NEW CLOAK

BY
ODÓN TARJÁN

In terms of the Munich Four Power Pact, Czecho-Slovakia has handed over the demarcated territories to Germany, Poland and Hungary. Although under that agreement the principle of self-determination should have been enforced when they were being ceded, it was not, and for this the Czecho-Slovak Government was to blame. Prague protested against a plebiscite, even in the disputed areas with a mixed population, surely because in the case of a plebiscite the autochthonous inhabitants of Slovakia and Ruthenia would have exercised their right of self-determination, which would have been synonymous with breaking away from Prague.

Thus it happened that under the pressure of circumstances Prague was forced to take cognizance of the Slovak resolution pronounced at Zsolna, but Dr. Joseph Tiso's appointment as Slovak Prime Minister was contrary to the will of the people, and the organization of the new State was begun in the same spirit that characterized the work of Beneš and his Czech colleagues at the Peace Conference. Needless to say, the results could not be expected to fulfil Prague's expectations.

Dr. Tiso was appointed Slovak Prime Minister by General Sirovy, to whom he took an oath of allegiance. M. Andrew Bródy, Ruthenian Premier, was also appointed by General Sirovy. If there was any reason in the first days to doubt Prague's intention to suppress at any price the manifestation of the real will of the people, there is none today, for events have shown that the Slovaks and Ruthenians are fully justified in showing an utter lack of confidence in the Sirovy Government.

The autonomy of Slovakia and Ruthenia is nothing but

an unscrupulous farce. The Slovak and Ruthenian Ministers were appointed by the Czech Premier, who can throw them out of office when he chooses. He has done so, in fact, whenever any of the Ministers of the allegedly self-governing Slovakia and Ruthenia dared to oppose Prague. In four short weeks more than half a dozen Ministers lost their portfolios. Brödy, the Ruthenian Prime Minister was accused of treason, because he had the temerity to demand a plebiscite. His assets were confiscated by his successor, Premier Volosin, without any legal procedure. Today Brödy is a prisoner in a Prague gaol. Dr. Fencik, another Ruthenian Minister, proclaimed his solidarity with Brödy and resigned his office.

A serious clash of interests arose between Prague and Pozsony, Prague and Ruthenia and Ruthenia and Slovakia. The Slovak Government demanded the right to have a say in the questions of foreign affairs affecting Slovakia. This was refused point-blank by Prague. Slovakia would like to establish a Slovak bank of issue. Prague refuses to hear of it, for one of the Czech Government's chief political manoeuvres is the intention to keep the Governments of Slovakia in subjection by making that province's financial difficulties permanent. The public are fully aware of this, and, as a result, 20% of the bank deposits have already been withdrawn.

Another cause of serious antagonism between Prague and Pozsony is the movement of about 300.000 Slovaks in Moravia, who want to join Slovakia. A deputation of about 2,000 of those Slovaks was prevented by Czech gendarmes from attending a meeting held at Szokolca and demanding a plebiscite. The judiciary and the body of attorneys in Slovakia have announced their complete separation from Prague.

Grave differences have arisen between the Slovak and Ruthenian Governments on the question of the demarcation of the western frontier of Ruthenia. The Ruthenian Government lays claim to the whole of the northern frontier zone, as far as Poprád and including the town of Eperjes, on the grounds that there are Ruthenians living in that area. The organ of the Slovak Government, the "Slovenska Pravda", in an article entitled "Ruthenian megalomania" rejects the demands of the Ruthenian Government.

The new arrangements are anything but a proof that the Government feels the support of public opinion behind it. The activity of the Tiso Government is characterized by indecision and a system of barefaced "influence". Notaries public who did not support Tiso's régime were transferred to Hungarian towns a few days before the latter were restored to Hungary; their appointments were given to others as a reward for political services, and highly salaried Government commissioners were set over the newspapers, printing offices and industrial undertakings.

The lot of the minorities shows no signs of improvement. It is true that the Tiso Government was obliged to appoint a German Secretary of State, but, on the other hand, it dissolved the Hungaro-German National Council of Szepes, just as the Volosin Government dissolved the political parties and confiscated their assets.

In vain do we seek to find a spirit of conciliation and circumspection in the activity hitherto displayed by the Tiso Government. The provisions of the Munich Pact are being evaded by means of petty chicaneries, not only in the field of politics, but also in the sphere of economics. To quote one instance: by order of the Pozsony Government the equipments of the famous observatory at Ógyalla, which has now passed into Hungary's possession, were dismantled and removed to Eperjes. This observatory had been equipped by a landowner, M. Julius Konkoly-Thege, who presented it to the Hungarian State. With this measure the Tiso Government has purloined property of purely Hungarian origin.

Everything that could possibly be carried away from the territories restored to Hungary was transported to Bohemia or at least to Slovakia. The fittings of the hospitals, Roentgen lamps, and even the beds were carried off as was the parquet flooring of the public buildings. Vandalism assumed such proportions that materials not worth the cost of transportation were also taken.

The Czech and Slovak Governments will have themselves to thank if, by this behaviour, they provide legal grounds for reparation claims that will not be calculated to promote neighbourly relations with Hungary.