

B O O K S

Magyars, Slovaks and Ruthenians in the Danube Valley. By Ödön Tarján and Dr. Andrew Fall. (Budapest, 1938. Victor Hornyánszky Ltd. 55 pp. and 3 maps.)

This valuable work, by Ödön Tarján and Dr. Andrew Fall, which with the help of irrefutable data and arguments reveals the points of contact between the Magyars and the Slovaks and Ruthenians, was published in the days immediately following the Munich Agreement. In its introduction the authors point out that Hungary's significance in connection with European peace and the reconstruction of the Danube Valley is not determined by her military strength, but by her geopolitical situation and the state-building abilities shown for more than a thousand years by the Hungarian people.

After a description of Masaryk's and Beneš' propaganda, it contains a chapter devoted to the historical struggle for autonomy carried on by the late leader of the Slovaks, Father Hlnka. Here the writers say:

After the decision of the Four Power Conference in Munich had been made public, the Slovak People's Party, — having come to terms with the Czecho-Slovak Agrarians and the Slovak National Party, — held a meeting at Zsolna at which it was resolved to establish a joint front in the interests of Slovak autonomy. The idea was to effect a reconstruction of the Czecho-Slovak State on a dualistic basis after the model of the old Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

In the Zsolna resolution it was announced that the Slovaks dwelling in the Czecho-Slovak Republic insisted on their right of self-determination and demanded international recognition of Slovak national unity. They insisted on a demobilization of the Slovak troops and stated that they had taken over administrative and executive control. The communiqué issued in connection with the Zsolna resolution ends with the words: — "The victory of the principle of self determination signifies the end of a struggle that has lasted for years. Long live the free Slovak nation! Long live the Slovak Government."

The Prague Government, sorely pressed on all sides, was

compelled to take cognizance of the Zsolna resolution, but soon devised an expedient to ensure that Slovak autonomy should remain illusory. The Prague Government accepted the fact that Dr. Josef Tiso and four others had formed a Slovak Government, but this "independent" Slovak Government was required to take an oath of allegiance to the Czech Premier. Tiso suggested the appointment of his four co-ministers, but the appointments were made by Premier Sirovy.

By acceding to the Slovak demands Prague hoped perhaps to avoid a manifestation of the real will of the Slovak people in a plebiscite.

It is obvious that an autonomy achieved not by the will of the people but thanks to the patronage of another State, is a mere travesty of political independence and a flouting of Hlinka's aims.

The right of self-determination must be exercised by the Slovak people in a plebiscite and without any outside influence being brought to bear on them. Before the plebiscite takes place Slovakia must be cleared of all the Czech troops, gendarmes and police and of the Czech administration. Otherwise it is scarcely conceivable that Slovaks would be allowed to express their desires freely.

In connection with the Ruthenian struggle for autonomy the book says that Prague employed the same methods to prevent Ruthenia's breaking away from the Republic — which it was certain to do if it had the chance — as were used to postpone at least the manifestation of Slovak self-determination. In Ungvár a National Council of Ruthenians and Ukrainians was allowed to draw up Ruthenia's demands and — what seemed of even greater importance — to nominate the members of the Ruthenian Government. A deputy named Bródy was nominated Prime Minister, Dr. Bárány, who was already a member of the Prague Government, was made Governor, and five other political leaders received portfolios. With this personal ambitions were partly satisfied, only the Ruthenian people were given no opportunity of expressing their wishes or of exerting any influence on the future development of their affairs in the radically changed circumstances.

The Ruthenian autonomy established according to Prague's intentions cannot be regarded as a final settlement, only as an attempt to apply Prague's wellknown methods to Ruthenia. There, as in Slovakia, the final decision must be taken by the autochthonous inhabitants by way of a plebiscite conducted on the principle of the right of self-determination.

The bitter sufferings of the Magyars in Czecho-Slovakia are graphically described. We learn of the anti-Magyar banking laws and Land Reform, of disindustrialisation, of a taxation and tariff policy aiming at the denationalization of the

minorities, and of the dimensions assumed by emigration as the result of oppression.

A separate chapter deals with the situation created by the Munich Agreement in Bohemia as well as in Slovakia and Ruthenia. The final conclusion drawn by the authors is that the future of the Slovak and the Ruthenian nations rests with the peoples themselves. The question is whether they are willing to exchange the sham autonomy conceded by a sorely pressed Prague for a self-government which really and truly enforces the principle of self-determination. Slovakia and Ruthenia have nothing to expect from Prague, in fact less than nothing, for they must reckon with the fact that Bohemia is going to take advantage of their resources in order to overcome her own difficulties. The *sine qua non* of the political independence of these territories is the financial independence of the State to which they belong, which can only be ensured if every economic possibility can fully be taken advantage of. From this it follows, as the logical conclusion of the standpoint adopted by the Slovak and Ruthenian peoples, that the self-government and independence for these territories can only be attained and maintained by co-operation with Hungary.

The Hungarian nation is not demanding privileges when it informs international public opinion of the situation in the Danube Valley and invites the Slovak and the Ruthenian peoples to co-operate in the solution of its problems. The history of ten centuries proves that St Stephen's ideas are still a vital force and that Hungary must remain independent and strong in order to become what owing to her geographical situation and the state-building ability of this nation she was destined to be: the nucleus of a union of the Danubian peoples. An atomized Danube Valley is necessarily at the mercy of the pressure of rival Great Powers. The little States are not strong enough to live independently; but if they join hands they can be decisive factors in European politics.

The Slovaks, as well as the Ruthenians, are too few in number to found separate independent States. Their union with what remain of Bohemia would — as we have seen — prevent their making the best use of their economic resources, as they must do if their national existence is to be safeguarded against Czech aggression. Economic and financial dependence would certainly crush all endeavours to achieve political independence. The only way in which the social, cultural and economic development of their national genius can be ensured is through self-government established in the spirit of St Stephen's ideas. The Hungarian nation has but one wish: that the Slovak and the Ruthenian peoples should take their own decision and do so by exercising the right of self-determination without any external influence being brought to bear on them. — y —