

SERB AND CROATIAN POLITICIANS MAKE STATEMENTS CONCERNING MAGYAR MINORITY

BY

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Since the dissolution of the Skupshtina, Parliamentary elections have been in the air in Yugoslavia, a circumstance that naturally causes Serb and Croatian politicians, and even Ministers, to devote more attention to the national minorities, amongst others to the Magyar minority. The following are some of their statements taken in chronological order.

M. Beshlitz, Minister of Communications, a native of the Bácska, speaking at a constituent assembly of the Government Party at *Nagybecskerek* (Petrograd) on 6th November, amongst other things said that the minorities must be treated with due understanding. The Serbs, today, did not wish the Magyars to become Serbs; everyone should preserve his own nationality; the Serbs would respect the language and culture of every national minority, but the latter in turn must acknowledge that Yugoslavia was the country of the Serbs. On 16th November this same Minister attended a constituent assembly held at *Bács-topolya*. After listening to the complaints and requests submitted by the representatives of the Magyars of the district, who in particular demanded that the system of name-analysis should be abolished, M. Beshlitz *flatly denied that such a thing existed in Yugoslavia*, and said that all parents were at liberty to send their children to any schools they liked. The Magyars have received this announcement with satisfaction and would fain hope that this disagreeable problem will be solved on lines in keeping with the Minister's statement.

A statement concerning the minorities was also made recently by Premier Tsvetkovitch, who at a meeting of the

Government Party held at *Ujvidék* (Novisad) towards the end of November, speaking of the political representation of the national minorities, to the astonishment of the nationalities said that "in the new system the minorities will have no opportunity to form separate political parties. *A revival of the old Hungarian Party will therefore not be possible; at best the national minorities will only be allowed to form sections within the national Serb or Croatian Parties, where they will be able to pursue their activities subject to Party discipline.*" This means simply that the 2.600.000 minority nationals in Yugoslavia, the Magyars included, will not be allowed in terms of the Election Act under preparation to organize separate political parties. Of particular significance in this respect is a statement made by M. Koshulitch, Vice-President of the Croatian Peasant Party, in which he hastened to refute the report published in the Bucharest "Universul" to the effect that he had promised the Magyars living in the Banate of Croatia adequate representation in the Croatian Sabor ("Napló" Dec. 1.).

To these various statements we must add one made by M. Subashitch, Ban of Croatia, and published in the Szabadka "Napló" of 3rd December. This rather vague statement says that "the rights and liberties of the minorities depend not only on the theoretical guarantees of the minority treaties, but also on the democratic ideas of the State and nation. We Croats profess the principles of democracy. Democracy has always been the basis of our political life, and *for this very reason we make no distinction between minority peoples and the Croatian nation... and to those who have fought with us we shall grant every right that will enable them to progress with us in the fields of culture and economy.*"

A statement similar in tenor was also made by Premier Tsvetkovitch at a banquet given by the Serb Patriarch, M. Gavrillo, on 14th December. The Premier said that the Government wished to ensure every Yugoslav citizen complete equality and the free exercise of all civil rights.

But now let us look at the other side of the picture. The Magyars in Yugoslavia were under the impression that certain signs of an understanding spirit were to be found in the abovesited statements, and that therefore the time was

ripe to demand from the Yugoslav Government guarantees of their rights and redress of their wrongs. So they took steps which they hoped would eliminate all misunderstandings and prove their complete loyalty to the Yugoslav régime. These efforts have been repeated more than once during the past two months; with what results may be gathered from a speech delivered by Dr. Emery Várady, ex-Senator, at a banquet given in Bácsstopolya on 25th November last in honour of the former leaders of the Hungarian Party, which was dissolved on 6th January 1929. In this speech Dr. Várady emphatically stressed that *"the old Party Committee, having learnt by sad experience not to trust the Government, has refused to co-operate with the Government Party during the Skupshtina elections unless considerable results of a political, economic, cultural and social nature and beneficial to the Magyar minority are first achieved, which results must be positive and not merely promises. All the negotiations conducted with the Premier and other Ministers by myself and the other leaders of the Magyar minority since the Serbo-Croatian agreement was concluded on 26th August 1939, have proved utterly fruitless."*

The fruitlessness of the negotiations between the minorities and the competent Yugoslav factors was also pointed out by one of the newspapers of the German minority, the "Volksruf", In its issue of 27th October 1939 we read that "many promises of a settlement of the educational problems of the German minority have been made by the competent authorities, but so far nothing definite has been done."

It was therefore with great pleasure that the minorities read the statement made by M. Maček, Deputy Premier, in the December 25th issue of the "Naplo". This statement, which was sensational in its effect, declared amongst other things: — *"I do not consider the minority policy hitherto pursued by this country either fair or wise. But we Croats will try to alter all that... I hope that very soon every citizen of the State — minority citizens too — will enjoy equal rights... I repeat, the present system is not a just one. Conditions must be altered and a wise minority*

policy inaugurated. Now the first and most important task of a wise minority policy is to give schools to the minorities. Let the children learn their lessons in their own mother-tongues... The Magyars living in the Banate of Croatia should be allowed to form a political party of their own. The draft of the Election Bill submitted to the Regency Council does not discriminate in favour of any one party. It allows every group able to collect 100 signatures in any constituency to enter the campaign with its own list. I am not at liberty at present to say what the general system of election will be."

As M. Maček is not only the leader of the Croats but also the Prime Minister's deputy, we must suppose that this really astonishing statement expresses the Government's attitude as well as his own. If this is so, and the new trend of minority policy promised by M. Maček is really adhered to in the Government's dealings with the nationalities, the change will be welcomed with rejoicing not only by the Magyars directly affected, but also by the Magyars at home in Hungary.

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