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# FATHER HLINKA'S STRUGGLE FOR SLOVAK FREEDOM

Reminiscences of  
Professor Francis Jehlička  
Chairman of the Slovak Council

*"We are neither Czechs nor  
Czechoslovaks: we are just  
Slovaks and we intend to  
remain Slovaks for ever."*

FATHER HLINKA AT THE 1919  
PEACE CONFERENCE IN PARIS

LONDON

PUBLISHED BY THE SLOVAK COUNCIL

1938

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FATHER ANDREW HLINKA

[LAST PORTRAIT]

## PREFATORY NOTE

**A**NDREW HLINKA, the Slovak politician, is a mere name to the ordinary member of the British newspaper-reading public. His recent death produced numerous obituary notices ; but most of them were perfunctory and colourless productions, giving an imperfect idea of the character of the man and the nature of his work. Intimidated by the Czech censors, the Press of his own political party did not dare to mention certain facts essential to a proper understanding of his political career.

Nor is it possible to learn much about his political aspirations and achievements from foreign books of reference, which record only the bare facts of his life. They record that, born in the village of Cernova in 1864, he came of Slovak peasant stock ; that, having studied theology, he wrote various devotional and theological books and translated the Bible from Latin into Slovak ; and that, as a journalist, a leader of the co-operative movement, and the founder of the People's Bank and of several factories, he rapidly acquired



#### PREFATORY NOTE

a strong personal hold over the Slovaks. But no details are given of his work during the last twenty years of his life.

Those years were devoted to the struggle for Slovak autonomy. He strove with unflagging zeal for the realization of the dream of an autonomous Slovakia. He regarded the Pittsburgh Agreement, by which President Masaryk had solemnly promised the American Slovaks that autonomy should be granted to Slovakia, as the fundamental hope of achieving his aim. When the original document was brought from the United States in the summer of 1938, the whole Slovak people pledged themselves to the principle of national independence. Hlinka was then at the very height of his popularity. He died within a few weeks of this amazing demonstration of attachment and affection: he died happy in the knowledge that his beloved people were firmly united in their aim of winning that independence for which he had worked with burning conviction and indefatigable energy. Events are proving the justice of his cause. The artificial State of Czechoslovakia is now being reconstructed in the interests of those peoples whom the Treaty of Versailles forced to accept its sovereignty.

As one of Father Hlinka's oldest friends and collaborators, I have decided to publish this brief



PREFATORY NOTE

account of some of his less familiar political activities in the hope of facilitating a more accurate estimate of his influence on recent political developments in Central Europe.

FRANCIS JEHLIČKA.

*London, October 1938*

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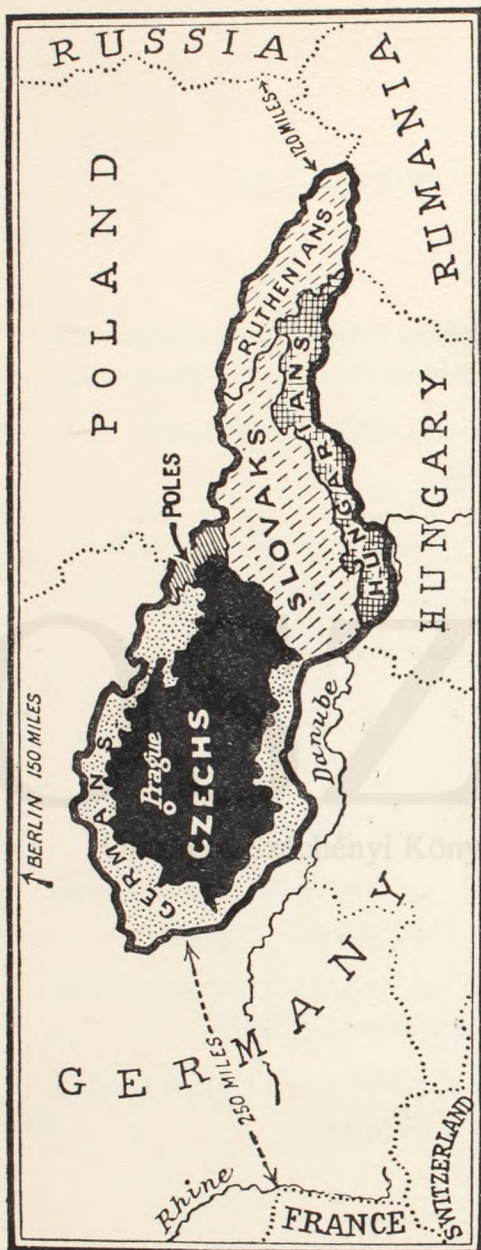
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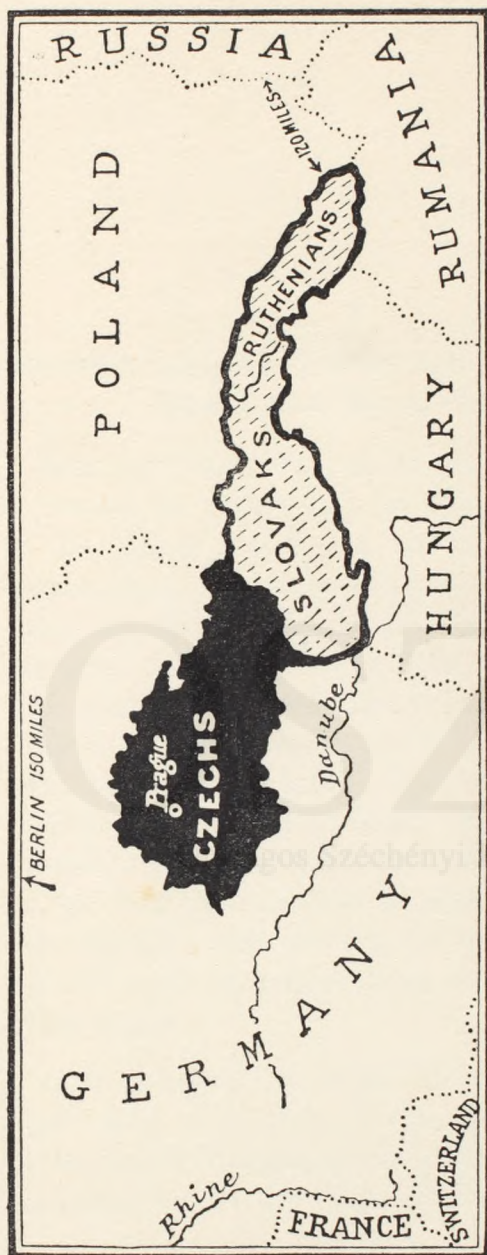
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#### CZECHOSLOVAKIA AS CONSTRUCTED BY THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES IN 1919

This map shows how more than 7,000,000 inhabitants—Germans, Slovaks, Hungarians, Ruthenes, Poles, and Rumanians—were added to Bohemia by the Czechs (7,000,000) at Versailles in 1919. The representatives of the defeated nations were excluded from the deliberations of the conference with the object of preventing any effectual opposition to the establishment of this artificial state. The scheme required the mutilation of a more compact, geographical and economic unit than Bohemia, i.e. Hungary, a country in which the Slovaks (2,500,000) had lived in perfect contentment since its foundation (A.D. 896). Czechoslovakia could never have been created in this form if Versailles had consulted the wishes of the incorporated nationalities.



#### CZECHOSLOVAKIA AS RECONSTRUCTED BY THE MUNICH AGREEMENT IN 1938

In September, 1938, the four-power conference at Munich accepted the principle of self-determination, which, if it had been applied in 1919, would have saved much suffering and prevented the economic dislocation of Central Europe. After the surrender of alien (German, Hungarian and Polish) territories the absurdity of the shape of Czechoslovakia will become even more glaring. Slovakia and Ruthenia should belong to Bohemia, but means of communication between the Western and the Eastern part of this 650-mile-long strip of territory are poor. Moreover, the Czech territories are separated from Slovakia and Ruthenia by the Carpathians, inhabited by the Slovaks and Ruthenes. All the rivers rising in the Carpathians flow towards the rich Hungarian plain, which supported the Slovaks and Ruthenes for a thousand years.





## I

### **Slovakia and the Destruction of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy**

Whatever may be said of Hlinka's character, it cannot be denied that he was deeply attached to the Slovak people, for whom he never shrank from making any personal sacrifice. To suffer for them was the ambition of his life. They returned his love with touching ardour and persistence. The remarkable manifestation of their love at his funeral afforded ample proof of his patriarchal ascendancy over them. Love may be wise or foolish, clear-sighted or blind. A mother's doting fondness may sometimes have an injurious effect on her children. The love of Hlinka for his people was sincere ; but whether it was always clear-sighted must be judged from the following facts of his career.

It is necessary to recall the critical period of 1918-1919. Conscious of the impending collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Hlinka directed his attention to the plans devised by the Czech

conspirators. It was rumoured that the Czechs, not satisfied with the notion of an independent Bohemia, were bent on merging Slovakia in Bohemia. In August, 1918, Alexander Wekerle, the Hungarian prime minister, deputed Peter Jekel, the head of the police department in the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior, to submit to Hlinka a plan by which the Hungarian government proposed to grant autonomy to the Slovaks. On 1 December, 1918, Hlinka was specially summoned from Ruzomberok to Budapest for a discussion of the Slovak problem with the Hungarian authorities.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, Hlinka himself was by no means immune from the contagion of those pan-Slav notions which had infected the Slovak national movement before the world war and roused the suspicions of successive Hungarian governments. Slovak politicians—Stur, Mudron, Vajansky—were dreaming of a great Slav empire under the supremacy of Russia: if their dreams had been realized, Slovakia would now be under Stalin's tyranny. In 1875 Kálmán Tisza, the Hungarian prime minister, had to close the Slovenska Matica—the Slovak academy of sciences—on account of its pan-Slav activities. The fact that the seal of the institution bore a Russian inscription is some

<sup>1</sup> See Hlinka's article in the *Slovak*, 30 November, 1932.

indication of the extent to which its affairs were under pan-Russian influence.<sup>1</sup>

Visiting Poland shortly before his death, Hlinka declared himself to be an incorrigible pan-Slavist.<sup>2</sup> The Poles were the more surprised at this declaration because Hlinka, a Roman Catholic priest, should have known that the Church condemned pan-Slavism.

It was his pan-Slav activities that brought Hlinka into frequent collision with the Hungarian authorities before the world war: the bitterness thus engendered determined him to reject Wekerle's proposal. When the Lutherans—Dula, Hodža, Ruman, and Markovič—among the Slovak pan-Slavists heard of Hlinka's refusal, they were eager to come to terms with the Hungarian government on their own account. But, regarding the Slovaks as a Catholic people, Wekerle declined to negotiate with the officious representatives of the Lutheran minority (13 per cent.).

Meanwhile the Czech conspirators were conducting a vigorous propaganda in London and Paris. Their claim that Slovakia should be annexed to Bohemia was founded on ethnologic considerations: they maintained that the Czechs and the Slovaks

<sup>1</sup> A photograph of the seal was reproduced in the *Prager Presse*, 17 October, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> This was reported by the *Slovak* at the time.



constituted one Czechoslovak race. A plebiscite was therefore unnecessary. In 1915 Masaryk submitted to the British Foreign Office a memorandum in which it was stated that the Slovaks were Czechs. In 1916 Beneš published in Paris a pamphlet entitled *Détruisez l'Autriche-Hongrie*, in which it was stated that the Czechs and the Slovaks were two branches of one Czechoslovak race, and should therefore be allowed to reunite in one State.

Most of the delegates at the Paris peace conference had never heard of the Czechoslovak race: it was an ethnologic novelty, about which they entertained entirely reasonable suspicions. It was therefore necessary for the Czechs to secure Slovak popular assent to their fictitious proposal: the pan-Slav group of Slovaks could be utilized for this purpose. Their support for the Czech plan was won by financial promises: they promptly delivered the notorious Declaration of T. sv. Martin, which stated that the Slovaks were not an independent race but merely a branch of the homogeneous Czechoslovak race, and wished to live with the Czechs in one State.

Those who subscribed to the Declaration acted without the authority or approval of the Slovak people. They numbered 106, of whom 95 were Lutherans. When they found it necessary to

obtain the signature of Hlinka, the chief representative of the Roman Catholic Slovaks, they were at pains to assure him that the Czechoslovak fiction need not be taken too seriously, since its real purpose was to impose on the credulity of the peace-makers in Paris. He was reminded that Masaryk in the United States had already guaranteed the independence of Slovakia. And it was hinted to him that, even if he did not feel disposed to trust the Czechs, their plan was to be only a ten-year "trial marriage," after which the Slovaks would be free to decide for themselves.

Trusting the Czechs, Hlinka signed the Declaration. He had some scruples about doing so ; for he knew that the theory of the Czechoslovak race was a rank imposture. As a priest, he should have resisted the temptation to acquiesce in conduct that ran counter to the moral teaching of the Church.

Speaking in the National Assembly at Prague shortly before his death, he publicly denounced the Czechoslovak fiction. A Czech deputy called out to him : " Have not you yourself signed the Declaration ? " To which Hlinka replied : " Yes, but we have been fools : we helped the Czechs to deceive Europe." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the *Slovak*, 11 March, 1938.



Hlinka soon discovered that the Czechs had deceived not only Europe in general but also the Slovaks in particular. Accompanied by the Rev. John Vojtassák, now bishop of Zipsia, he visited me in Budapest in November, 1918, and asked me to go home with them and help them. "The Czechs," he said, "have deceived us. Come and help us." He then took from his pocket copies of a number of Czech Bills to be introduced in the National Assembly at Prague. The Bills, which dealt with such subjects as divorce, crematories, and the "layman's moral," which was to supersede the catechism in schools, were offensive to his religious susceptibilities. Turning to me, he said: "You are a university professor, and will be able to defend the Catholic point of view in the Prague parliament. We are not qualified to engage in such a controversy. You have been our parliamentary representative in Hungary, and I shall do all I can to secure your election to the revolutionary National Assembly. Come with us."

Having obtained the consent of my archbishop, Cardinal Csernoch, I decided to accept Hlinka's pressing invitation. In due course I became a member of the National Assembly at Prague, where I delivered two important speeches: one against the "layman's moral" and the other against divorce. I helped to organize the Slovak



People's party and to found its official journal, the *Slovak*. The government appointed me rector of the University of Pressburg and entrusted me with the task of reorganizing it into a Slovak university. The Slovak ecclesiastical authorities commissioned me to organize the faculty of theology in the university and the courses of study in the Roman Catholic seminary, of which I was appointed rector.

In defiance of repeated protests on my part the government systematically converted the University of Pressburg into a Czech institution. They named it after Komensky, a prominent Czech teacher of the eighteenth century; but they pursued a policy in opposition to his teaching, which had recommended the regular use of the mother tongue for purposes of instruction. The youth of Slovakia are forbidden to use or to study their own language, though Slovak is considered a purer idiom than Czech. Czech is the language of instruction: in their zeal for the Czech cause some professors, like Professor Prazak and Professor Chaloupecky, at this university presume *ex cathedra* to pronounce Slovak to be a debased Asiatic language.

. . . . .

Meanwhile the Czechs were hard at work on the new constitution, which made no reference

either to the Slovaks or to Slovak autonomy. The peasants of Slovakia used to speak of this instance of Czech selfishness under a metaphor: the Czech brother, they said, had pulled the whole blanket, intended to serve for both Czech and Slovak, over himself and left the poor Slovak brother uncovered in the dark and chilly night following the destruction of Austria-Hungary. The Czechs successfully contrived to concentrate all power in their own hands. Under the terms of this arbitrarily drafted constitution the Slovaks were excluded from all positions of authority and influence.

As Hlinka and I were beginning to understand the real fate that was overtaking our country, the Rev. Paul Siska, a Slovak Roman Catholic priest, arrived from the United States and presented me with a copy of the Pittsburgh Agreement, to which he himself had subscribed. He assured me that the American Slovaks were relying upon me to do my utmost in the cause of Slovak autonomy.

On 26 August, 1919, I took this document to Hlinka and repeated to him the message from the American Slovaks. I suggested that the document should be submitted to the Paris peace conference even at so late a stage; for, unless the Pittsburgh Agreement was officially recognized



by the conference, autonomy would never be granted to the Slovaks. Hlinka at once concurred in my suggestion. "We shall start to-morrow morning," he said. A new hope was born among the dispirited Slovaks.

Hlinka's decision was no doubt prompted by his anxiety to repair the wrong he had done by signing the Declaration of T. sv. Martin. "Do you know," the Rev. Stephen Mnohel, Hlinka's assistant, asked me, "why Hlinka has so abruptly decided to go to Paris? Because," he went on, "he gets letters in shoals from Slovak peasants condemning him for having signed the Declaration of T. sv. Martin and thus opened the way for the Czechs into Slovakia."

There was another consideration that helped to strengthen Hlinka in his decision. At the instance of the Czech conspirators Dr. Milan Hodža, the recent prime minister of Czechoslovakia, made certain modifications in the Declaration shortly before it was printed. For example, he omitted the clause providing that a Slovak delegation should be sent to the Paris peace conference. In other words, Beneš and his party ignored the rights and claims of the Slovaks. It was therefore of vital importance that we should reach Paris before the conference took any decisions *de nobis sine nobis*.

## II

### The Voice of the New Poland

We needed passports for the journey to Paris. The competent authorities in Prague would naturally have refused our applications ; for they knew that the real purpose of our mission was to submit to the consideration of the conference our grievances against the Czechs. Accordingly, we decided to go to Warsaw and apply for Polish passports.

Hlinka took with him his assistant, the Rev. Stephen Mnohel ; we were joined later by Dr. J. Rudinsky, a Roman Catholic priest, and a Slovak merchant named Kubala. In Hlinka's absence the party were left in the charge of the secretary, Francis Unger. The fact that Hlinka entrusted Unger with the key of his cellar, stocked with Tokay wines, shows that he placed unreserved confidence in him. Slovakia was separated from Hungary, and there was no chance of getting fresh supplies.

At Žilina station we were greeted by the Rev. K. Kmetko, a deputy of the People's party, who is now bishop of Nitra. Hlinka told him where we



were going and why, and asked him to join us. Kmetko refused on the ground that he could be of more help to us by staying behind and defending our cause if our mission brought us into conflict with the Czech authorities. Having bought us food for the journey, he said good-bye. As for his promise to defend our cause, I am sorry to say he failed to keep it. On the contrary . . .

We travelled by way of Teschen. On our arrival we sought an interview of Marshal Pilsudski, the regent of Poland, who received us graciously and listened with indignation to our account of Czech misrule in Slovakia. "You Slovaks," he said, "are entitled to freedom and justice. You have every right to attend the Paris peace conference. I shall arrange for Polish passports to be issued to you and for the Polish delegation at the conference to give you every possible assistance. *If in the end your claims are ignored, your wisest course will be to make peace with the Hungarians and return to Hungary. After all, you belong to Hungary on historical, and geographical grounds.*"<sup>1</sup>

We then paid a visit to the papal nuncio, Achille Ratti, now Pope Pius XI, and explained to him how the devout Slovaks had had the misfortune to come under the tyrannical rule of the Czechs, who were Hussites and enemies of the true Church.

<sup>1</sup> See *Nasza Przyszlosc*, May-June, 1938.

As it was considered unadvisable to travel through Germany owing to the unsettled conditions then prevailing on the Franco-German and Polono-German frontiers, we went a roundabout way through Rumania, Yugoslavia, Italy, and Switzerland. After so many years we were glad to revisit the Western countries, which promised to see to it that the principle of self-determination, eloquently advocated by President Wilson, should be put into practice with the object of emancipating oppressed minorities. The application of that principle to the Slovak case was the purpose of our mission.

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### III

#### Round Paris

Arrived in Paris, we proceeded to compose a memorandum for submission to the peace conference. The contents of the memorandum, dated 16 September, 1919, may be thus summarized: "We are neither Czechs nor Czechoslovaks: we are Slovaks and intend to remain Slovaks." Hlinka then had no idea that the last twenty years of his life would be spent in vainly endeavouring to explode the mischievous theory of the Czechoslovak race and to win for his people the independence to which they were ethnologically entitled.

The principal items of the memorandum may be thus enumerated:

(a) The Czechoslovak race is a pure fiction invented by the Czechs for the purpose of strengthening their claim to our country on ethnologic grounds. This ethnologic claim is frivolous, since the Czechoslovak race belongs to the realm of non-fact.



(b) The Czechs have positively overrun our country. They have gained complete control of the public services and the liberal professions : every post is filled by a Czech. If we protest against this state of affairs, the Czechs merely insult us with the reminder that the Czechs and the Slovaks are just one and the same race.

(c) The Czechs are bent on making our country predominantly Czech in character. They regard Slovakia as a colony and treat it as such.

(d) The Czech army of occupation behaves like an invading horde of ferocious and predatory barbarians. The soldiers spend their time in harassing our people, desecrating our churches, mutilating our sacred sculptures, and violating our women.

(e) The constitution now being drafted for the new State is such that a Czech despotism will be established and we shall have no voice in the direction of our own affairs. Such virtual slavery will be the more degrading and humiliating because President Masaryk himself concluded with the American Slovaks the Pittsburgh Agreement, which guaranteed complete autonomy to Slovakia. He actually received more than \$1,000,000 in support of the cause of Slovak autonomy.

(f) We earnestly appeal to the peace conference to guarantee our promised autonomy.

(g) If the Pittsburgh Agreement does not carry sufficient weight with the Conference, we ask for a plebiscite to be taken in Slovakia. 2,500,000 Slovaks, 1,000,000 Magyars, and 500,000 Ruthenes will participate in such a plebiscite: that is to say, the 4,000,000 people who are going to be separated from Hungary at the suggestion of Dr. Beneš.

When David Hunter-Millar and Lloyd George published their memoirs, it was shown that Beneš had resorted to false statistics with the view of achieving his aim. The formidable crisis of September, 1938, fully proved the wisdom of our original conclusion. We clearly perceived that there could be no lasting peace in Europe without the proposed plebiscite: it was the duty of the peace conference to spare no effort in the task of establishing a lasting peace among the nations that had suffered so much during the world war. It should be mentioned that the insertion of the passage about the plebiscite was suggested by M. Paderewski, the prime minister of Poland.

. . . . .

In Paris we lodged at the convent of the Pères du Saint-Esprit in the rue Lhommond.



As it was not customary for the convent to notify the police of the arrival of visitors, the Czech spies experienced some difficulty in running us to earth. We had ten clear days in which to call on the various delegations, to present our memorandum to the secretary of the conference, and to procure interviews with M. Clemenceau and other personages. Meanwhile Hlinka suggested to a Polish Cabinet minister, M. Patek, and two Polish generals that the Polish army should march into Slovakia and drive the Czechs out : he was anxious that the city of Žilina should be taken first. Unfortunately, it was impossible to carry out his suggestion. The Poles replied : " We are very sorry, but we can't help you at present. The question of our frontiers has not yet been settled, and we have to hold five plebiscites. We are surprised to hear that, while Poland has to acquire every inch of territory by means of a plebiscite, the Czechs are allowed to seize the whole of Slovakia without any plebiscite at all."

We were amazed at the spirit of destruction assiduously propagated by the Czechs among the delegates, whose duty was to seek constructive solutions of the problems that confronted them. While Beneš urged the destruction of Austria, his intimate friend, Kuffner, in his book entitled *Our State and World Peace*, advocated the partition of



Germany into a number of small States. The German nation, like a tribe of North American Indians, was to be left with a small tract or reservation. Kuffner proposed that the frontiers of Czechoslovakia should be extended to Berlin, Vienna, and Budapest, and Ruthenia should be ceded to Russia for the purpose of establishing a Czecho-Russian frontier. Czechs and Russians aimed at keeping the neighbouring capitals within gunshot (*see map, pages 28 and 29*).

Let us see what the Czechs were preparing for us in Paris. After a stay of ten days we were obliged to leave the convent because all the rooms were needed for a general assembly. We then moved into a hotel in the same street. On the following day a French detective appeared at the hotel with a summons from the prefecture of the metropolitan police. Being without Czechoslovak passports, we were ordered by the prefect to leave French territory within twenty-four hours. We appealed in vain to French hospitality and traditional love of freedom. Beneš reigned supreme in Paris. We experienced that agonizing sense of disillusionment which follows the destruction of cherished hopes.

Our mission was unsuccessful. We submitted our memorandum to the secretary of the peace conference ; but it stood no chance of being



# STŘEDNÍ EVROPA V ZÁJMU SVĚTOVÉHO MÍRU.



HOW THE CZECH KUFFNER AND  
BENEŠ WISHED TO PARTITION  
GERMANY

It is known that the destruction of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy was contemplated by Beneš during the world war. With a view to creating still larger Bohemia or Czechoslovakia the Czech Kuffner published this map showing how Germany was to be dismembered and left with a small tract like a reservation in North America. The Czech frontiers were to be extended to Berlin, Vienna and Budapest. Buda—almost half Budapest—was to be incorporated in Bohemia. It was intended to establish also a common frontier with Russia for the purpose of carrying into effect a pan-Slav policy backed by Russian military power.



properly considered. There was no serious attempt to meet just claims or to redress legitimate grievances. It cannot be denied that the conference was more concerned with sharing out the spoils of victory than with offering equitable and honourable terms to the defeated. The Czechs were rewarded for having gone over to the side of the Allies. That explains why the Slovaks were refused a plebiscite. As M. André Tardieu puts it in his book, *La Paix*, "We had to choose between the plebiscite and the creation of Czechoslovakia."

The Poles, who were unable to give us any effective help, afterwards explained to us that Beneš was responsible for the failure of our mission. "Look at this Slovak delegation," he said everywhere: "it consists mostly of Roman Catholic priests. They are sent here by the Vatican and the Habsburgs."

Before leaving Paris, we conferred together and decided to follow Pilsudski's advice by attempting to make peace with the Hungarians. Accompanied by the Rev. Stephen Mnohel, I was sent to Budapest with a view to opening negotiations with the Hungarian authorities. Rudinsky and Kubala were sent to the United States to propagate the idea among the American Slovaks and obtain their financial support for carrying it into effect. Hlinka,



it was agreed, should return to Slovakia as leader of the Slovak People's party.

We said good-bye at the Pazmaneum—the Hungarian seminary—in Vienna, where we stayed for a couple of days. The seminary was then directed by a fellow countryman of ours, Dr. Stephen Csárszky, now a canon at Esztergom, the seat of the prince primate of Hungary. Hlinka exhorted us to work unremittingly in the cause of Slovak autonomy. "I am now going back to Ruzomberok," he said. "I shall carry on the struggle in Czechoslovakia, mainly in parliament: you will remain abroad, where I ask you to act as our foreign secretary. You must plead our cause before the governments and in the Press of the world." He promised me the assistance of Francis Unger, the secretary of the delegation, who has always been a loyal and efficient servant of our cause.

Országos Széchényi Könyvtár

Hlinka had scarcely recovered from the fatigues of the journey to Ruzomberok when, during the night of 12 October, 1919, twenty Czech soldiers broke into the presbytery, dragged him out of bed, and hurried him away by car to the Czech prison at Mirov. The unity of feeling among the Slovaks is proved by the fact that this brutal action on the part of the Czechs provoked a local revolution

in Ruzomberok. Roused by the tocsin, the population demolished the houses of several Czechs and Czechophiles—Srobar, Burian, Jancek—and demanded the immediate release of their vicar and leader.

For six months Hlinka was detained in prison without a trial. He wrote urging me to redouble my efforts to emancipate the Slovaks from Czech domination. Confinement being insupportable to him, I contrived a plan for his escape; but the assistance necessary to its successful execution could be secured only at a price beyond our means. When at length he had been released, he described how poison had been administered to him in his food. He thus developed a painful gastric disorder, from which he never properly recovered.

As for the two Slovak friends who had gone to the United States, Kubala, on his return, was confronted with financial ruin, cunningly contrived by the Czechs. He and his family were rapidly reduced to penury. Rudinsky, who had been in charge of our money on the journey, later betrayed us to the Czechs. He is now a serviceable tool in the hands of Dr. Milan Hodža, the recent prime minister of Czechoslovakia.

## IV

### **The Hungaro-Slovak Agreement**

According to our arrangement, the Rev. Stephen Mnohel and I proceeded to Budapest. The Hungarian government authorized Professor Jakab Bleyer, Minister for Minority Affairs, to negotiate with us. The Polish government were duly informed of the negotiations through the Polish ambassador in Budapest, M. Szenbek. Agreement was soon reached, and a document providing for Slovak autonomy was drafted accordingly. This document, which recognized the Slovaks to be a separate race, was unanimously ratified by the Hungarian Cabinet on 9 January, 1920. As it dealt also with ecclesiastical affairs, it was later signed by the Hungarian archbishop, Cardinal Csernoch.

The legal position between Hungary and Slovakia is this : there is a positive autonomous constitutional scheme, adopted by the Hungarian government, which may also be adopted by the Slovaks, providing they are not denied the right of self-determination.



## V

### **The Struggle for Autonomy**

After his release from prison Hlinka devoted all his energies to the organization of the Slovak People's party. In spite of intrigue and persecution he was remarkably successful: he won for his party the active support of the majority of the Slovaks.

This success aggravated the hostility of the Czechs towards Hlinka and his party. They had recourse to financial machinations, and actually succeeded in destroying the financial stability of the party and in ruining its financial undertakings, particularly the People's Bank at Ruzomberok. They even went as far as to threaten with imprisonment Hlinka and the directors of the ruined bank. An urgent appeal for financial assistance at this critical conjuncture was addressed, through M. Klimko, a representative of the Slovak People's party in the Czechoslovak Senate, to the Hungarian government; but the government had little confidence in Hlinka and his schemes, and politely excused themselves from helping him in his predicament.

Fearing the eventual reproaches of the ruined depositors, who were mostly peasants, Hlinka in desperation turned to the Czech government for financial assistance. The government expressed themselves willing to help him, but only on one condition : he was required to abandon all opposition to the ruling powers and to join the Czech Cabinet. He surrendered, and received a loan of 12,000,000 Czech crowns. His party joined the coalition in 1926.

At this conjuncture I renewed my attacks on the Czech rulers, and reproached Hlinka with his apostasy. My aim, which I ultimately realized, was to rally his bewildered and despondent followers and to pursue a more vigorous and progressive policy. The pamphlets and articles in which I criticized Hlinka served to conceal the true nature of my relations with him and other members of the party. Another Slovak patriot that did much to revive the party was Professor Tuka, who, in consideration of his services, was appointed to be its Press chief. When the Czechs sentenced him to fifteen years' penal servitude on false charges, the ever widening breach between Czechs and Slovaks became irreparable.<sup>1</sup>

One martyrdom followed another. The Slovaks will never forgive the Czechs for the murder of

<sup>1</sup> See *Une Étape du Calvaire slovaque*, Le Procès Tuka, by Professor Francis Jehlička.



another Slovak patriot, General Stefanik, who was killed by Czech machine-guns on 4 May, 1919, when his plane landed at Vajnory, near Bratislava (Pressburg). The official explanation stated that General Stefanik, together with two Italian airmen, had been killed by accident. So disingenuous an explanation did not satisfy the Slovaks. Father Stefanik, brother of the murdered general, accumulated many proofs of the fact that his brother had been deliberately killed on the order of the Czech military authorities. Writing in the *Slovak* of 26 May, 1927, he declared that, as his brother's murderers were then in power, he did not dare to publish the proofs of their guilt. He himself fled to Kulpin, in Yugoslavia, where he is still living.

Meanwhile Hlinka resumed his agitation for Slovak autonomy. Masaryk repeatedly declined to grant autonomy to the Slovaks on the ground that it would encourage them to secede from the republic and reunite with Hungary. Whenever the Slovaks referred to the Pittsburgh Agreement, Masaryk pronounced it invalid. In a letter to Hlinka in 1929 he contemptuously dismissed it as a forgery. This was all the more surprising because the original draft had been written and signed by him.

Slovak refugees abroad exerted themselves to



the utmost in support of their fellow countrymen suffering under the Czech yoke. For this purpose the Slovak Council was founded at Geneva in 1933. The Council submitted to the League of Nations a memorandum declaring that the Slovaks aspired to self-government not in Czechoslovakia but in Hungary. Hlinka's own words may here be aptly quoted: "Our Hungarian motherland treated us much better than this hateful Czech republic. We lived and fought with the Hungarians for a thousand years, during which we did not suffer half as much as we have suffered at the hands of the Czechs during the past few years. The Czechs claim to have set us free, but this freedom is far worse than our previous condition."<sup>1</sup>

Since its inception the Slovak Council has addressed memoranda to all the governments in Europe. The disclosures contained in them were so embarrassing for the Czechs that they tried their hardest to compel the Slovak autonomists to deny the facts published by the Council. Both the Catholic and the Lutheran autonomists successfully resisted the pressure put upon them by the Czechs.<sup>2</sup> The Czechs then published a declaration against the Slovak Council, which they condemned as a mere instrument of the Hungarian Revision League and as having no authority to speak on

<sup>1</sup> See *Narodnie Noviny*, 20 November, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Slovak*, 10 August, 1933.

behalf of the Slovak nation. They did not scruple to append to this document the forged signatures of deputies and senators representing the Slovak autonomist parties. The parties in question vehemently protested against this infamous imposture.<sup>1</sup> Impervious to their protests and destitute of moral principle, the Czechs continued, and still continue, to use the declaration for the purpose of frustrating the activities of the Slovak Council. This forgery has been exposed in two pamphlets published at Geneva in 1935: *Comment fut signé une Déclaration* and *La Vérité slovaque et les Trucs de la Diplomatie tchèque*.

<sup>1</sup> See the *Slovak*, 28 December, 1933.

## VI

### Hlinka's Political Views

The reunion of the Austro-Germans with Germany acted as a powerful stimulus to the Slovak autonomist movement. When the problem of the oppressed Sudeten Germans became acute, the foundations of the Czechoslovak republic began to show ominous rents and fissures. The right of self-determination is now being claimed by the Sudeten Germans, the Poles of Teschen, the Hungarians, the Slovaks, and the Ruthenes, all of whom were forced under Czech rule against their will. The Slovak People's party has combined with the other minority parties in the present struggle to overthrow the tyranny of the Czechs. The general meeting of the party, held at Pressburg on 5 June, 1938, was attended by a delegation of American Slovaks, who brought with them the original draft of the Pittsburgh Agreement. Hlinka made a public declaration to the effect that the Czechs must without delay grant autonomy to Slovakia, which would otherwise secede. He made the Slovak people swear to this declaration, and the oath was repeated on the departure of the



delegation of American Slovaks on 12 August, 1938. The oath is regarded by his followers as Hlinka's political testament.<sup>1</sup>

Like the raven in Æsop's fable, Czechoslovakia is a bird decked out in the plumage of other birds. Its hope that the other birds, whose feathers it had stolen, would never recover their strength has been disappointed. The German eagle, the Polish eagle, and the Hungarian eagle, have now come to demand their stolen feathers from the Czech raven. Now Prague, seeing that the territories annexed to Bohemia under the Treaty of Versailles will recover their rightful sovereignty, seeks the help of the Western powers in its frantic endeavour to retain them.

Whenever the question arose of the Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia, Hlinka made it clear that the Slovaks wished to return with them to Hungary. Statements to the same effect have been made by the Lutheran Slovak autonomists and the American Slovaks. The Czechs are fully aware of this desire for the reunion of Slovakia with Hungary; for they have dubbed the Slovaks *Magyarones* or satellites of the Hungarians. *Česke Slovo*, the journal of President Beneš, made the following admission: "We have no confidence in the Slovaks. Their only wish is to destroy our

<sup>1</sup> See the *Slovak*, Nos. 183 and 194 (1938).

republic and return to Hungary.”<sup>1</sup> This is the real fact. Nor is it surprising ; for the Slovaks are not strong enough to form an independent State of their own. It may truly be said of them, *extra Hungariam non est vita*. While the Czechs have managed in the past, and will manage in the future, to live without Slovakia, the Slovaks cannot live without the great Hungarian Plain. They must return to a life consecrated by the associations of centuries. Union with Hungary and a common frontier with Poland, another Catholic State with which Hungary was at peace for a thousand years, are of vital importance for the Slovak race.

The Poles admired Hlinka as a man, but thought him short-sighted as a politician. They held that he should have known, long before the crisis following the world war, that the Czechs, a servile race by nature, would not hesitate to abuse newly acquired power and to tyrannize over unwilling subjects of their rule. He should have foreseen that Czech industry and Slovak industry would never prosper together, and that the devout Slovaks would never live in harmony with the Czech Hussites and infidels. While the delegation of American Slovaks were on their way through Poland to Czechoslovakia, an officially inspired Polish periodical published an article reminding them of Pilsudski's advice and suggesting that

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the *Slovak*, 26 February, 1929.



the example of the Magyar Báthory,<sup>1</sup> whose name was borne by the boat that had brought them to Europe, should encourage them to pursue the ideal of good government in concert with Hungary after the final collapse of the Czechoslovak republic.<sup>2</sup>

Andrew Hlinka, a great son of Slovakia, died in the summer of 1938. Fate thus deprived him of the joy of seeing his people reunited with the Hungarians. The union is facilitated by nature ; for all the Slovak rivers flow towards the Hungarian Plain and the Hungarian capital, Budapest, whereas the Bohemian capital, Prague, is separated by the huge barrier of the Carpathians. The whole Slovak people mourned the death of their leader : not so the Czechs.

The Czechs positively rejoiced at the news of Hlinka's death. Festivities were held on the day of his funeral. A ball took place at the neighbouring holiday resort of Lubochna, and the Czech director of the baths, A. Prosek, holding a glass of wine in his hand, shouted : " He should have died long ago." <sup>3</sup>

A notice in *Narodni Listy* accurately expressed

<sup>1</sup> Stephen Báthory, who, as prince of Transylvania, was elected king of Poland in 1575, is revered as one of Poland's greatest rulers and regarded as one of the strongest links in the old Polono-Hungarian friendship.

<sup>2</sup> See *Nasza Przyszlosc*, May-June, 1938.

<sup>3</sup> See the *Slovak*, No. 195 (1938).



the feeling of the average Czech: "Hlinka is dead. Ever since the change after the Great War his life was one continual struggle against our State. He spoke against it in the revolutionary National Assembly and at the peace conference: he worked against it in concert with Jehlička and Tuka. It is fortunate that he died before he could injure it more than he had already done."<sup>1</sup>

Hlinka took a prominent part in helping the Czechs to acquire Upper Hungary after the war. And this is how they expressed their gratitude. . . . The Slovaks regard this as a flagrant insult to themselves. It is to be hoped that they will never again be deceived by the false doctrine of pan-Slavism, which led Hlinka into error and is responsible for the present plight of Slovakia.

<sup>1</sup> See the *Slovak*, No. 192 (1938).

## Conclusion

Having vainly protested against our mortifying subjection and repeatedly demanded the just settlement of our claims during the last twenty years, we cannot fairly be described as rapacious. Our case has never been considered by a competent authority. Excluded from the Paris peace conference, we appealed on several occasions to the League of Nations. But this institution always declined to have any dealings with us, since it officially recognizes the Czechoslovak, but not the Slovak, nation. This absurd attitude must give place to an exact understanding of the relation between Czechs and Slovaks.

It is clear from the foregoing account that the Slovak problem is older than the present Czech crisis. The problem is now aggravated by the Slovaks being obliged to remain in a State whose shape, after the detachment of the German, Polish, and Hungarian areas, is geographically incongruous (see map, p. 9). Moreover, Slovakia, which has sheltered and supported about 300,000 Czech immigrants since 1919, is now to become a mere settlement for Czech refugees.<sup>1</sup> This will

<sup>1</sup> See the *Slovak*, 1 October, 1938.

mean starvation for the Slovak people, who will be thus compelled to emigrate.

We demand for our people a free vote by which they can choose the State to which they prefer to owe allegiance. We are prepared to agree to such methods and procedure as Mr. Chamberlain, the peace-maker, may prescribe, and to such time as he may choose for the plebiscite.

If our people vote for reunion with Hungary, it is not our intention to exert a disruptive influence on the neighbouring States ; on the contrary, we are eager to promote mutual understanding and goodwill and to stimulate commercial intercourse between them. Surrounded by Germany, Bohemia, Poland, and Hungary, Slovakia will be in a position to facilitate the flow of trade from west to east and from north to south, and thus to make a substantial contribution to the prosperity and peace of Europe.



OSZK