

CZECHOSLOVAKIA'S STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

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FOR the second time in a single generation, the world has been thrown into war, with all the horrors which are the accompaniment of the latest destructive instruments of modern warfare. What loss of human life, and what damage to material goods, this means! What a check to progress in all spheres!

But for some nations this second war within a quarter of a century is something infinitely more important and more fateful. The victory over Germany and the fall of a number of ancient dynasties in 1918 helped these nations to regain their independent State life after centuries of enslavement. For twenty years they had the opportunity of living their own national life, and of showing whether they were worthy of freedom. After twenty years they now become the victims of the German attack, their independence has again been destroyed, and the outcome of this war will decide whether these twenty years of independent life were merely a passing episode or whether it will be possible after this war permanently to ensure their independence.

I should add that were Germany to win this war, not only would their independence be finished for centuries, if not for ever, but their national existence itself would be menaced, in the most elementary biological sense of the word. It is an unconcealed plan of Hitler's Germany to make the subjugated Slavonic nations into a mass of slaves which would be driven from one part of German Europe to another, just as German political and economic interests demanded, and might even be removed from Central Europe entirely and sent to the Urals or Siberia, as has several times been expressly suggested in Nazi publications; they might be simply extirpated, should this be in any way advantageous to the *Herrenvolk*. For these nations, therefore, literally everything is at stake in this war. If Germany—although I consider this impossible—were to be victorious in this war, it would mean not only the final end of their State independence, but also the end of their individual national life, and of their life altogether.

The Czechoslovak nation is one of these nations which in this war can either ensure their recently won independence for

all time or can lose everything. It is one of the nations which re-entered the ranks of independent States at the conclusion of the last World War. It did not receive its independence in 1918 merely as a gift from heaven, but conquered it by the toil and endeavours of many decades. Although in the Thirty Year War it had lost not only its independence but also its political, economic and cultural élite which perished in exile or on the execution block, it was able in the 19th century, after almost two hundred years of complete degeneration, to recreate a cultural life of a European level, to organize itself in the political struggle for the re-attainment of its independence, and also to prepare itself in the economic sense for the tasks in store for independent nations.

During the World War it also played a valuable part in the attainment of the ultimate victory of the Allies. Through its active and passive resistance, it disintegrated the Austro-Hungarian monarchy from within, and from its military volunteers an Army of 150,000 Legionaries was formed abroad which actively intervened in the fighting in France, in Italy and especially in Russia. It is above all the Odyssey of the Czechoslovak Legions in Russia, which marched through Russia from Ukraine to Vladivostok and then returned home by way of America, that is considered to be one of the most successful military enterprises of the last War. The World War was not yet over when the Czechoslovak nation on October 28, 1918, in Prague, and on October 30th in Slovakia, threw off the Austro-Hungarian régime, which was internally disintegrated and weakened by defeats on the battlefield, and declared its independence. The Peace Conference took note of this *fait accompli*, gave it international sanction, and drew frontiers for the young Republic which—at least as far as Germany, its largest neighbour, was concerned—were the thousand-year old frontiers between the old kingdom of Bohemia and Germany. The German peace delegation in Versailles, which presented a written protest against all the other frontiers imposed upon Germany by the victorious Allies, did not protest against the frontiers with Czechoslovakia and Austria, and saw in them no wrong, for they changed nothing in a state of affairs which had lasted from the beginnings of the history of these two countries in the Middle Ages.

How did the liberated Czechoslovak nation use its freedom? I think it is universally acknowledged that the young Czechoslovak Republic during these twenty years gave a splendid proof

of its right to exist, and that it could have been envied by more than one much older State. The spirit of T. G. Masaryk, the Liberator and later President of the State, soared above the nation's struggle for liberation during the World War, as well as above the internal and external life of the Republic, and impressed upon it the stamp of profound spirituality, moral sincerity, and at the same time of a sense for concrete requirements. T. G. Masaryk was able in his philosophy and in his activity to harmonize an understanding for the actuality of life with a profound and uncompromising moral sense. He was a democrat of a deep social conviction; he could seek and find compromises in concrete political practice, but he knew when and in what things to insist unshakenly on his principles. The State which owed to him its origin and seventeen years of happy development sought to act in order to be worthy of him.

It was a democratic State which until the end was able to maintain its democratic régime, even when it was already surrounded on all sides by dictatorships and semi-dictatorships; it was administered by governments in which, from the very beginning, all the productive elements of the nation were represented. It succeeded in solving painlessly and in a peaceful fashion problems which elsewhere led to revolutions or showed themselves to be insoluble—e. g. the Land Reform or the capital levy. It was in the forefront of social progress; it was the first of the industrial States to ratify the Washington Convention on the eight-hour working day; it introduced a social insurance system from which other States took their example, paid holidays for workers, the participation of factory committees in the internal administration of industrial enterprises, etc. It had inherited more than two-thirds of the industry of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and succeeded in finding new markets for its industry and in ensuring an unheard-of prosperity for its population, a prosperity which continued until the world economic crisis. The State was hard hit by this crisis, but its internal order was not shaken. It was one of the first States to begin to move again towards economic prosperity after 1934 and in 1938; at the time when the new great European crisis overwhelmed it, production was again in full swing, and there were only about one hundred thousand unemployed out of a population of fifteen millions.

Similarly fruitful progress was seen in the cultural sphere. Despite the rigorous economy the Republic exercised in its administration of the nation's finances, it never saved money at

the expense of the schools or of education in general. It was the only State in Europe to introduce compulsory public libraries in every commune; it made good the shortcomings of the former monarchy in the sphere of schooling, and built up a magnificent school system from the lowest grade up to universities and technical high schools. It gave abundant support to art and music—the Czechoslovak theatre was world renowned—and to scientific ventures. Private cultural initiative had a free field of activity, and in its production of books this medium-sized State kept abreast of more than one Great Power.

In its foreign policy, Czechoslovakia was one of the foremost pillars of the League of Nations. It strove for collective security; it had an active part in the elaboration of the Pact of Mutual Assistance of 1923 and the Geneva Protocol of 1934; it was represented at Locarno; it was one of the first States to sign the Briand-Kellogg Pact of 1928 which outlawed war. Czechoslovakia had treaties of mutual assistance with France and with Soviet Russia; it was linked with the two other States of the Little Entente—Rumania and Jugoslavia—by a treaty to maintain the new International Post-war Europe in the Danube Basin; it had a good neighbour treaty with Austria from 1921 onwards, and treaties of arbitration with Poland and Germany from 1925. All these treaties were conceived in such a fashion as not to be in opposition to the Covenant of the League of Nations, and Czechoslovakia several times rejected proposals for a unilateral treaty with Germany, who did not respect this fundamental idea of Czechoslovak foreign policy.

In view of the prevailing circumstances, Czechoslovakia saw to it that she had a good, technically efficient Army; after Hitler's accession to power she spared no sacrifices in constructing means of defence, and in 1938 was, apart from Hitler's Germany, the only European State which was militarily prepared for war. Nevertheless, as Foreign Minister of the Czechoslovak Republic for seventeen years, I can testify to the fact that we threatened no one, that we wished to get on well with all, and, if I may mention a personal detail, I have myself been called the man of a hundred treaties. Perhaps I may be allowed to add that I was on many occasions the General Rapporteur of the Third Commission of the Assembly of the League of Nations, which dealt with the problem of disarmament, and that I was the General Rapporteur of the Disarmament Conference. Together with the former British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Henderson, the President of the Disarmament Conference, I

strove until the last to enable this Conference to reach a positive outcome. The Czechoslovak Republic, which I represented in the international arena at Geneva, let no opportunity pass when it was possible to do anything for the pacification of Europe. It was not the fault of Czechoslovakia if, instead of general appeasement, a new war came about.

This country of religious struggles, which several times in its history bled to death through conflicts of religious ideologies, found in its renewed independence the basis for mutual agreement among all confessions and sects. The nation, grown wise through experience, granted absolute equality to all confessions and convictions, it reached a suitable *modus vivendi* with the Vatican, it in no way denied its Hussite past, it did not sully itself with anti-Semitism (as so many other countries in Central Europe did), and while giving every support to a truly religious life and religious education, it granted full freedom of expression to agnostics without specific religious views.

Above all, however, it maintained democratic equality with regard to all the language minorities in the country. Czechoslovakia was not a linguistically uniform State. The innumerable language and nationality migrations in Central Europe brought about the situation that none of the Central European States is, in the linguistic respect, so uniform as the States of Western Europe or America, and that frontiers could nowhere be precisely drawn according to the language spoken by the inhabitants. This was prevented by geographical, economic and strategic reasons, but not the least important obstacle is the fact that the population is often linguistically mixed, that minorities live in towns surrounded by a countryside which speaks the language of the majority. Czechoslovakia also had her linguistic minorities. Of the fifteen million inhabitants, roughly ten millions were Czechoslovaks, 3,232,000 had German as their mother tongue, 692,000 Hungarian, 550,000 Ruthene. In addition, the Republic had some 80,000 Poles within its borders, and of the 357,000 citizens of Jewish religion 187,000 declared themselves to belong to the Jewish nationality.

In all its elected bodies, from the local councils up to the parliament, the Republic introduced the principle of proportional representation which guaranteed to all minorities a representation exactly corresponding to their numerical strength in the population of the State. Thus in the Czechoslovak parliament, in addition to 313 Czechoslovaks, there were 106 Germans, 18

Hungarians, 9 Ruthenes, 2 Poles and 2 Jews. The administration of almost 34,000 communes and of almost 50 political districts was wholly or largely in German hands. I shall not go into details. I shall merely say—and the precise researches carried out by the minority section of the League of Nations can prove this—that the minorities in Czechoslovakia had the number of schools of all types to which they had a right according to their number, and in certain sections even a larger number than that to which they were entitled; that they had their press, their theatre, their broadcasts, and in general a richly developed cultural life, that they played an important part in economic life and enjoyed complete political equality of rights. From 1926-38 the German minority was represented by a number of ministers in successive governments of the Republic.

There is no one to-day who still believes that Hitler's demand for the incorporation of the Sudeten territory in the Reich was dictated by the need to protect the Germans from Czechoslovak oppression. To-day, it is clear to all that the disintegration and then the occupation of Czechoslovakia were simply a necessity for Hitler in his plans for the conquest of the world. He had to rid himself of the danger threatening him from Prague in order to be able safely to venture on his campaign against France, and the easiest way to Warsaw as well as to the Balkans led through Czechoslovakia. The fact that the Western democracies did not understand this, and allowed Hitler to destroy Czechoslovakia, will certainly remain one of the greatest paradoxes known to history. No more convincing proof could have been given of their desire to preserve peace at any price, as well as of the fact that it is dangerous to preserve peace for oneself by sacrificing one's friends and allies. But let us not indulge in recriminations. Hitler himself soon cured Europe and the whole world of their errors, and this second war for the preservation of civilisation and democracy against German Nazi barbarism has quite clear motives, causes and aims. Clearer ones than had the last war, when German militarism had not yet shown itself in such naked brutality as it has done this time.

The Czechoslovak nation has participated in this war from the very beginning on the side of the democracies. Its situation is at once easier and more difficult than in the last War. It is easier, because the nation made undreamed-of progress in these twenty years of freedom, and has gained not only a greater self-confidence but also more experience in defence and attack. It is easier, also, as a result of the fact that in foreign countries we

are no longer the unknown nation of 1914 which had to inform the world of its very existence and of its claims. The world knows us, and acknowledges that it has moral obligations towards us. And, finally, it is easier in the fact that we did not enter this second struggle for liberation with completely empty hands, as we did in 1914. After the occupation of Prague, the greatest and most influential States—Great Britain, France, the U. S. A. and the Soviet Union—and certain others, e. g. British Dominions, Egypt and certain South American States—refused to recognize this act of violence. Thus Czechoslovakia never ceased to exist in law. Her representative organs have acted without interruption, even though her country has been occupied; we were able to base our endeavours on our foreign diplomatic representation when we inaugurated our second struggle for freedom.

On the other hand, the Nazi oppression is much more brutal and systematic than the Austrian oppression. The resistance at home involves much greater risks than in the last war. Further, certain circumstances make it impossible to create abroad an Army as strong as we could in our first liberation campaign. Germany does not send Czechs to the Army, because she remembers the experience of the Austrians and makes use of the Czechs only as slave labour in her war production. Thus we are deprived of the possibility of recruiting our war volunteers from prisoners. The so-called free Slovak State, which was created by Germany after the destruction of Czechoslovakia and which Germany immediately took under her protection, does, it is true, take part in the wars waged by Germany, but only in the form of small symbolic units, so that it is not possible to recruit the volunteers from their ranks either. The Czechoslovak Army abroad, therefore, is composed in this war partly of Czechoslovak colonists in France and Great Britain, partly of exiles who have succeeded in escaping abroad. Neither of these two sources is a very abundant one. Our colonies in the West of Europe were not numerous, and escape was very difficult both from the Protectorate and from "free" Slovakia.

The Czechoslovak Army in this war cannot, therefore, compare in numbers with our Army 25 years ago, but fortunately in this war numerical strength is not the decisive factor that it was in former wars. Despite its inconsiderable numbers, the Czechoslovak Army this time, too, is playing a prominent part in the war, thanks chiefly to its Air Force. Both in France and in Great Britain the Czechoslovak pilots accomplished remark-

able feats, which were appreciated according to their worth by French and British experts. In addition, the fact that Germany must maintain military and police forces to the extent of some 250,000 men in the Protectorate which she would make use of elsewhere, if she were not rightly afraid of a revolt in this territory, has also its value for the Allied cause.

From the beginning of the war we have tried to be accepted as participants in the war with full rights, representing a State which is temporarily occupied by the enemy. It was only in stages that we succeeded in having this claim accepted; the peculiar political conditions in France, which formed one of the causes of French disaster in the spring of 1940, rendered difficult a normal development in this matter. Nevertheless, on October 2, 1939, we succeeded in negotiating an agreement which recognised the Czechoslovak Army as an independent Allied unit. On November 17, 1939, the French Government recognised the Czechoslovak National Committee of eight members, whose mission was to organize and represent politically this Army. The British Government recognized the National Committee on December 20th of the same year.

"This Committee will be qualified to represent the Czechoslovak peoples, and in particular, in agreement with His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, to make such arrangements as may be necessary in the territories under the jurisdiction of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom in connection with the reconstitution of the Czechoslovak Army in France."

So runs the note of the Foreign Office. It was also recognized by the Governments of some of the Dominions.

The National Committee had its seat partly in Paris, partly in London. The catastrophic defeat of France, in the spring campaign of 1940, transformed Czechoslovakia's military and political situation. Thanks to Great Britain's timely help, a considerable portion of the Czechoslovak Army and of the political exiles was successfully embarked and transported to British soil. The Czechoslovak Air Force found its way to England, partly by air. In Great Britain this Army was reorganized, once more it received its independent status—for technical reasons the Czechoslovak Air Force units form an autonomous section of the R. A. F.—and it is again actively intervening in the war, both in the air war over Great Britain and in the land warfare in the Middle East.

In the political sphere the defeat of France removed the main obstacles which hindered the recognition of Czechoslovakia

as an equal participant in the war beside Great Britain's other allies. In a note of July 21, 1940, Lord Halifax informed me as follows:

In the light of exchanges of view which have taken place between us, I have the honour to inform you that, in response to the request of the Czechoslovak National Committee, His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom are happy to recognize and enter into relations with the provisional Czechoslovak Government established by the Czechoslovak National Committee in function in this country. His Majesty's Government will be glad to discuss with the representatives of the provisional Government certain questions arising out of this recognition which require settlement.

On July 23rd the Czechoslovak Provisional Government was formed; it consisted partly of members of the National Committee, partly of certain representatives of the liberation campaign in the home country who had succeeded in escaping abroad. Msgr. Jan Srámek was appointed Prime Minister of this Government; as a representative of the democratic Catholic Party, he had been a member of almost all the successive governments which had held office during twenty years of the Republic. Finally in December, 1940, the State Council began its activity, an advisory body which is a provisional substitute for the parliament. Its members are former members of the Czechoslovak legislative bodies in so far as they are living abroad and support the principle of the democratic organization of the Republic, members of the Government and representatives of all classes and sections of the Czechoslovak national community. Thus, in the second year of the war, Czechoslovakia has abroad its recognized President, its Government and a broad advisory body. These authorities are recognized not only by the Czechoslovak exiles, but also by the nation at home, as the legitimate spokesmen abroad for the Czechoslovak nation insofar as the nation at home is unable freely to express its will.

What is our programme in this war, and what is our aim? Like the other participants in the Allied war against Hitler, we have our specifically Czechoslovak aims as well as our European and world aims. Our national aim is, in the first place, the restoration of the State independence of the Czechoslovak Republic. In this respect we uphold the principle of continuity. Nothing that has been imposed upon us since Munich do we consider to be valid in law. The separation of one-third of our

State territory and one-third of our population by the Munich dictate is for us an act of illegal violence not approved by the Czechoslovak parliament, which alone is authorized by our constitution to ratify treaties regarding a change of frontiers. This does not mean that we desire as our war aim a mere return to the *status quo* of September, 1938. For the whole world this war is at the same time a revolution, and Europe will issue from it much changed. But refusing *à priori* to accept any dictate of any kind, we wish to agree on our frontiers with our neighbours in a friendly fashion, and in this the ethnographic, economic, as well as strategic integrity of our State territory must be maintained. Changes in detail are possible, as it will certainly be possible to obtain frontiers corresponding to our requirements and to those of our neighbours. But as we do not desire to dictate to others, so we shall not admit that they should dictate to us.

With regard to the internal conditions of our State, we also insist on the principle of continuity combined with the principle of progress. It is not necessary for us to change anything absolutely essential in the political structure of our State. It was a democratic structure which in its detailed aspects corresponded well to the conditions of our country and on the whole acquitted itself very well. Changes in this connection should rather affect political practice than the system itself. We suffered from a hypertrophy of political parties; it is probable that in our restored State the nation will concentrate its political forces into a number of large parties after the English and American models. But this development will be the result of the experiences which in the meantime the nation will have gained at home and abroad.

It is also probable that in the administration of the State—again following the English and American models—a broad decentralization will be carried out. The centralist system which was a necessity in the first years of the Republic bore within itself great dangers. Already before Munich it had been corrected by a number of reforms; after the war, further modifications will certainly be made. The commune and the country will certainly have to be equipped with a sufficient measure of self-administration for the central State administration not to suffer from bureaucracy, and so that each citizen shall be able to make the most direct decision on the administration of his own affairs. This would also have the advantage of contributing to a solution of the Slovak question, the difficulties of which were in part the result of administrative obstacles.

It is also probable that certain changes will be carried out in the nationality composition of the State. I do not speak of the total settlement of the relationship of the Czechoslovak majority to the minorities, more particularly the Germans; on the one hand I should not like to prejudice the decision of the nation at home in this matter, and on the other hand, the German problem in Central Europe is in certain of its aspects a whole which will have to be solved on an international basis. As far as Czechoslovakia is concerned, we shall consider all loyal citizens of the State as equal without distinction of origin, religion or language in the restored Republic. But no one will be able to reproach us if we see to it that no one shall again be exposed to a fate similar to that of our citizens in 1938 and 1939. We shall punish the traitors who served Hitler as instruments for the disintegration of our State; we shall see to it that the security of the State should never again be menaced by any irredents; it may be that we shall—if this principle will be applied in the other countries—carry out to a certain extent an emigration and exchange of the non-Czech speaking population. We must not forget that Hitler himself has transferred German minorities throughout Europe in the name of the unification of the German nation.

It goes without saying that the economic and social structure of the Republic will pass through a number of fundamental changes, that democracy will be put into practice in these spheres also much more thoroughly than before. But here we are already passing into the realm of international war aims, for the social and economic aspect of restored Czechoslovakia will hardly be different from the total picture of post-war Europe in this respect.

How then do we envisage in rough outline this post-war Europe and post-war world? President Masaryk called his memoirs of the World War "The World Revolution", for the war was for him a revolution of oppressed and menaced nations, a revolution for the conquest and assurance of democratic freedom. This war, too, is a revolution, and in a much more profound and wider measure than the last war. What Wilson considered to be the chief aim of the last war—to make the world safe for democracy—is the aim of this war, too. It is obvious that it was not attained the first time when within twenty years of the victory, which at that time had appeared decisive, democracy could again find itself in a much greater danger than in 1914.

I do not intend here to go into an analysis of the causes which brought the world into this unpleasant situation. The indulgence

shown by the democracies towards Fascism and later Nazism in the conviction that they were local diseases which could not be transferred elsewhere, is certainly one of the chief of the reasons. Those peace treaties which were the outcome of the last war were in the broad lines not bad ones, but they required of the victors that they should stand behind these treaties with the determination to defend them. The experiences of these twenty years have not passed unheeded. Future organization of Europe and the world will have to take note of them and consider them as a warning.

In the political sphere, I think that we shall not be able to do without some kind of federative organization. As to whether this will be a restored League of Nations or something completely new, I do not venture to predict to-day. But in any case there must be a body equipped with greater executive power than the Geneva institution which died such an inglorious death. For two decades we fought at Geneva for collective security, the condition and guarantee of peace. The new organization of Europe must receive this security at its very origin, if it is to take root and maintain itself. This probably presupposes a renunciation of a certain extent of their sovereignty on the part of the States concerned. We are prepared in advance to accept all limitations of our State sovereignty, for this aim, which are accepted by the other States. I have always been convinced that regional pacts within the League of Nations are not only not opposed to the spirit and intentions of the League, but on the contrary, that they are an effective instrument of peace and of economic and political understanding. The Little Entente in Central Europe, Locarno in the West, were two regional pacts whose beneficent effect cannot be doubted. I am convinced that regional pacts will be still more in place in the new settlement of Europe and the world.

In particular, the interdependent zone of small and medium sized nations which runs across Europe along its whole length from the Baltic to the Mediterranean, between Germany and Italy on the one hand and Russia on the other, is perfectly fitted for closer collaboration and for a firmer federal or confederate union. What this federation will be like, we cannot yet clearly see to-day. But through our collaboration with the Poles, and through the preparation of a confederate union between these two Slavonic nations, we propose to create a core around which the other interested States will be able to assemble. A certain minimum common political and economic level is a

condition of the success of this venture. This minimum has so far been lacking: between democratic Czechoslovakia, for instance, and feudal Hungary there was a difference in development of one and a half centuries. But if we believe that this war will not end without profound social changes, then we can also hope that this feudal fossil in the midst of Central Europe, as well as other economically and socially backward systems, will be brought to approximately the same level as that of the socially more progressive States and nations, so that a common life will be possible in some wider federal organization.

It seems also natural to me that it will not be possible permanently to guarantee political democracy without democracy in the economic and social relations among nations, and among individuals within each nation. Certainly international trade, the access of all nations to raw material resources, the international validity of the chief social laws, etc., will be better and more purposefully organized than after the last war. But I lay still greater stress on what Anthony Eden has called the "social security" of every member of the nation and in which he sees one of the fundamental war aims of fighting democracy. In an orderly and organized society it must be made possible for every member to express himself in accordance with his abilities and decently to maintain himself and his family. As long as this condition is not fulfilled, society will not cease to be undermined by the dissatisfaction of the socially oppressed classes, and political democracy will be in constant danger. The access to higher and highest education will also have to be democratized and made possible for all in accordance with their talents and not with the principles of wealth or origin.

All these problems are being eagerly discussed here in Great Britain and elsewhere. It is comprehensible that a small nation like our own will not have the decisive word to say in the final settlement of these fundamental questions of the post-war organization of the world. But within the measure of the powers of our nation and State we shall endeavour to make this organization as perfect and as just as possible. Many times in history we have been predecessors far in advance of our time. Our Hussites, the predecessors of the Reformation, bore in mind the ideal of a Christian "community of God", and they endeavoured to realize it in the primitive social forms of the 15th century. In the same century our national King, George of Podebrady, made the first attempt at the constitution of a sort of League of Nations. By this I only wish to prove that nothing in our

spiritual and political tradition is opposed to the great plans of reform which are now being born from the suffering of the present war.

We have reliable reports indicating that our nation at home is bearing the barbarous oppression with admirable valour, in the knowledge that it is suffering not only for its own better future, but also for a better future for the whole of mankind. During the twenty years of our State independence we had no other ambition than to show by deeds that we were worthy of living as free among the free in the community of nations. We have no other desire than that a free Czechoslovakia in a free Europe should again devote itself to peaceful and fruitful work for itself and for all.