

CURRENT MAGAZINES

THE CASE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The New European Situation:—Dr. M. Hodza, in the *Central European Observer*.

Czechoslovakia's Problems:—Dr. G. Schacher, in the *Contemporary*.

Hitler and Central Europe:—Mr. F. L. Hayes, in the *Yale Review*.

Refugees: A World Problem:—Dorothy Thompson, in *Foreign Affairs*.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA has been very much in the news. That oasis of democracy still flourishing in a desert of European dictatorships has an appeal all its own for the liberal and generous mind. Last March, when its peril seemed so grave, and when Mr. Neville Chamberlain was so obviously in search of a decent pretext to rid himself of responsibilities regarding it, he was reminded—with a vigour which British public opinion is still able to apply—that “pretexts” decent or indecent must not be the sole, nor the chief, concern of British statesmanship. The speech he delivered on second thoughts, so different from the one plainly simmering before in his mind, was the result of this rapid and rather strenuous education. That the British obligation to Czechoslovakia must be neither ignored nor explained away, was driven home to him by various co-operating influences, from the speeches of Mr. Churchill and Mr. Amery on one side to street demonstrations on the other. The West Fulham electorate, too, dotted the *i*'s and crossed the *t*'s of this admonition. Mr. Chamberlain prides himself on being a realist. But he is not alone in that. It is an open secret that in Canada six years ago, at the Imperial Economic Conference, he found to his chagrin how realism has its capable exponents also here: when realist meets realist, something happens. In like manner those whom he thought dreamy idealists over foreign policy in England proved their capacity for handling a wayward Prime Minister. And not even the hysterical support of Mr. Garvin in *The Observer* could avail to overcome them.

What are the salient features of this dispute in Central Europe, as the development of events and of criticism during these last three exciting months has made them clear?

I

The State we know as Czechoslovakia is a product of the Great War. Whether it ought to have been thus constituted, with just its present boundaries and its present mixture of

populations, is a question on which much might be said. But one cannot discuss all questions about the post-war settlement of Central Europe together, "closely connected" though they be—as we are often, rather superfluously, reminded. However close the connection, we must consider one thing at a time. The particular enquiry just now about Czechoslovakia is not whether it should ever have existed as a State, but whether having been called into existence, it has carried on its government in a manner relatively so respectable as to keep it in good standing among European States, or in a manner relatively so disgraceful as to justify dismemberment by foreign hands. Since it is treatment of "minorities" that is here under survey, it will be relevant to consider how minorities are treated elsewhere, by States with whose internal affairs no interference is proposed; how they are treated, for instance, in Poland, in Rumania, in Jugoslavia, and especially in Germany—because it is German minority championship which is in this case invoked. If I may borrow the term just now most familiar in international interchange, the debate is about "Non-Intervention" in Czechoslovakia. What Herr Henlein insistently demands is that Germany should intervene to help him, and that none should intervene on the opposite side. Of what, then, precisely, does he complain?

He is speaking, if we may take his own word for it, in the name of some 3,250,000 persons of German descent who live in Czechoslovakian territory, for the most part within a few miles of the German frontier. That he speaks *about* these people, is clear; how far he speaks genuinely *in their name* is open to dispute, for the Nazi technique of popular demonstration leaves one in great doubt about the feelings behind it. There, at least, "minority" rights are held in small esteem, and how large the pro-Czech minority in these German towns may be, we are unable to judge. We do know that German employees in industry have been imploring protection from the Czech Government against countrymen of their own who are determined to "Nazify" them against their will. It is beyond doubt, however, that in that area best known to foreign tourists for its health resort at Karlsbad, the area named after the Sudeten mountain range which forms a sort of natural frontier dividing it from Bavaria and Saxony, there is very considerable discontent and even anger among Germans at their subjection to Czech control. The nearest analogue, perhaps, is that of the people of Alsace-Lorraine during the twenty years which followed 1870.

Have they been maltreated? It is not relevant to reply that subjection of Germans to Czechs is in itself, intrinsically, maltreatment. At turn after turn of this enquiry, one is confused by the intrusion of futile arrogance about the natural superiority of Teutons to Slavs. Observing the limit I set to this paper at the outset, I simply exclude that as without bearing on the point here at issue. When there is leisure from matters more urgent, it will be at least amusing to take up the claim of higher privilege for "Nordics", based not upon verifiable facts of the present, but upon genealogical traditions of the remote past. Our immediate question is whether, and—if at all—then how far, Germans in Czechoslovakia have been deprived of those *equal* rights which, to our way of thinking, constitute all that anyone, even a "Nordic", can reasonably demand.

II

The truth on this matter is not indeed very easy to elicit. An *ex parte* statement by Czechs on one hand meets an *ex parte* arraignment by Germans on the other. Supporting these respectively are two sets of foreign newspapers; a democratic, parliamentary group, of which the *Manchester Guardian* and the *New Statesman* are most representative; and an authoritarian, pro-Fascist group, represented by the *Observer* and the *Daily Mail*. For the former, Czechoslovakia is to be extolled because, amid dictatorships, it remains democratic; for the latter, it is to be denounced apparently on the same ground. As to what the concrete grievances of the Sudeten Germans are, these rival organs leave us guessing. Not that they fail to mention grievances; but the mention is in such terms as make us wonder about that other way in which the same story could be told. A British reader must be excused for bewilderment when he reads in succession—say, Dr. Seton Watson and Mr. Ward Price! Our only recourse is to put the statements together, clinging desperately (like those who would reconstruct the historical Socrates from Platonic and Xenophontean sources) to "the common element."

It is agreed that the Sudeten German industries lost, through incorporation in Czechoslovakia, a great part of their market. Tariff walls shut out their manufactured goods from Germany and Austria. This can scarcely be blamed upon the Czechs, but it does go to explain a general irritation, and readi-

ness to accuse "the Government." It was impossible to set up an independent State at all without such a tariff barrier in the Central Europe of post-War days, and the hardships of those Sudeten towns have, unfortunately, many a parallel elsewhere. Perhaps Austrians and Germans should be most blamed in this case, for making the conditions of entrance into their markets so severe for goods on whose sale workmen of their own kith and kin were dependent for a livelihood. But at least the drop from industrial prosperity was severe, and may excuse even an unreasonable bitterness. Sudeten German industries were in certain areas closed, and in certain other areas reduced to such difficulty that they were absorbed at a low price by Czech firms. The mood of those thus thrown out of work may be guessed. It is said that half the nation's unemployed at present are of this minority stock, although it comprises not more than 22 per cent of the general population.

We are told, too, that in reorganizing the country's industries, Government policy—whether by coincidence or by design—has favored those sections which are Czech or Slovak, rather than those which are German or Magyar. The argument is advanced that by no means merely considerations of industrial effectiveness have in this matter been operative, but also a desire to "get even" for some inequalities on the other side in the past. Men like Herr Henlein insist that State relief, in late years so sorely needed, has been a field for partialities of management. "Discrimination against Germans", they say, has been manifest. Still more obvious is the disability under which Germans are placed in having so many Czech officials over them even in towns where the proportion of Czech inhabitants is very small. As one reads a manifesto from the Sudeten German party, one is reminded very much of the case presented for North-East Ulster against forcible incorporation in a self-governing Ireland. It might be paraphrased somewhat as follows:

We, Germans, have been here, minding our lawful business, in these towns which take their general name from the Sudeten mountains, for a good many centuries. How our ancestors came here, in what was called by every geography book up to the end of 1918 the Austrian province of Bohemia, we don't pretend to know. You say that it was *your* country, centuries and centuries ago, until wicked people called Teutons, from whom we are descended, came in to pillage and drive out or subjugate splendid people called Slavs, of the stock from which you come. But we Germans disavow all responsibility for what those forefathers of

ours, according to your tale, did to your forefathers. We don't know whether your historical record, your genealogy, is true or false: most likely it is in part true and in part false, as genealogies drawn up to support a policy always are. One thing we do know, that it is most unfair to call on us Germans of the present to atone through all sorts of suffering inflicted by you for alleged tyrannies of our ancestors on your ancestors generations back.

Consider what you have done to us since 1914. Our country (also at the time, officially, your country) declared war on Servia, and that started the world war. No sooner was it begun than you Czechs opened secret negotiation with the enemy, betraying every piece of information you could send that would help to disclose Austria-Hungary's weak spot. Your so-called "patriot" leaders were tireless in working against us. And when the war was over, what did you do? At your solicitation the victors carved up Austria-Hungary so as to throw its whole industrial wealth into your hands, to wreck beyond repair the prospects of those industries which our effort, generation after generation, had built up.

That is why we are so resentful. That is why we demand autonomy.

Does it not read like a statement of the Ulster plea, in that period of negotiation between the British Government and Mr. De Valera, with memories of what happened in Dublin during Easter week, 1916? But in the Irish case "partition" met, in a measure, the difficulty. Why not partition for the Sudeten Germans?

I have endeavored to make clear the situation as these insurgents within Czechoslovakia see it, by constructing an argument in words which I think they would endorse. Looking across their border, at the prosperity—or apparent prosperity—of their kinsmen who had the luck to be placed on the other side of the invisible line, they feel ill used; and the Government of the Reich does not fail to exploit—at times even to create—such a mood.

What about the reply from Praha?

III

To these charges and complaints and amending proposals, the Czechoslovakian answer has been presented with equal clarity.

It does not err by over-statement. No pretence is made of faultless administration in a new State called to life as the outcome of four years of war, and with such recent memories of implacable civil strife. "Revenge", said that shrewd observer, Becky Sharpe, "may be unchristian, but it is natural." No

doubt there have been cases, not a few, in which some Czech official took his chance to make Germans, so recently dominant, appreciate by experience the victim's side in an injustice. How clearly this danger was foreseen, may be judged by numerous passages in the speeches and writings of Masaryk. It is well known that at one crucial point he prevailed only by confronting his colleagues with the threat of his own abdication, unless they agreed to measures he thought indispensable for defence of the equal rights of the German minority.

A survey of Czechoslovakian conditions has convinced neutral observers, not indeed that Czech administration is without room for improvement, but that the liberal and far-sighted policy of the Liberator is, on the whole, carried out with fidelity and success. It is not merely when we look at neighboring countries, not merely by comparison with the unspeakable horror of minority treatment in Germany, in Austria, in Hungary, in Rumania, that the example set at Praha seems so admirable. Comparison is challenged not with the worst, but with the best.

A *New York Times* investigator lately completed a tour of the area in which Czech injustice is depicted by the German press as rampant. What impressed him was the care everywhere taken not to promote but to discountenance and impede any revengeful spirit of "denationalizing" the German minority. Methods of denationalization are, alas, only too well understood: it is perhaps not out of place to recall how the history of Austro-Hungarian government is specially rich with examples, which the Czechs have been at obvious pains to avoid imitating. The Germans in Czechoslovakia, says this American investigator, have their own schools, from kindergarten to university. In their towns, bilingual by law, one hardly hears any language other than German. Their municipal government is in their own hands, and their representation in parliament is not only adequate in number but most outspoken in its criticism. They have an active press in every considerable town, which quite freely extols Hitler and denounces the Czech administration: they openly cherish the memory and celebrate the exploits of Germans in the Great War, while Czechs look on with a tolerant composure to which no habit in an "authoritarian" State presents the least similitude. What a contrast, for example, with the scene in Italian cities of the South Tyrol!

The *New York Times* visitor is moved to ask why Nazi Germany, so concerned for her expatriated sons, has nothing to say against the régime under which Mussolini holds a quarter

million Germans, in cities where their children must attend schools that use only the Italian language, with no other tongue officially permitted in public, with all officials Italian, with no German representation in "parliament", no German political press or political organization. Not a word of complaint about this seems to proceed from the lips of *der Fuehrer*: one would gather that, on his visit to Rome in May, he was careful to avoid mention of a matter on which *Il Duce* is known to be intolerant of criticism and impatient when it is even named.

Acknowledging certain still unredressed grievances of the Sudeten Germans, hardships that were inevitable in the transition from one régime to another, but which ought not to remain for an indefinite period without repair, the Government at Praha has shown itself eager to amend the situation by a further safeguarding *Minority Statute*. For the framing of this, it has invited and welcomed suggestions from everywhere, especially from those who feel themselves aggrieved. With such malcontents, after a manner unlike that of States in the past, it is willing to discuss this whole domestic matter in a world forum. Never, perhaps, was the merit of that great interchange at Geneva, that project for world-wide consultation publicly on issues of justice and injustice, more convincingly revealed than by a case such as this. Nor could we have more definite evidence on the present issue than is supplied by the eagerness on one side to maintain and on the other to abolish the influence of the League. When Herr Henlein tells us that it is no *Minority Statute* which can ever meet his demand, we have little difficulty in judging either his purpose or his prompting.

It is the whole post-War adjustment that his master in Berlin is using him as an agitator to undo. "Pertinax" has aptly put it in last number of *Foreign Affairs*. Hitler, he says, before resuming the interrupted drive for control of all Eastern Europe, "determined to destroy the political system which had been created to maintain the territorial settlement and to restrain resurgent Pan-Germanism." For this purpose a quarrel had to be picked. And how transparent have been the artifices used to pick it!

A glance at the map of Czechoslovakia will show at once how preposterous is the demand, for example, that the Sudeten German area should be constituted "a State within the State", without regard to the geographical conditions fixed by the mountain range which plainly determined at the Versailles Conference just the frontier as now drawn. Very clearly indeed

do the chiefs of the Reichswehr realise how helpless would be the Czechoslovakian Department of National Defence if their rectification of the boundary were adopted, and it is but a fair tribute to their intelligence to suppose that this is the thought behind their present proposal. Best of all, from their point of view, would be a scheme under which their neighbor would entrust the guardianship of its frontier to friends of their own! A glance at the map will thus suggest the reply also to some loudly trumpeted charges about discrimination in the choice of men for official place. Obviously if Czechoslovakia as a State is to survive at all, certain responsibilities must be reserved for that section of her people on whom more dependence can be placed than upon the circle of Konrad Henlein in constant intercourse with Adolf Hitler. An elementary precaution of national safety, which the Nazi Reich at least might be expected to appreciate! It is not, as a rule, "indiscriminate" in thus bestowing its own confidence.

But it seems that the complaint of discrimination has to do with very minor offices, and regarding these it may be acknowledged to have an element of truth. Quite probably the village postmasterships might be distributed with more scrupulous fairness, and the road work might be made to provide summer employment in more exact proportion for Germans as well as for Czechs. Perhaps, indeed, large contracts have not always been awarded on a basis of strict impartiality "to the lowest tender," and here too there is room for amendment. We have heard of such faults of public administration elsewhere, in countries which have not such a record of recent domestic conflict to explain group animosities. It makes one recall the words of Edward Gibbon, so often appropriate to express the feelings of a keen party worker when change of government has not brought him his expected reward: "My sword was counted in the day of battle, but I was forgotten in the distribution of the spoil." What is fair ground, however, for even shrill complaint, and peremptory demand for remedy, is one thing: the threat of precipitating a world war is another. Where grievances, not insignificant, yet obviously adjustable, are made a pretext for such measures as the Nazi dictator has persistently used—measures about whose probable consequence he can have no doubt—the design is apparent.

This time the project has, at least temporarily, miscarried. It has been frustrated by three influences: (i) the proof, at length made clear to Berlin, that Czechoslovakia can be dis-

membered only after the full strength of the Republic of France exerted in her support has been overcome; (ii) the proof, likewise painfully and slowly realized in the same quarter, that in this conflict France would have the utmost cooperation of Great Britain; and (iii) last, but most important, the proof of Czech readiness and ability to fight now in self-defence no less than twenty-four years ago in self-liberation.

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Certain newspapers, during these crucial weeks, in London and in Paris, took the enormous responsibility of representing (i) that Great Britain would not under any circumstances fight for the Czechs; (ii) that in all probability France would not fight for them either; and (iii) that the resistance threatened from Praha was "bluff", sure either to be abandoned on challenge or to be quickly and properly overcome.

Fortunately Hitler was disillusioned on these points in time. But it seems to have been a tragically near thing.

IV

To those who feel concern that the Sudeten German grievance may be remedied, not that remedies for it may be systematically refused so as to make Nazi interference certain, the experience of the last three months has been illuminating. What happened to Austria in March, with its preliminaries and its sequel, produced a mood of wholesome suspicion when the like preliminaries began to appear in German dealings with Czechoslovakia. The press campaign, in particular, which British readers could observe even in their own London newspapers of the pro-dictatorial group, should have been enough to disclose the imposture. One read about Czechoslovakia's failure to fulfil those tests of racial and cultural homogeneity which are essential to nationhood: as if such requirements were fulfilled elsewhere, so that since 1918 the exception in Central Europe had been an intolerable outrage upon a symmetry otherwise complete! As if, too, the British newspapers which have shown such enthusiasm in this case for racial homogeneity were not precisely those which at other times and in other references have been most contemptuous of it!

One does not easily recall the championship of these journalistic crusaders on the British "Right" for the cause of a racial minority, or for those whose cultural inheritance is being overborne by material power, for example, in the case of Ireland, in the case of Egypt, even a generation ago in the case of Austria-Hungary, which George Meredith called "an Empire bound with

iron hoops." One can only conjecture that the editors of that section of the London press from which German broadcasters quote to us with such frequent approval have been acquiring of late a way of thought very new to them. They seem to have studied for reproduction and adaptation passages in the more liberal English newspapers of days gone by, on which they have been accustomed to pour most scorn. What was "sentimentality" in the Celtic Irish plea, for example, is plain demand for justice in Sudeten Germans! Small wonder that the phrases of a newly-found generosity do not even yet seem quite natural from such lips. It is a strange bed-fellowship that the necessities of party journalism create. Strangest of all, and most exquisitely amusing, is the philippic of Mr. J. L. Garvin in *The Observer* against the scandalous project of Czech dominance over Germans, Magyars and Poles. As if we did not remember how Mr. Garvin had spent a long life supporting English dominance in Ireland, and coining phrases still more satiric than those he now employs, to ridicule just the same sort of cause he now professes to have at heart! The conflict of "ideologies" is indeed manifest in the British press itself, as the electorate in such constituencies as Ipswich, West Fulham, Lichfield has been quick to realize. Probably the reader most diverted at present by an *Observer* editorial is Mr. Eamon de Valera.

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As one reflects on this whole amazing spectacle, there are historic parallels that crowd upon one's mind. The Praha of to-day recalls in its conflicts and its anxieties, its perils and its ideals, much of the Prague of five centuries ago. Then, as now, that old city was the centre of a Czech civilisation menaced by German forces on every side. Then, as now, the Slav was there summoned by the Teuton to accept a rôle of subservience and to abandon all claim to a selfconscious nationality. Twenty-two years ago there fell the Hus quincentenary. It came when the War was at its height, and the German alternative *Weltmacht oder Niedergang* was appreciated with a clearness we were all too quick to lose and have been slow to recover. Masaryk then took the opportunity at Geneva to recall in a public address how the burning of Hus, disguised as it was by the ecclesiastical imposture of the time, was in truth a move in the German anti-Czech campaign. Ecclesiastical has now given place to genealogical imposture: cant about Nordic descent has succeeded to cant about soundness of dogma: when our world recovers from

this period of relapse into superstition as the pretext for cruelty, it will be a nice point to decide whether the manifestos of the Council of Constance about the authority of the Church or the preamble to Nazi decrees about preferred rights of race and blood and soil constituted the deeper abasement of intelligence. The Fathers of Constance will probably be deemed deserving of the lighter blame, because—other considerations being supposed equal—the superstition made a pretext for cruelty in 1938 is more disgraceful than the superstition invoked for a like purpose in 1416. One thinks, too, of the great scene of July 16, 1410, in Prague, when two hundred copies of Wycliffe's writings were solemnly burned before the Archbishop surrounded by his clergy, while the *Te Deum* was chanted in accompaniment, and all the church bells of the city rang out an exultant peal. Was it the model for Teutonic conflagration of books in another interest, four years ago?

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The historic imagination might indeed range long and far over such old scenes with these present days in mind, observing in humbled mood how much of wickedness and folly one had thought gone for ever has now been brought back. A final similitude is perhaps too suggestive to be omitted. It is well known that Mussolini's imagination is much occupied with memories of Julius Caesar and the manifold suggestiveness of "the fateful hills of Rome". Hitler is not generally credited with a like mood of historic reverie, and yet in his Vienna speech after the occupation one can hardly miss a certain hint of the same self-consciousness. It was at Berchtesgaden, within sight of the Austrian frontier, that he had met von Schuschnigg, so soon before he avowed his mission—a German Austrian back on his native soil, set apart by Heaven to reunite the Reich. The place is laden with memories. Is it fanciful to suppose that on such a spot some thought of Frederick I. may have been in his mind? One remembers the famous paragraph by Lord Bryce:

To the south-west of the green plain that girdles in the rock of Salzburg, the gigantic mass of the Untersberg frowns over the road which winds up a long defile to the glen and lake of Berchtesgaden. There, far up among its limestone crags, in a spot scarcely accessible to human foot, the peasants of the valley point out to the traveller the black mouth of a cavern, and tell him that, within, Barbarossa lies amid his knights in an enchanted sleep, waiting the hour when the ravens shall cease to hover round the peak,

and the pear-tree blossom in the valley, to descend with his Crusaders and bring back to Germany the golden age of peace and strength and unity. Often in the evil days that followed the fall of Frederick's house, often when tyranny seemed unendurable and anarchy endless, men thought on that cavern, and sighed for the day when the long sleep of the great Emperor should be broken, and his shield be hung aloft again as of old in the camp's midst, a sign of help to the poor and the oppressed.

The analogies, in all conscience, are remote enough. But they are not more remote than passage after passage of the Hitler eloquence from the actual situation of those Sudeten Germans. If the *Fuehrer* thinks of himself as like Barbarossa, it may well pass as one of his milder and more harmless illusions.

H. L. S.