

THE ATTACK ON MUNKÁCS

BY

ERNEST SCHMIDT-PAPP

In the early hours of the morning of Epiphany Day (January 6th) a daring outrage of an unpardonable character was committed against the territory of the Hungarian State. Taking advantage of the shelter of the darkness, Czech troops surreptitiously broke into the sleeping vottage of Oroszvég and town of Munkács. During the attack, carried out with the aid of up-to-date appliances of war, the town of Munkács was bombarded by Czech artillery.

The attack is of an incredible character, as coming only a few weeks after the Vienna award, which Czecho-Slovakia had solemnly accepted as binding upon her, and being directed without provocation of any kind against a peaceful town with the deliberate intention of taking possession of that town by force.

The attempt — which cannot be treated simply as a mere "incident" — ended in a fiasco and throws a searching light on the dangerous political atmosphere originating in particular from the Ruthenia subjected to the rule of the Volosin Government which has converted this section of the map of Europe into a hotbed of unrest endangering the peace of Europe. Though at the cost of considerable losses, the local Hungarian garrison heroically repulsed the treacherous attack, which has been proved beyond a doubt to have been a deliberate action systematically prepared and planned days in advance. An action the responsibility for which rests exclusively with Prague. This fact is shown also by the commentaries and explanations accompanying the reports of the events at Munkács published in the world press. Apart from the conclusions drawn by the British, Italian and Polish presses, particular interest attaches to the communiqué issued by the "Deutsche Diplomatisch-Politische Korrespondenz", which stresses the point that events of the kind are a direct defiance of the spirit of the Vienna award, adding that the responsibility for what happened at Munkács must be laid at the door of a system of malicious propaganda of a most deliberate character.

In connection with the events which occurred at Munkács and in the neighbourhood on Epiphany Day (January 6th.) last the Hungarian Government instituted an investigation of a most careful and thorough character. The investigation was opened already while the Czech attack was being repulsed; subsequently the work of the investigating authorities was co-ordinated with that of the mixed Czechoslovak-Hungarian Military Commission delegated by agreement between the Prague and Budapest Governments to find out what really happened.

The organs entrusted with the conduct of the investigation have endeavoured to thoroughly ascertain every single detail of the happenings in question, doing so for the purpose of determining the question of responsibility. That question is very closely connected with the aggressive attitude of the Czecho-Slovak troops. This question is to be determined internationally.

In order to render fully comprehensible what happened at Munkács it is necessary to describe the geographical situation in which the town of Munkács was placed by the Vienna award. The line of demarcation runs immediately beside the outlying sections of the town or rather of the village of Oroszvég, which forms the outskirts of the town, being separated therefrom only by the bed of the Latorca. Indeed, in places that line actually intersects the gardens attached to the houses. Only a few hundred metres from the town rises suddenly (from territory which to that point is flat in character) the first steep chain of the Wooded Carpathians, which is still in the hands of the Czechs. This mountain chain surrounds the town so closely — and at so short a distance — that from a military point of view the situation of Munkács is decidedly precarious. So long as the present frontiers remain in force, it will be an easy matter for any one with evil intentions to cross the boundary line.

It was this absurd situation of the frontier that the Czechs took advantage of to carry out their treacherous and surreptitious attack, in the conviction that their plan must succeed and that by the aid of their false propaganda they would be able to cajole the outside world into believing that the town of Munkács was not Hungarian after all. As it happened, however, the treacherous attack of the Czechs was repulsed in a striking manner by the inhabitants of Munkács themselves, who drove the Czech intruders out and proved for all time that the town of Munkács has always been and will always remain Hungarian.

This is how the treacherous and surreptitious attack of the Czechs was carried out: — At 3 a. m. on the morning of January 6th, under cover of the night darkness, the Hungarian frontier guards — altogether four persons — stationed at the eastern corner of Oroszvég were surprised by an attack by 3 Czech armoured cars and several hundred Czech regulars. The small Hungarian

guard stood their ground manfully until three of their number had been overpowered and the fourth seriously wounded by the attacking party. The heroic defence put up by this tiny detachment had however given the Hungarian troops stationed farther back time to get ready to take part in the action. The advance of the Czech infantry was checked by the stubborn resistance of this latter detachment, a small force of some ten men who showed the utmost courage and determination. Only one of the three armoured cars succeeded in advancing any distance — almost to the bridge over the Latorca.

Simultaneously with these events an attack was made by a superior force of Czech infantry on the Hungarian frontier guard stationed at the western entrance to the village of Oroszvég. Here too the Hungarian guard behaved with exemplary courage, retiring gradually and fighting every inch of ground, doing so in order to give the Hungarian garrison and the inhabitants of Munkács time to prepare to deliver a counter-attack.

The attacks of the numerically superior Czech forces were checked heroically by the admirably stubborn resistance of the small Hungarian detachments defending the frontier. A Hungarian policeman of Ruthenian nationality of the name of Pazuchanitch by constantly discharging his rifle disconcerted the driver and crew of the Czech armoured car. The tiny Hungarian detachment fired a volley at the car. The driver of the latter lost his head and drove the car into a ditch. The soldiers in the car jumped out and took to flight. The heroic Ruthenian policeman referred to above jumped on the Czech armoured car, removed one of the mitrailleuses (which he immediately put out of action) and then with two other men advanced to the bank of the Latorca, to a point from which a company of Czech infantry were approaching the town. Pazuchanitch then treated the Czech infantry to a severe drum-fire; and the Czechs made away as fast as they could.

Reports of the attack being made by the Czechs were very soon communicated to the battalion of Hungarian soldiers stationed in Munkács. The sections of the battalion already in marching order were immediately instructed to cross the bridge over the Latorca and support the frontier guards in their fight. After the alarm had been received the police of the town of Munkács at once joined the fray. They were joined also by the Hungarian ordnance officers functioning in Munkács; nor was any hesitation shown by the patriotic inhabitants of Munkács, who voluntarily reported themselves for military service and gallantly undertook their share in the work of driving out the treacherous enemy. Meanwhile Czech artillery began to bombard the defenceless town and awoke the sleeping inhabitants. The theatre was hit by a shell; so was the cinema and several other big buildings.

The treacherous Czech attack — supported by all kinds of up-to-date war equipment — failed; the numerically very inferior Hun-

garian force triumphantly repulsed the Czech assailants. Unfortunately the treacherous assault cost the Hungarians a number of valuable lives: the Hungarian soldiers who fell in defence of their country were Lieut. Joseph F. Csapó, Lieut. Joseph Koncz, Ensign Joseph Rozs, Artillery Sergeant Stephen Szarka and Corporal Peter Krisztin. In addition, the Czech bullets killed a Ruthenian woman too, — Mrs. Csubirka, who has left ten orphans to mourn her. Later on, two more of the injured combatants died of the effects of their wounds. There were a large number of wounded. The Czechs removed their dead and wounded.

From documents found on Czech prisoners the fact may be established that the attack was made deliberately and was carried out by Czech regular troops detached for the purpose. The heinousness of this dastardly and unprecedented attempt is enhanced by the circumstance that, though the Czechs notified the authorities in Munkács that they were anxious to hold a parley with the competent Hungarian officials, the car occupied by the Hungarian delegates — Lieut.-Colonel Szentiványi and Dr. Béla Dudinszky, Chief Constable of Munkács —, though provided with the regulation white flag and though marked white as provided in international usage, was subjected by the Czechs to the fire of machine-guns, Chief Constable Dudinszky being wounded in the neck. And, while the respective delegates were parleying in the Town Hall, the Czechs continued to bombard the town. When the Czech colonel who headed the Czech delegation was asked how such a thing could happen, — how the Czechs could continue to bombard the town while they were negotiating —, the colonel replied that he too thought it strange, but that it was not in his power to stop the firing.

It is a remarkable fact worth special mention that at 9 p. m. on January 7th, on the confines of the village of Nagygeőcz, near Ungvár, Czechoslovak regulars made another attempt to invade Hungarian territory: on that occasion, however, the attack was repulsed with the greatest ease by the Hungarian frontier guards, who were already prepared for such contingencies.

There can be no doubt whatsoever that the Hungarians will receive international satisfaction for the dastardly and cowardly surprise attack made by the Czechs. However, there is no possibility of full confidence and re-assurance being restored until the question of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak frontier is satisfactorily settled and until the Prague Government makes up its mind to discontinue its machinations. Another *sine qua non* without which no adjustment of the question can ever prove satisfactory or lasting, is that the Czech Government must disarm the bands of Ukrainian Bolshevik terrorists and must give the Ruthenian people the right of self-determination which is that people's due.