

THE MINORITY QUESTION IN THE BUDGET DEBATE IN THE SKUPSHTINA

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The minority question was broached on March 6th. in the Skupshtina, during the debate on the Estimates of the Department of Education, when Stevan Chirtz, Minister of Education, in his exposé declared that he desired to respect the mother tongues and the nationality rights of the minorities. The first of the Government Party Deputies to speak on this question was Rada Lungulov. In his speech M. Lungulov stressed that in order to ensure an adjustment of the minority question it was necessary to elaborate a permanent minority cultural programme, which would then have to be strictly observed.

Particularly noteworthy were the speeches made by two representatives of the German minority, Herr Francis Hamm and Dr. Trischler, and of the sole representative of the Magyar minority, M. Gellért Fodor. Deputy Hamm demanded a proper amendment of the law dealing with the regulation of the sale and purchase of real estate, the said law being in diametrical opposition to the provisions of the Minority Treaty and of the principle of equality of rights ensured in the Constitution. He complained further that the articles of association of the "Deutsch-Schwäbischer Kulturbund" had not yet — despite repeated attempts to urge the matter — been approved by the competent factors, and that Yugoslav subjects of German nationality still had the greatest difficulty in obtaining passports. And in conclusion he complained of the brutal treatment by the authorities of Yugoslav subjects of German nationality. Dr. Trischler demanded the establishment of agricultural schools, with German as the language of instruction, for the German minority.

The Deputy dealing most exhaustively with the minority question was M. Gellért Fodor, the representative of the Magyar minority, who in his speech explained the grievances and the legitimate demands of the Magyars living in Yugoslavia. "The Magyar minority living in Yugoslavia" — he said, inter alia — "does not ask for prerogatives or to be treated as privileged citizens; all it asks is that rights to which it is entitled by the laws of the land shall be realised to the same extent as in the case of the German minority within the framework of the Constitution. It has every right to ask that this should be done, particularly seeing that during the past 20 years it has unquestioningly fulfilled every obligation devolving upon Yugoslav citizens and has proved that it is ready to do so in the future too. The fact must nevertheless be established that the 500.000 Magyars living in Yugoslavia have been deprived of every possibility of development, have been reduced to intellectual thralldom and ruined economically, the result being that it would appear to be condemned to death. The leaders of the Magyar minority have in innumerable cases laid the grievances and legitimate demands of the Magyars of Yugoslavia before the political leaders of the country; but all they have received in answer so far has been — empty promises.

"The most crying of our political grievances is the circumstance that there are no Magyar officials functioning in the towns and villages inhabited by Magyars. We are quite unable to get work for the Magyar young men who have graduated at a university; for all posts alike are given to persons whose mother tongue is Slav and who in many cases do not possess adequate qualifications, and have brought the once flourishing towns and villages to the brink of ruin . . . As things stand today, there is not a single village in the whole country with a Magyar functioning as parish clerk or notary. The Magyars therefore beg the Royal Government to engage in the public offices a number of duly qualified Magyar young men in proportion to their quota of the population.

"The officials and other employees of Magyar nationality engaged by private enterprise are also being gradually ousted from their posts. I have received numbers of letters from

citizens complaining that under official pressure they have been dismissed on the plea of "nationalisation."

"The Magyars desire further that the courts of law functioning in districts inhabited by Magyars should have attached to them only judges familiar with the language of that minority. The Magyar minority also complains that formidable difficulties are thrown in the way of procuring citizenship even in the case of persons who resided in the territory of present-day Yugoslavia prior to 1910 and had already prior to that date acquired the right of domicile (pertinenza) in that territory. Another grievance voiced by the Magyar minority is that exceptional difficulties are thrown also in the way of obtaining passports, especially in the case of Yugoslav citizens of Magyar nationality.

"One of our chief grievances in respect of the country's economic policy refers to the Order in Council dealing with the restriction of the sale and purchase of real estate, which is aimed exclusively against the Magyar minority. As things stand at present, Magyars are already quite unable to sell real estate to Magyars, contracts of sale never being approved by the authorities when the purchaser is a Magyar. We see, therefore, that it is the express object of this Order in Council to make it impossible in particular for citizens who are Magyars by nationality to acquire landed or other real estate.

"The Magyar agricultural labourers were not given a share in the benefits of the land reform; and the Magyar agricultural labourers have never received even as much as a house-building site. The same has been the fate of the farm servants, cottagers and tenants of Magyar nationality expelled from the large estates that were distributed under the land reform, who today go about in rags and are in the most desperate situation. I would call the attention of Government particularly to the sad situation of these poor Magyar destitutes who have been plunged arbitrarily into misery.

"The most painful wounds in the cultural field have been those inflicted by the school policy so far pursued. The Magyars beg Government before all to urgently invalidate the various Orders dealing with the name-analysis system. As a consequence of the ruthless enforcement of the system of name-analysis, in Horgos, for instance, as things stand

today, the language of the Magyar minority is used as the language of instruction in only 6 of the 17 classes established there, despite the fact that of the 11.000 inhabitants of the township 9500 are Magyars by nationality. We beg, further, that religion should be taught, in both the elementary and the secondary schools, not in Serbo-Croatian, but in Magyars, irrespective of whether the pupil in question is attending a parallel Magyar section or a section in which the language of instruction is the language of the State. Another thing desired by the Magyars is that the teachers of Magyar nationality transferred to the schools in which the language of the State is the language of instruction should be re-attached to the so-called parallel Magyar sections, and that the Magyar teachers who have recently completed their training should be appointed without delay, to make it possible to re-open the Magyar sections closed owing to an alleged shortage of teachers. This is particularly the case with the homestead schools, in which there has not been any teaching for years.

"Another thing desired by the Magyars is that a Magyar theatre of a permanent character should be established and the same benefits in respect of taxation accorded it as those enjoyed by the theatres using the language of the State. And, in conclusion, we beg for the approval of the articles of association of the non-political Magyar cultural associations promised so many years back but not yet actually effected."

What M. Gellért Fodor said in the speech of which we publish an abstract above, is only a mere fraction of the grievances and legitimate demands of the Magyar minority. If the Yugoslav Government really and seriously desires to adjust the question of the Magyar minority and to bring about a sincere rapprochement with Hungary, it should without delay fulfil the demands described above, which are really only a minimum.

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