

THE INDEPENDENT SLOVAK STATE

BY

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The history and the particulars of the collapse of the second Czecho-Slovak Republic constructed on the basis of the Munich Agreement are well known. Nevertheless, to give our readers a clear, historical picture of what took place, we consider it necessary to set out in detail certain phases of that collapse and of the construction of the new Slovak State.

On 9th March — as reported on the 10th by the German Telegraphic Bureau — M. Hacha, President of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, removed the Tiso Government from office by means of a coup-d'état, and appointed M. Joseph Sivak as Slovak Premier and M. Charles Sidor as Political Minister. Simultaneously, Czech troops occupied the Slovak towns and proclaimed martial law. According to an announcement in Slovak, broadcast by the Vienna wireless at 1.10 p. m. of the same day, Mgr. Tiso, on 10th March, informed Vienna that he and the other members of the Slovak Cabinet had been removed from office against their will by the Central Government, and that this was an unconstitutional act.

A report from Berlin received by the Hungarian Telegraph Bureau on 11th March stated that German public opinion was following the events in Slovakia with keen interest, and that the general view taken was that the Prague Government had violated Slovakia's autonomy, had been guilty of a breach of the Munich and Vienna Agreements, and was bent on governing with the old Beneš system of force. Rumours spread that Mgr. Tiso and his colleagues in office had drawn the attention of the German Government to the circumstance that Prague was acting in an unconstitutional manner, and that in their Note they had begged the German Government to support their legitimate points of view. After Mgr. Tiso's Note had been despatched, President Hacha removed M. Sivak from office and, on the recommendation of the Committee of the Slovak Diet, appointed M. Sidor as Premier, making at the same time other changes in the Cabinet. Mgr. Tiso, accompanied by his deputy in the former Cabinet, M. Durchansky, left for Berlin by aeroplane. They

were accorded an official reception by the German Government on 13th March, after which both Mgr. Tiso and M. Durchansky had an audience with Herr Hitler, who spoke with them in the presence of the German Foreign Minister. That same day an official communiqué was issued in Berlin in which it was stated that the attempt to settle the relations between the different racial groups in Czecho-Slovakia in a peaceful manner and in the spirit of the Munich Agreement had failed. For this unfortunate state of affairs the so-called "Beneš" spirit alone was responsible.

By this time the whole world knew that anarchy was rampant in Slovakia. According to a report received from the Pozsony "Informacio Bureau", on 15th March certain detachments of the German forces operating in Bohemia and Moravia crossed the western frontier of Slovakia in order to defend those provinces against any possible action of the Czecho-Moravian soldiers and gendarmes in Slovakia. The report emphatically declared that the German troops had occupied only a narrow strip of the western frontier zone from Zsolna to Pozsony, and that they had not entered the town of Pozsony itself. The German troops had halted at a distance of several kilometres from Pozsony, the German ring around that town extending to Bazin on the north-east. Zsolna, a town near the frontier, had been occupied, but only as a temporary measure.

On 15th March the Hungarian Telegraph Bureau issued the following report:

"Germany officially states that from this day Czecho-Slovakia has ceased to exist. As regards the future of Slovakia, the following statement has been issued: Slovakia is a completely independent State, in which Germany will be represented by a diplomatic agent. Germany naturally demands that Slovakia shall respect the cultural rights of the German minority living there."

On 14th March the Slovak Diet entrusted Mgr. Tiso with the task of forming a Cabinet. The Diet also proclaimed the independence of Slovakia and passed a law the text of which runs as follows:

§ 1. Slovakia is an independent and sovereign State. The former National Assembly has resolved itself into a legislative Diet.

§ 2. Until such time as the Slovak Constitution is promulgated, all administrative and executive powers shall be exercised by a Slovak Government appointed by the Competent Committee of the Slovak Diet.

§ 3. All laws, ordinances and measures hitherto in force shall, subject to such modifications as follow from the independence of the Slovak State, continue to be operative.

§ 4. The Government is empowered to institute by ordinance

such measures as are in the meantime required to maintain the order and security necessary to the interests of the Slovak State.

§ 5. This law comes into operation today.

On 16th March Premier Tiso despatched the following telegram to Herr Hitler:

"Trusting fully in the Führer and Chancellor of the German Reich, the Slovak State places herself under your protection. Slovakia begs you to undertake the protection of the Slovak State."

In reply Herr Hitler sent the following telegram to Mgr. Tiso:

"I acknowledge receipt of your telegram and herewith undertake to protect the Slovak State."

On 17th March the Hungarian Telegraph Bureau received the following report from Berlin:

"In connection with Slovakia's decision to place herself under Germany's protection, well-informed political circles point out that, although no definite steps have been taken in this respect yet, it is very probable that Slovakia's relations with the German Reich will be of an entirely different nature from those of Bohemia and Moravia. Namely, whereas the two Czech provinces have become part of the Reich, Slovakia will retain her independence, and will merely enter into a military, customs, and financial union with Germany. This signifies a common customs frontier, a common monetary system, and close military co-operation under the direction of a joint military staff. Slovakia will be ruled by a Slovak President; legislative powers are to be exercised by the Slovak Diet, and the executive power will be in the hands of the Slovak Government. The foreign affairs of the country will be attended to by an independent Foreign Minister, and Slovakia will have her own diplomatic representatives in other countries."

On 17th March General Göring made a statement to Mr. Ward Price, the editor of the Daily Mail, in which he stressed the point that Slovakia, although a German Protectorate, would remain outside the framework of the German Reich, and would be a completely independent State; no German garrisons were to be established in the country unless the Slovak Government asked for them.

According to the "Uj Hírek" (Pozsony) of 19th March, Mgr. Tiso, accompanied by M. Mach, Propaganda Minister, and M. Durchansky, left on 17th March for Vienna, where he entered into negotiations with German official circles, the upshot of which was that it was decided to set forth in the form of a declaration Slovakia's relations with Germany, which, although they were to be very close, would in no way affect the independence of the Slovak State. The report stated that agreements of an economic,

financial and military nature were to be expected as a result of the Vienna pourparlers.

On 23rd March Professor Tuka and M. Durchansky, Slovak Ministers, arrived in Vienna along with several economic experts to discuss economic questions. When this discussion was over, they left the same afternoon by aeroplane for Berlin to continue negotiations there. These negotiations were concluded that day, upon which Mgr. Tiso immediately flew to Berlin to sign the agreement. The text thereof runs as follows:

"Article 1. The German Reich undertakes to protect the political independence and territorial inviolability of the Slovak State.

"Article 2. In order to ensure the protection of Slovakia as undertaken by the German Reich, the German army shall always have the right to establish military bases in the zone encompassed by the western frontiers of the Slovak State, the eastern ridge of the Little Carpathians, the eastern ridge of the White Carpathians and the eastern ridge of the Javornik mountain range, and to occupy those regions with such military forces as Germany considers necessary. It devolves upon the Slovak Government to acquire and provide the areas required for these military bases. The Slovak Government also agrees to such measures as are necessary to ensure that commissariat supplies for the German troops in Slovakia shall be free of customs duty and that no duties shall be imposed on the materials to be sent from Germany to the German military bases in Slovakia. In the above-mentioned zone, the German army shall exercise supreme military authority. All subjects of the German Reich who, under contracts of a nature pertaining to the sphere of civil law, are engaged in the work of establishing military bases in the above mentioned zone shall be under the jurisdiction of the German courts of law.

"Article 3. The Slovak Government shall organize its own defence army in close co-operation with the German army.

"Article 4. In keeping with the military relations as stated above, the Slovak Government shall always shape its foreign policy in close co-operation with the Government of the Germany Reich.

"Article 5. This treaty comes into operation on the date of signature and is valid for 25 years. Before the lapse of that term the two Governments shall approach each other in good time with a view to prolonging this treaty."

The treaty was signed on behalf of Germany by Herr von Ribbentrop, and by Mgr. Tiso, Professor Tuka and M. Durchansky on behalf of Slovakia.

The nature of the military agreement concluded between Germany and Slovakia is clearly set forth in the foreign treaty, but public opinion knows nothing of the details of the economic

agreement beyond what Mr. Mach broadcast from the Pozsony wireless station on 23rd March. According to the "Slovak" of the 25th, M. Mach's broadcast on the economic treaty stated that in future Slovakia was to be an independent customs unit and would not enter into a customs union with any other State. Slovakia's political frontier as established by the Vienna Award would also constitute her customs frontier. In order, however, to ensure economic uniformity between the various parts of the former Czecho-Slovak Republic, the treaty stipulated that for the time being no customs duties were to be imposed on goods passing between Slovakia on the one hand and Czecho-Moravia and Sudetenland on the other. At the same time it was agreed that export and import permits were to be required for goods passing between Slovakia, Czecho-Moravia and Sudetenland, and, although no customs duties were to be imposed, they would be subjected to a customs examination. The "Slovak" report also announced that a separate clearing agreement would regulate payments between Slovakia, Czecho-Moravia and Sudetenland as well as between Slovakia and Germany, the difference to be paid in marks. The ratio of Slovak crowns to German marks was to be $100 = 8.60$. Mr. Mach also explained how exporters and importers were to effect their payments and how they would receive payments in their own countries.

According to the "Slovak" of 31st March, the "Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung" reported from Vienna that the delegates of the German National Bank discussed the establishment of a Slovak National Bank with Slovak economists. They also discussed the new Slovak monetary unit and its ratio to the German mark and the Czech crown. It was agreed that German advisers would collaborate in the management of the new Slovak National Bank as a permanent department thereof. It was also agreed that regular customs duties would be paid on the goods imported from the Czecho-Moravian Protectorate and Slovakia by the Sudeten German districts, if these commodities were consumed in the Sudeten areas. This report would appear to imply an amendment of the customs treaty as explained by M. Mach. No duties, however, are to be paid on such agricultural products as are exempted from customs duties by the German Minister of the Public Commissariat.

All this permits of the conclusion that although Slovakia's political status is essentially different from that of the Czecho-Moravian Protectorate, her links with Germany in the fields of military and foreign affairs, finance and customs policy are nevertheless very close.

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