At the beginning of the 20th century, the Slovak people, without political or economic power, faced the prospect of national extinction. Yet within two decades, they won liberation from the Hungarian Kingdom and participation in the new state of Czechoslovakia. This was the result, in part, of the efforts of a small activist group of leaders. Particularly productive and energetic were Milan Hodža (1878—1944) and Anton Štefánek (1877—1964).

Their collaborative activities were especially prominent in the areas of journalism and agrarian organization. Members of a new generation, they were realists and recognized the Slovak national movement had to establish a popular base, to politicize the people. Their journalistic enterprises, particularly Slovenský Týždenník and Slovenský Denník, were specifically aimed at the agrarian masses. Their commitment to this goal, often at great personal expense and travail, was a key factor in the politicization of the people. They were also actively involved in agrarian development and laid the foundations for agrarian democracy, later of prime importance in Czechoslovakia.

Through their joint goals, activities, and problems they became close friends, but they reflected certain philosophical differences. Hodža was a pragmatist, always aware of the factor of power, shifting tactics and means as opportunity arose. Štefánek was philosophically and strategically more consistent. Thus at the outbreak of World War I Hodža had to move from his policy of alliance with Francis Ferdinand to Czech-Slovak cooperation, to which Štefánek had been committed throughout their association. Their activities converged by 1917, and aided the incorporation of the Slovaks into Czechoslovakia.

ANTON ŠTEFÁNEK AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA

Owen V. Johnson

There is no question that in 1918, the Slovak people suffered from serious educational poverty, though dire predictions about their fate were exaggerated. After the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic, it fell to Anton Štefánek, a 41-year old journalist and future sociologist, the task of establishing an educational system in Slovakia. As Referent for Education in the government of the Minister Plenipotentiary for Slovakia, Štefánek devoted the bulk of his efforts to the development of secondary education, for it was from these schools that the intelligentsia, crucial to the continued existence of a nation, would emerge.

This article describes in detail how he did so. As the major criterion for deciding the fate of each institution, he followed "the democratic principle of religious and racial equality before the law." In practice, it meant reclaiming the
cities for the Slovaks. In a little over three years, 9427 students were attending 37 Slovak gymnasia and 14 teacher training institutes. It is in this connection that Štefánik’s work in Slovakia must be praised. For it was he who created the educational system without which the new Czechoslovak state could not have been successful.

THE CZECH GOVERNMENT’S ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST „MACHTERGREIFUNG“ IN 1933

Thomas Storch

Little attention has heretofore been paid to the question whether the political leadership of Czechoslovakia recognized the National Socialist danger in time and what priority was given in 1933 to staving off the German danger, as compared with other threats. Up to 1933 the Czechoslovak government saw the main danger to its country in the revisionist policy of Hungary which Italy supported, and in a possible restoration of the Hapsburg monarchy. A threat from National Socialist Germany first seems to have been perceived only in April 1933. The underestimation of this danger was evident in the attitude of the Czechoslovak government to the Four-Power Pact, to a new economic order in East-Central Europe, and to supporting Austria against Hitler’s Germany. It can be demonstrated that Beneš had farsighted views of National Socialist foreign policy in the fall of 1933, but they did not issue in any change of priorities in Prague’s security policies. Differences with Italy over the problems of East-Central Europe prevented any cooperation against the Reich. The ČSR persisted in seeing Austrian Anschluss with National Socialist Germany as a lesser evil than an Austrian monarchy under the Hapsburgs. This can be explained by the fact that the Prague leadership believed there was a considerable degree of continuity between the foreign policy goals of the Third Reich and those of the Weimar Republic.

AMERICAN AND VATICAN REACTIONS TO THE TISO TRIAL

Walter Ullmann

The trial and ensuing death sentence pronounced against Dr. Jozef Tiso, president of the Slovak state during the Second World War, attracted great attention in the USA. Americans of Slovak origin in particular worked energetically for an intervention by the US government to prevent the sentence from being carried out.

The State Department, however, rejected any intervention, as did the Vatican, which saw Tiso primarily as an ex-ally of the Third Reich — a view for which Tiso’s activity during his time in power had provided enough concrete justification.