

## AMERICAN AND VATICAN REACTIONS TO THE TISO TRIAL

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The trial and subsequent execution of Mgr. Jozef Tiso, one-time president of Slovakia, caused considerable commotion in certain American circles. In particular, it affected the sentiments of some Americans of Slovak origin who, for the most part, viewed the sentence as unjust and considered the execution of a Catholic prelate a simple act of revenge by an atheist, Communist-dominated government.

The following is an attempt to trace briefly the events leading up to Tiso's trial and to examine American reactions to them, both in official circles and among spokesmen of various Slovak-American organizations in the United States, as well as their American sponsors.

As will be seen, the official American position differed sharply from the position of most of the various individuals and groups which sponsored Tiso's cause in the United States. Washington's refusal to intervene in Prague on behalf of the accused lends itself to the potential charge that responsible U. S. officials were both influenced and misinformed by Prague and its Washington embassy and that the true nature of Tiso and his independent administration during World War II had been obscured. While it is certainly correct to say that the Czechoslovak Embassy in Washington and, for that matter, the Prague government presented their case as they saw it, there is no evidence that American unwillingness to come to Tiso's aid was motivated by the official Czechoslovak position. Rather, the extant documentation suggests that Washington steered an independent course and did not permit itself to be influenced by either Communist exaggerations or exiled pro-Tiso elements. Abiding by the decisions reached by the Big Three on matters concerning War Criminals and relying primarily on the intelligence provided by its own embassy in Prague, the United States government remained aloof.

Similarly, the Holy See, which can hardly be accused of having fallen under Communist influence, abstained from any kind of direct or even indirect influence in Tiso's trial. While undoubtedly aggrieved over the trial and subsequent execution of a Catholic priest, it took great care not to permit the Tiso trial to spill over into a political issue of international dimensions. On the contrary, explicit Vatican documentation points to the difference between the trial of the Croat Archbishop Alojz Stepinac, whom the Holy See viewed as a persecuted spiritual leader, and Mgr. Jozef Tiso, President of war time Slovakia, who entered politics on his own accord against the express wishes of the Vatican. Hence, when Congressman Alvin E. O'Konski of Wisconsin, one of Tiso's staunchest American defenders, compared Tiso's martyrdom to that of Stepinac<sup>1</sup>, he was simply being more Catholic than the Pope.

<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 307.

On Easter Sunday, 1945, Tiso and members of his government crossed the Slovak border into Austria to seek refuge with the American troops who had just liberated the better part of that country<sup>2</sup>. The refugees were afraid of falling into the hands of the advancing Soviet army, now rapidly approaching the Slovak capital of Bratislava. Tiso and his group had no illusions about the fate that would befall them should they be taken captive by the Soviets. On the other hand, they thought they had reason to believe that, apart from decidedly more humane treatment, their chances of obtaining a fair trial for their activities during World War II would be considerably greater if it were conducted under the aegis of one of the Western victors.

Although it may not be altogether possible to avoid comment on the acts of Tiso and his government during the years from 1939 to 1945, this is certainly not the main purpose of this study. Both his defenders and his detractors have amassed ample commentary on these issues over the thirty years since Tiso's trial and execution<sup>3</sup>. What I wish to do here is simply to make a critique and evaluation of the American and Vatican positions in this matter. Both the Prague Embassy and the Department of State, as well as a number of members of Congress, were involved. The Embassy, by the very nature of its functions, reported extensively on the events preceding Tiso's trial and on the reactions to it in Slovakia and the rest of the country. While reports, stemming from Ambassador Laurence A. Steinhardt and his Prague staff had, on some previous occasions, proved to be superficial or even patently false, as was the case in Steinhardt's prognosis of the outcome of the 1946 elections, the U. S. Department of State had other sources of information at its disposal. Among others, it received numerous petitions on Tiso's behalf from Slovak exiles, some of them former members of Tiso's government who had succeeded in escaping from Slovakia. On the other hand, and representing the Czechoslovak side, the Department had to deal with the various protests and inquiries concerning the whereabouts of the fugitives addressed to it by the Czechoslovak government and its embassy in Washington. Finally, Congressmen from constituencies with considerable Slovak ethnic background were literally

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<sup>2</sup> The text of the document of surrender to the United States Armed Forces by Tiso and members of his government may be found in Kirschbaum, Jozef M.: *Slovakia: Nation at the Crossroads of Central Europe*. New York 1960, pp. 295—296. Interestingly enough, American sources did not consider Tiso's surrender to them as an arrangement mutually agreed upon by both parties. In a communication from Francis Williamson, Chief of the State Department's Central Europe desk, to John Hickerson, Acting Director, Office of European Affairs, the former merely refers to „the arrest of Dr. Tiso by the United States military authorities . . .“. See Williamson to Hickerson, March 24, 1947, File 860 F.00/3—2447, National Archives, Diplomatic Correspondence, Czechoslovakia, Record Group 59.

<sup>3</sup> Kirschbaum: *Slovakia* gives a version sympathetic to Tiso. Lettrich, Jozef: *History of Modern Slovakia*. New York 1955 takes the opposite point of view. Kirschbaum was a ranking official in Tiso's World War II administration; Lettrich was prominent in Slovakia's post-World War II government. The 1972 and 1975 issues of *Slovakia*. An annual pro-Tiso publication of the Slovak League of America. Middletown/Penna., present a whole series of articles, of vastly differing quality, on the various aspects of Tiso and his government.

bombarded with petitions from a whole galaxy of Slovak-American organizations, most of which were highly sympathetic to Tiso, and requests for United States diplomatic intervention on his behalf.

As early as June, 1945, Vladimír Hurban, the Czechoslovak Ambassador in Washington, asked the United States government to hand over to Czechoslovak authorities Jozef Tiso and some half a dozen members of his former government. Prague informed Washington that Tiso and the others were „indicted for criminal offenses against Czechoslovakia, ranging from high treason, treason-felony, and kindred offenses — which they perpetrated in their office or for the benefit of Germany — to participation, in varying degrees, in a number of criminal offenses against public order, person, and private and public property, committed prior to and during the existence of the Bratislava regime“<sup>4</sup>. Acting Secretary of State Joseph Grew replied that the request had been forwarded to Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces and that British concurrence in the release of the Slovaks under indictment had been asked simultaneously<sup>5</sup>.

It would appear that the British took a more legalistic view of the whole matter, or so at least it would seem from a directive sent by Secretary Acheson to the United States Ambassador in London. To be sure, contrary to the United States, the British government, in 1939, did indeed extend *de facto* recognition to the then Slovak Republic and, for the next two years, entertained consular relations with Bratislava. It may well be then that, in view of this, London's approach to the handing over of Tiso and his government to Czechoslovakia was influenced by these past relations. To ascertain the current British position in the whole matter, Acheson instructed the United States Ambassador in London to inform the British Foreign Office that „unless FonOff [sic] has urgent reasons for opposing delivery of Slovaks . . . [the U. S. State] Dept. shortly will request U. S. military authorities to release them to authorized Zecho [sic] [Czechoslovak] officials.“ The State Department, however, did not envisage following such a course in the case of „any members of the former Slovak State apprehended in the future“ but saw „no objection to the release of Slovaks specifically requested by the Zecho [sic] Govt“<sup>6</sup>. An urgent telegraphic request from the United States Embassy in Prague that „any further delay in delivery of the Slovaks [to Czechoslovak authorities], particularly since the prompt delivery of Laval to the French government“ would be „difficult to explain to the Zecho [Czechoslovak] Government“, must have spurred the State Department further still<sup>7</sup>. With no objection from London, the United States government now proceeded with the necessary steps towards the handing over of Tiso and his party to Czechoslovak authorities. Considering the American position on Slovak traitors to be in harmony with the „Directives on United Nations Renegades and Quislings“ previously agreed upon jointly with the British, Acheson subsequently informed Winant that the United

<sup>4</sup> Hurban to Grew, June 18, 1945. Foreign Relations of the United States (1945), IV, 525—526.

<sup>5</sup> Grew to Hurban, July 2, 1945, *ibidem* 526—527.

<sup>6</sup> Acheson to Winant, September 11, 1945, *ibidem* 527—528.

<sup>7</sup> Steinhardt to Secretary of State, September 3, 1945, File 860 F.00/9—345, National Archives, Diplomatic Correspondence, Czechoslovakia, Record Group 59.



States Political Adviser in Germany had been instructed to request from the appropriate military authorities the release of the Slovak officials to Czechoslovakia, as originally requested by Hurban on June eighteenth<sup>8</sup>.

On November 1, Ambassador Steinhardt informed the State Department about the prominent treatment given in the Czechoslovak press to the handing over of Tiso and the other members of the former Slovak government<sup>9</sup>. Immediately after their arrival in Prague, the prisoners were transferred to Bratislava, and for the next year both Slovak Communists and Democrats exploited the forthcoming trial for their own propaganda purposes. The Communists were insisting on death sentences for Tiso and the other chief offenders, as well as an early trial before the elections of May, 1946. By such actions, they hoped to discredit Catholicism and to weaken the traditional influence of the Catholic clergy over the Slovak electorate. The Slovak Democrats, on the other hand, were fearful that exposure of the wartime activities of the former president, who was also a Catholic priest, would seriously harm their own objectives in the forthcoming election. At this time, however, they may not have been all that concerned about the occasional instances of collaboration of some of their members with the Tiso regime, although this issue was later to cause them much embarrassment and to force the resignation from the Slovak regional government (*Sbor povereníkov*) of some of the ranking Slovak Democrats. On the contrary, since the Communists were in the habit of accusing almost everyone who differed with them of some sort of disloyalty, the frequent Communist charges that the Slovak Democratic Party, as a result of the so-called „April Agreement“<sup>10</sup> with the Slovak Catholic Episcopate, had compromised itself with one-time Tiso followers, did not seem to carry that much weight. At any rate, the tactic obviously backfired on its propagators, as is best evidenced by the election results of May, 1946, when the Democratic Party trounced the Slovak Communists by a spectacular margin of two to one. So much, then, for the purely political implications of the trial.

Apart from these political considerations, the trial had its judicial and psychological aspects. To the Communists, Tiso's guilt was a simple matter: the evils committed during the six years of his presidency rested most heavily on him, as head of the former Slovak State. The Democrats, however, took a more complex but less punitive view. They recognized that Tiso was guilty, but they argued that he had been a member of the moderate faction of the one-time Slovak government; they saw in this sufficiently extenuating circumstances to spare his life. Furthermore, they contended that Tiso's death would provide the Slovak separatist cause with a martyr and would severely strain the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks.

<sup>8</sup> Acheson to Winant, October 4, 1945, Foreign Relations of the United States (1945), IV, 529—530.

<sup>9</sup> Steinhardt to Secretary of State, November 1, 1945, File 860 F.00/11—145, National Archives, Diplomatic Correspondence, Czechoslovakia, Record Group 59.

<sup>10</sup> On the agreement concluded March 30, 1946, between the Slovak Democrats with former followers of the Tiso regime and other Slovak Catholic elements, see Prečan, Vilém: Slovenský katolicizmus pred februárom 1948. Bratislava 1961, pp. 242—247.

Under these conditions, preparations for the trial took over a year, so that it did not begin until December, 1946. During the preparatory period, and even more so during the months of the trial itself, Tiso's supporters made numerous attempts to have the United States government intervene in the proceedings to spare his life. Typical of such interventions was a communication from Congressman Chauncey W. Reed (Illinois) to Secretary of State Byrnes. Reed expressed concern over Tiso's fate and feared that he might be executed. He asked Byrnes whether Washington might be able to do something in the matter<sup>11</sup>. Byrnes' reply was swift and to the point. He explained that it was United States policy to adhere to the appropriate United Nations resolutions in all matters concerning war criminals. He then told Reed about the wartime activities of Tiso, presumably on the assumption that the Congressman was unaware of the wartime role of the man on whose behalf he had been asked to intercede by some of his constituents. In a terse concluding statement, Byrnes simply stated that the United States „did what it had to do“ and that „the United States government therefore [was] unable to take further action in this matter“<sup>12</sup>.

Reed's letter was but one of the many which members of Congress, on occasional Catholic bishop, and various Slovak fraternal organizations in the United States addressed to the Secretary of State, assorted other officials in the State Department and, on occasion, President Truman himself. It is difficult to ascertain whether the various pleas on Tiso's behalf were motivated by an honest belief that an injustice was being perpetrated by the Prague government or whether they were primarily acts of compassion requesting clemency on Christian grounds. As far as can be judged today, some thirty years after the actual events, it would appear from the overall textual quality of the petitions that not all their signatories were fully aware of the portents of the documents they signed. Mostly working people of Slovak origin, it is likely that in signing they had followed the advice of their parish priests and other local leaders, a custom not uncommon among various ethnic groups in the United States who had been politicized by an ambitious leadership. There were, to be sure, occasional exceptions to the pro-Tiso trend among American-Slovak communities. Thus, the Slovak Workers' Society of Cleveland, under the signature of its president, Andrew Burin, and secretary Jerry Marsik, both of whom were visibly angered by two „memoirs“ of the „so-called ‚Slovak National Council‘ of London“, signed by Peter Pridavok and addressed to the United States Ambassador in London, protested to the Department of State; the Society claimed that the publication of these „memoirs“ in the American Slovak newspaper *Jednota* (Middletown, Penna.) merely represented the feelings of „a handful of discontented Slovaks who call themselves the ‚Slovak National Council‘ [and] have been and are the apologists for the former Tiso puppet regime of Slovakia“<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Reed to Byrnes, December 23, 1946, File 860 F. 00/12—2346, National Archives, Diplomatic Correspondence, Czechoslovakia, Record Group 59.

<sup>12</sup> Byrnes to Reed, December 31, 1946, File 860 F. 00/12—3146, *ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Crosser, member of Congress, to Secretary of State, October 16, 1945, File 860 F. 00/10—1645, *ibidem*. Congressman Crosser forwarded the letter of the Slovak Workers' Society.

Form available records, however, it would appear that the Slovak Workers' Society, rather than the numerous pro-Tiso fraternal organizations, spoke for the minority. Irrespective of its quality, the available evidence suggests quite clearly that pro-Tiso sentiment among American Slovaks was strong. Nor need we question the ability of its leadership in impressing its point of view upon the elected representatives of the United States government. Prodded by various organizations, a number of Congressmen transmitted to Washington letters of support for Tiso from their constituents and, on occasion, added support of their own<sup>14</sup>. While the Congressmen's knowledge of the actual state of affairs surrounding the Tiso trial did not always bespeak any particular insight into world politics or even the cause they championed, and while a simple cover letter obviously did not necessarily indicate the transmitter's own point of view, it is quite evident from the correspondence of the members of Congress that they espoused the cause which they were asked to plead.

The typical petition on Tiso's behalf presented the rather simplified picture of a persecuted man and a Slovak State which, under Tiso's leadership, was a staunch bulwark against Bolshevism rather than an ally of Nazi Germany. Additionally, the simple fact that the accused was a prelate of their church must have strengthened the petitioners' belief in his innocence. Since few of the actual petitioners had had occasion to live in Slovakia during the six years of its independence, their image of the „old country“ was obviously not an accurate one. Equally nebulous must have been the visions entertained by some of their congressional sponsors. Thus, B. W. Kearney, representing the 31st Congressional district of New York, in a cover letter for one of his constituents, referred to the pending trial of Mgr. Tiso „to be held in Slovakia or that part of the country known as Bohemia“. One can only hope that Kearney's familiarity with the intrinsic part of the Tiso trial exceeded his geographical knowledge of the part of the world where it was to be held and where many of his constituents came from<sup>15</sup>.

Not infrequently, Congressmen added their own pleas to those of their constituents. For example, Roay J. Madden of Indiana and Alvin E. O'Konski of Wisconsin wholeheartedly supported Tiso's cause. Madden stressed the fact that „over 80 percent of the Slovak-American fraternal organizations have forthrightly declared themselves to be of the opinion that Tiso was a hero in the defense of the best interests of the Slovak people“. He cited Slovakia's progress during the years of its independence and compared it favorably with any similar period of its existence under Czechoslovakia<sup>16</sup>. While Madden's contention about pro-

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<sup>14</sup> Congressmen Kearney (N. Y.), Philbin (Mass.), Huber (Ill.), Kelley (Penna.), and Muhlenberg (Penna.), as well as Bishops Griffin (Trenton, N. J.) and Toolen (Mobile, Ala.) had interceded in Tiso's behalf. See their various communications to the United States government for the period from June, 1946, until about April, 1947, in File 860 F. 00, *ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> Kearney to Department of State, November 18, 1946, File 860 F. 00/11—1846, *ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> U. S., Congress, House of Representatives, 80th Congress, 1st session, March 31, 1947, Congressional Record, 93, part 3, 2928—29.



Tiso sympathies may well have been statistically correct, it cannot be assumed that all the American-Slovak signatories of the various petitions on his behalf were sufficiently informed about the whole issue to enable them to make a dispassionate decision in a question which, for obvious reasons, was of an emotional nature. Where knowledge of Tiso's wartime activities was lacking, such lacunae were readily remedied by pious exhortations by clerical leaders who pointed to Tiso's stand against Bolshevism. It was obviously not in the best interest of the petitioners similarly to belabor Tiso's Christian stand against Nazism. While it is understandable that the pro-Tiso leaders among American Slovaks were conspicuously silent about this aspect of Tiso's political activities, Madden's silence about it was bound to make his listeners question his own impartiality in the matter. Even worse, it must have made them question his actual knowledge of the complex subject to which he addressed himself. Similarly, Madden's second contention about Slovakia's progress during the years of independence is at least open to question. Present-day students of the brief history of the Slovak State see in this so-called progress little more than a systematic economic exploitation of Slovakia by Nazi Germany<sup>17</sup>. What material progress Slovakia experienced during the years of its independence was usually brought about by Germany, and, one hardly need add, conceived of and initiated primarily in the interest of the German military and its war effort rather than for the benefit of the Slovaks. For that matter, the build-up of Slovakia and the rapid industrialization of the country have grown even more rapidly since 1945, and surely neither Madden nor his Slovak constituents would take pride in an achievement brought about by Communism. Slovak growth during World War II, whether or not actually exceeding similar development in any comparable period under Czechoslovak rule, was largely artificial and brought about by outsiders, rather than an intrinsic achievement of the Tiso regime.

While some of Madden's facts might have been incorrect and he himself insufficiently informed about the cause to which he lent his name, Congressman Alvin O'Konski's impassioned exhortations border on the ludicrous. Comparing „the brave and gallant Monsignor Joseph Tiso to the immortal General Mihailovitch and the immortal Archbishop Stepinac“, he accused the Czechoslovak Communists of murdering Tiso on the basis of „trumped-up charges“. What seemed to bother the Wisconsin Congressman even more than the actual execution of Tiso was the failure of any United States government agency to protest it „just for the record“<sup>18</sup>.

Official Washington did not see in its refusal to intercede for the accused Tiso a threat to its honor and, Madden's and O'Konski's pleas notwithstanding, refused to interfere with what was considered a domestic affair of Czechoslovakia.

<sup>17</sup> On the matter of German economic exploitation of Slovakia during these years, see Hoensch, Joerg K.: *The Slovak Republic, 1939—1945*. In: V. Mamaty and R. Luža: *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918—1948*. Princeton/N. J. 1973, pp. 271 ff.

<sup>18</sup> U. S., Congress, House of Representatives, 80th Congress, 1st session, April 23, 1947, Appendix to Congressional Record, 93, part 11, A 1872.

Similar appeals, addressed directly to various United States government agencies by American-Slovak fraternal organizations, fell on equally deaf ears<sup>19</sup>. If the Department of State or any of its officials responded at all, the replies were usually limited to some factual explanations about the wartime activities of Monsignor Tiso and his government. It was, after all, for that and not for his Christian stand against Bolshevism that he was being judged. Thus, Francis Williamson, the Chief of the State Department's Central Europe desk, informed William D. Hassett, President Truman's secretary, of the true nature and character of Tiso's government; in so doing, he conveyed a more accurate picture to the President than those who now championed the cause of Tiso and an independent Slovakia. Williamson used the occasion to reply to a memorandum forwarded by Hassett with an attached request from Congressman Matthew Connolly. The Congressman had appealed to Truman on Tiso's behalf, and now Hassett was seeking more information before answering Connolly's letter. Williamson supplied such information, mincing no words in his characterization of some of the Slovak petitioners. He observed that some of the champions of Tiso's cause were „war criminals“ convicted by Slovak courts: „The Department [did] not consider it appropriate at present to reply to letters from the Slovak Action Committee, whether signed by [Ferdinand] D'určanský or not<sup>20</sup>.“

Such a categorical reply from high American government officials must have been extremely disappointing to the petitioning Slovaks and their American sponsors. Lest they should think, as some of them did, that official Prague and its Washington Embassy had successfully conditioned American thinking in the Tiso case, they must have been doubly disenchanted to see a similar lack of sympathy for the cause of the accused Slovak President from the Holy See. Although Tiso was a Catholic prelate, the Vatican made no diplomatic efforts on his behalf. Nor did papal diplomacy exert itself in the cause of an independent Slovakia. From its very beginning, in 1939, the Slovak State and its first president, Mgr. Tiso, had been viewed by the Vatican with mixed emotions. Although the Holy See established diplomatic relations with Slovakia, it expressed reservations about the acceptance of high political office by a cleric. During the war years, Tiso's reputation was tarnished by reports from the papal Chargé d'affaires in Bratislava, Mgr. Giuseppe Burzio, which accused the President of being weak and failing to stem the radical faction in his own government<sup>21</sup>. Although Burzio was aware of the various internal and external pressures to which Tiso had been subjected,

<sup>19</sup> Rev. Florian Billy, „Supreme Secretary“ of the Slovak Catholic Federation in the U.S., was one of the most ardent defenders of Tiso and his cause.

<sup>20</sup> Williamson to Hassett, March 31, 1947, File 860 F. 00/3—3147, National Archives, Diplomatic Correspondence, Czechoslovakia, Record Group 59. Ferdinand D'určanský was the prime mover of most of the petitions. He was Slovakia's first Minister of Foreign Affairs and was one of those on the „war criminals“ list, although he managed to escape from Allied custody.

<sup>21</sup> Burzio to Maglione [Vatican Secretary of State], September 18, 1941, *Le Saint Siège et les victimes de la guerre, Janvier 1941—Décembre 1942*, Vol. 8 of *Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la seconde guerre mondiale* (9 vols. to date; Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), pp. 279—280.



in particular with respect to the promulgation of the Slovak „Jewish code“<sup>22</sup>, the Chargé's reports from the Slovak capital provoked an uncomplimentary and merciless response from the Vatican Assistant Secretary of State, Mgr. Domenico Tardini. Instructing Burzio to intercede directly with Tiso on behalf of the persecuted Jews, he called the Slovak leaders, Prime Minister Tuka and President Tiso, „lunatics“. He concluded that they were „two madmen... Tuka who acts and Tiso — the priest — who permits such action“<sup>23</sup>.

Shortly after, Tiso once again became the object of the Vatican's displeasure. On this particular occasion, Tardini called in the Slovak Minister to the Holy See, Karol Sidor, to verify reports according to which Tiso, in a recent speech, had equated Catholic social doctrine with the social teachings of Nazism. Sidor, who himself handed Tardini a text of the speech, expressed his astonishment as to „how Mons. Tiso — a professor of theology — could say such things which make people believe an untruth“<sup>24</sup>. When Cardinal Montini, Assistant to the Vatican Secretary of State, read the memorandum of the conversation between Tardini and Sidor, he added indignantly that if Tiso had indeed made the remarks attributed to him, he Holy Father might consider striking Tiso's name from the list of prelates<sup>25</sup>. Although Tiso subsequently explained to Chargé Burzio that he had been misquoted, Rome, while abstaining from stripping him of his title of Monsignor, was obviously displeased<sup>26</sup>.

Even after the conclusion of the war, the Vatican's position did not significantly change. While undoubtedly regretting the arrest of a Catholic prelate, the Holy See made no diplomatic efforts on his behalf. In November, 1945, only weeks after the handing over of Tiso to the Czechoslovak government, Harold H. Tittman, the Representative of the United States President to the Holy See, quoted

<sup>22</sup> Burzio to Maglione. For a full discussion of the Jewish question in Slovakia during World War II, see Jelinek, Y.: *The Vatican, the Catholic Church, the Catholics and the Persecution of the Jews during World War II*. In: *Jews and Non-Jews in Eastern Europe*. Ed. B. Vago and G. L. Mosse. Toronto 1974, pp. 221—255.

<sup>23</sup> Tardini's postscript to a communication from Burzio to Maglione, March 25, 1942, *ibidem* 478—479.

<sup>24</sup> Notes of Mgr. Tardini, October 21 and 23, 1941, *Le Saint Siège et la guerre mondiale*, Juillet 1941—Octobre 1942, Vol. 5 of *Actes et Documents*, pp. 273—274.

<sup>25</sup> Addendum of Montini, October 23, 1941, *ibidem* 274. Of special interest here is a footnote in the text, according to which Tiso „had been named a secret superannuary [papal] chamberlain on November 21, 1921 and appeared under this title in the *Annuario Pontificio* of 1922 (p. 608). The title had to be renewed with each new pontificate. Neither Pius XI nor Pius XII had confirmed him, and his name no longer appeared in the *Annuario*, but the practice of giving him the title of Monsignor was continued. Monsignor Tardini had mentioned this to the Pope (A. E. S. 477/43).“.

<sup>26</sup> According to Karol Sidor, one-time Slovak Minister to the Holy See, Tiso did not seek renewal of his title of Monsignor with the new Pope, Pius XII. Hence, since „Monsignors die with the Pope who had nominated them“, Tiso's title expired with the death of Pius XI. Since neither Tiso himself nor the Slovak bishop who, at the time, was Tiso's superior, asked for re-confirmation, his one-time title did indeed expire. Consequently, there would have been no need and no occasion for the new Pope to strike Tiso's name from the list of prelates. For details, see Sidor, Karol: *Šest rokov pri Vatikáne*. Scranton/Penna. 1947, pp. 59—60.

Monsignor Tardini and reported that „the Vatican had little sympathy for him [Tiso] since he had accepted [the] presidency without consulting [the] Holy See and had carried out Nazi orders [of] Jewish persecution against Vatican's 'vehement protests'“. Tittman further wrote that the Vatican's only interest in the Tiso case was that he should obtain a fair trial which Tardini thought might be difficult, considering the national hatred involved<sup>27</sup>. In April, 1947, a mere two weeks before Tiso's execution, Ambassador Steinhardt had the following to say on the matter. The Prague archbishop, Josef Beran, and a ranking Slovak cleric, Mgr. Laznik, had recently returned from Rome with the news that „the Vatican is not backing Tiso“ and that „Tiso assumed the [Slovak] presidency against the advice of the Vatican“. As if this piece of news were not damaging enough to Tiso's cause, instructions from Rome to Czech and Slovak Catholics „to cooperate with the [Prague] government“ all but killed any anticipated help from papal quarters. To justify itself against any future possible charges that the Holy See had abandoned one of its own, „a martyr for the faith“, as Tiso was so frequently called by his supporters, the Vatican made clear the basic difference between Tiso and the persecuted Croat Archbishop Stepinac: „The latter was a spiritual leader, whereas, Tiso, as President of [the] Slovak State, had actively entered political life<sup>28</sup>.“ As late as December, 1947, in a routine report from the Vatican, J. Graham Parsons, Assistant to the Personal Representative of the President of the United States to Pope Pius XII. transmitted the following opinion of Monsignor Domenico Tardini, Vatican Under-Secretary of State; according to Tardini, „in Monsignor Tiso's [sic] time the situation was unsatisfactory to the Vatican and as often was the case with political prelates, he paid no attention to suggestions and thoughts expressed from Rome“<sup>29</sup>.

The respective positions of Washington and Rome to refuse to come to the aid of the accused Tiso was further supported by a dispatch from John Bruins, Counselor of the United States Embassy in Prague, and, in Steinhardt's absence, Chargé d'affaires. In a communication to Washington during mid-February, Bruins told the Secretary of State rather bluntly that he [Bruins] „had no doubt whatsoever that Tiso [was] guilty<sup>30</sup>. Although it is not likely that D'určanský or any other of Tiso's defenders were familiar with the unsympathetic position taken by Washington, Rome, or the Prague Embassy, the official postures of these three places clearly underscored two important facts. Since no one, at that time, was likely to accuse either Washington or the Vatican of pro-Communist sympathies, one is bound to conclude that Tiso's conduct during his tenure of office was reprehensible not only by Communist standards of justice, but by the standards of democratic governments as well. Moreover, and just as significantly, the political orien-

<sup>27</sup> Tittman to Secretary of State, November 11, 1945, File 860 F.00/11—345, National Archives, Diplomatic Correspondence, Czechoslovakia, Record Group 59.

<sup>28</sup> Steinhardt to Secretary of State, April 2, 1947, File 860 F.00/4—247, *ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> Memorandum of a conversation between Parsons and Tardini, December 10, 1947, enclosed in Parsons to Secretary of State, December 10, 1947, File 860 F.00/12—1047, *ibidem*.

<sup>30</sup> Bruins to Secretary of State, February 13, 1947, File 860 F.00/2—1347, *ibidem*.

tation of many of Tiso's defenders was clearly demonstrated: having themselves turned their backs on the democratic process, they now tried to invoke that same process to save the skin of their one-time leader.

On April 15th the verdicts on the former Slovak President and his Foreign Minister were pronounced. Both Tiso and D'určanský were found guilty and sentenced to hang, the latter *in absentia*. The third accused, one-time Minister of the Interior Šaňo Mach, was hospitalized at the time of the trial and his case was deferred to a later date. On May 15, 1947, he was sentenced to thirty years imprisonment, only to be released by the Dubček government in May of 1968. As far as can be ascertained, he is free to this day.

Four weeks before the announcement of the sentences, Washington had requested its Prague Embassy to comment on the fairness of the judicial proceedings<sup>31</sup>. The Embassy replied that the „Tiso trial, which recently ended, was conducted in a fair and orderly manner“. It further reported that „public attitudes in Slovakia have hardened somewhat against Tiso, mainly as a result of [the] introduction into evidence of a Vatican letter which stated [that the] ,Vatican considers Tiso a Hitlerian“<sup>32</sup>. The Department of State seemed to concur with such an assessment of both Tiso's past and the fairness of his trial. In a communication to Peter P. Jurchak, President of the Slovak League of America, John Hickerson, on behalf of the Acting Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, told Jurchak that „the public record of Dr. Tiso does not, in the judgement of the Acting Secretary, constitute a specific reason for any intervention by the [United States] Government“. In particular, Hickerson noted Slovakia's adherence to the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis, an act committed on November 25, 1941, under Tiso's presidency. Finally, „the records of his [Tiso's] trial show indisputably that Dr. Tiso agreed to the Slovak declaration of war on the United States and the United Kingdom on December 12, 1941“. In view of all this, „the Acting Secretary does not consider that it would be appropriate for the [United States] Government“ to accede to Jurchak's request for American diplomatic intervention on Tiso's behalf<sup>33</sup>. Further comment on Czechoslovak reactions to Tiso's trial and the verdict came from Ambassador Steinhardt two days after the death sentence had been announced. He said that the sentiments in the Czechoslovak government had „veered sharply in favor of carrying out death sentence on Tiso and unless there is [an] unexpected development, sentence [will] be carried out in [the] near future“. As for the public reaction to it, the Ambassador did not foresee major problems. He simply stated that „while the [Czechoslovak] government anticipates dissatisfaction in some quarters with [the] carrying out of [Tiso's] sentence, it [did] not expect serious demonstrations or that they [would] be longlived“<sup>34</sup>.

The verdict in Tiso's trial soon came to be a political football in Czechoslovakia, with the Communist, Social Democrat and National Socialist parties favoring the death sentence, while the Slovak Democratic Party and the Catholic Peoples'

<sup>31</sup> Acheson to Prague Embassy, March 14, 1947, File 860 F.00/3—1447, *ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Bruins to Secretary of State, March 20, 1947, File 860 F.00/3—2047, *ibidem*.

<sup>33</sup> Hickerson to Jurchak, April 7, 1947, File 860 F.00/4—747, *ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> Steinhardt to Secretary of State, April 17, 1947, File 860 F.00/4—1747, *ibidem*.



Party recommended mercy. According to yet another report of Steinhardt's, Beneš himself is reported to have favored the latter course<sup>35</sup>. When it came to the actual question of granting clemency to the accused, the National Court in Bratislava merely forwarded Tiso's request to Beneš, without any comment of its own. There was, however, support for mercy from the office of the Slovak Commissioner of Justice (*Poverenictvo spravedlnosti*) and also a formal appeal to Beneš from the Council of Slovak Catholic bishops and from Bishop Čobrda, who wrote on behalf of the representatives of the various Protestant churches of Slovakia. On the other hand, the League of Slovak Partisans and representatives from the Slovak labor movement let Beneš know that they stood behind the death verdict and were in favor of its implementation<sup>36</sup>. The President, who found it politically inexpedient to intervene, sidestepped the issue; he forwarded the matter to the Czechoslovak government. There, by a margin of seventeen to six, it was decided to let the verdict stand<sup>37</sup>.

Tiso was executed on April eighteenth. Contrary to his wish to be interred in Banovce, his one-time parish, Tiso was quietly buried in Bratislava. The government chose to disregard Tiso's request for fear that burial in the small parish where he had been well known and had carried out his priestly functions might lead to manifestations of sympathy on his behalf.

Although some demonstrations in favor of Tiso did indeed occur in Slovakia even before the announcement of the death sentence, his opponents, incited by the Communist-dominated trade unions and partisan organizations, staged major counter-demonstrations in Bratislava<sup>38</sup>. Although for some time to come Slovak Democrats and Slovak Communists continued to use Tiso's trial as a method of hurling accusations at each other, the storm soon calmed. In the western-oriented provinces of Bohemia and Moravia, the effect was nowhere nearly as noticeable.

By mid-1947, only groups of American citizens of Slovak origin, continuously stirred by their leaders and exhorted by the now thoroughly discredited ex-members of Tiso's government, persisted in honoring Tiso's memory, each in its own way. While the clergy limited its homage to requiem masses, the politicians thought it wisest to honor their departed leader by continuing appeals for Slovak independence. The diplomatic files for 1947 reveal a number of such documents, addressed to various agencies of the United States government and signed by the untiring D'určanský. Since many of the leaders of the former Slovak State were *personae non gratae* in the United States, the Department of State found itself the recipient of petitions from places as distant as Rome and Buenos Aires. Like Jozef Tiso himself, the man who provided the impetus for some of the earlier petitions, they were quietly laid to rest in the Department's files, largely unanswered.

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<sup>35</sup> Steinhardt to Secretary of State, April 3, 1947, File 860 F. 00/4—347, *ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> Daxner, I.: *L'udáctvo pred národným súdom*. Bratislava 1961, p. 173.

<sup>37</sup> Belda, J. et. al.: *Na rozhraní dvou epoch*. Prague 1968, pp. 170—173. Only three ministers from the ranks of the Slovak Democrats and three Populists voted in favor of mercy.

<sup>38</sup> Bruins to Secretary of State, March 28, 1947, File 860 F. 00/3—2347, National Archives, Diplomatic Correspondence, Czechoslovakia, Record Group 59.

## REAKTIONEN IN DEN VEREINIGTEN STAATEN UND BEIM HEILIGEN STUHL AUF DEN TISO- PROZESS

Das Gerichtsverfahren und die daraufhin vollzogene Todesstrafe gegen Dr. Jozef Tiso, den Präsidenten des Slowakischen Staates während des Zweiten Weltkrieges, wurde von Amerikanern slowakischer Abstammung mit großer Anteilnahme verfolgt. Gut organisiert und oft von Tisos ehemaligen Mitarbeitern im Exil beeinflusst, unternahmen diese Kräfte alles, um Tiso vor der Vollstreckung des Urteils zu retten. Neben direkten Protestschreiben an amerikanische Politiker, insbesondere an den Staatssekretär Byrnes und an Präsident Truman, verstanden sie es auch, die Repräsentanten ihrer Wahlbezirke im Amerikanischen Kongreß für Tiso zu interessieren und sie zu einer direkten Intervention für Tiso im Amerikanischen Kongreß zu bewegen. Aus den vorliegenden Quellen geht nicht immer einwandfrei hervor, ob dieses oder jenes Kongreßmitglied bei seinem Vorgehen lediglich das Anliegen seiner Wähler bei den zuständigen Federalbehörden in Washington förderte oder ob er selbst an einer entsprechenden amerikanischen Intervention Interesse hatte.

Wie dem auch sei, als gute Volksvertreter folgten sie den Wünschen ihrer Wähler. Wenngleich nicht alle slowakisch sprechenden Amerikaner mit der Politik Tisos einverstanden waren — es ist nachweisbar, daß es unter den amerikanischen Slowaken auch Gegner Tisos gab —, war doch die für Tiso eingestellte Lobby im Kongreß einflußreich genug, um die höchsten politischen Kreise Amerikas für den Fall Tiso zu interessieren. Trotz aller Bemühungen der Fürsprecher Tisos und trotz des oft wiederholten Arguments, daß Tiso ein anti-bolschewistischer Kämpfer sei, der nun von rachesüchtigen tschechischen Kommunisten und nicht von einem demokratischen Gericht verurteilt wurde, verhielten sich die amerikanischen Behörden, insbesondere das State Departement, zurückhaltend. Sie lehnten es nicht nur ab, in Prag oder Preßburg für Tiso vorzusprechen, sondern sie waren auch hinsichtlich der wachsenden Zahl der Appelle verstimmt. Die Regierung in Washington entschloß sich deshalb, auf Appelle nicht mehr zu antworten, und begründete diesen Entschluß mit der Behauptung, daß die meisten slowakischen Fürsprecher noch vor kurzem Feinde der Alliierten waren und sich jetzt nur als Demokraten aufspielten.

Die negative Stellungnahme Washingtons rief eine große Enttäuschung bei den amerikanischen Slowaken hervor. Einen noch größeren Schock bereitete aber die Haltung des Vatikans, der es ebenfalls ablehnte, sich in die Angelegenheit einzumischen und für den zum Tode verurteilten Priester vorzusprechen. Bereits zu Beginn des Tiso-Regimes im Frühjahr 1939 hatten vatikanische Kreise eine ambivalente Stellung gegenüber Preßburg eingenommen. Obwohl Msgr. Ignaz Seipel im Vorkriegs-Europa bereits ein Beispiel von Priester-Politikern abgegeben hatte,

hegte der Heilige Stuhl Zweifel an der Richtigkeit der Entscheidung Tisos, sich zum slowakischen Präsidenten wählen zu lassen. Als es nun während des Krieges slowakische Behörden für nötig fanden, mehr und mehr autoritativ aufzutreten, verstimmte dies den Vatikan in steigendem Maße und führte gelegentlich, wie im Falle der slowakischen Judengesetze, zu offener Kritik an Preßburg. In dieser Beziehung waren die Depeschen des apostolischen Delegierten in Preßburg, Msgr. Burzio, besonders maßgebend und scheinen den vatikanischen Staatssekretär stark beeinflusst zu haben. Abgesehen von diesen Kritiken, die oft rein moralischer und philosophisch-theologischer Natur waren, hielt es die Vatikan-Diplomatie nach dem Kriege wohl kaum für richtig, sich nun für einen Ex-Verbündeten des Dritten Reiches zu exponieren.

Obwohl sich die für Tiso eingestellten Führer der amerikanischen Slowaken nach dem vollstreckten Urteil um eine Rehabilitierung Tisos bemühten, war dieses Thema seit Sommer 1947 in Washington nicht mehr aktuell. Gesuche um amerikanische Interventionen wurden einfach zu den Akten gelegt.