

T.G. MASARYK'S SLOVAK AND HUNGARIAN POLICY

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The personality of T. G. Masaryk has heretofore been considered almost exclusively from the point of view of the events of the First World War and the birth of the Czechoslovak Republic. These interpretations were only seldom free of partisanship. The beginnings of Masaryk's intellectual and emotional development, as well as the social historical foundations of his environment, on the other hand, have scarcely been examined thus far. Thus his Slovak origin, with its impact on his character and activity, has heretofore been neglected. On the basis of primary Slovak and Magyar contemporary sources, the psychological, intellectual and political phases of T. G. Masaryk's development are therefore examined here.

Since Masaryk was born in Moravia and came from the lowest stratum of the population, he was compelled to turn to the Czech world in order to be able to develop his talents. He always felt himself to be a Moravian Slovak, however. Nevertheless, the politically and culturally active part of the Slovak middle class, which at the time partly bore the imprint of the social structure of Hungary and partly showed romantic Pan-Slav characteristics, always remained alien to him. With his western-democratic and social-critical orientation, he regarded these Slovaks as backward. Masaryk had matured into a personality in the Austrian and Czech environment and had turned completely to the progressive Anglo-American social ideas as well as to a liberal Christianity. From the 1880's on, he was active in the modern-radical movement in Czech politics. Already in 1882, when he was appointed university lecturer at the Czech University in Prague, he regarded himself as the born leader of the Czechs and the Slovaks. He endeavoured to unite these two peoples in their education and ideology, as well as psychologically. As a result of his social origin and his sociological knowledge, he at all times directed his efforts toward radical reforms and transformations, and opposed what was traditional and romantic.

In the vicinity of the then focal point of the Slovak political and intellectual life, the town of Turčanský Svätý Martin, he spent most of his vocations, and from here he attempted to influence the Slovak politicians and writers. He considered the passivity of the Slovak national policy of the time as the logical outcome of the romantic and Pan-Slav Russophilism of the Slovak leaders. The latter, in turn, openly opposed the intellectual achievements of industrial Western Europe, as well as the ideas and practice of a democratic policy. They declared that the outward forms of the „rotten West“ were irreconcilable with Slavism. Still, Masaryk had at the beginning a sincere friendship with Svetozár Hurban-Vajanský, the most important representative of these Slovak conservatives. It was broken off when, around 1890, it no longer seemed possible to overcome the ideological contradictions.

The conservative Slovak policy led by Hurban-Vajanský appealed only to

a small part of the population, and almost not at all to the broader strata of the Slovak people. As a professor of Prague University, Masaryk looked after the Slovak students and won them over to his ideas. The bourgeois-radical transformation of Slovak politics in the years 1890—1914 — a socially oriented opposition to the Hungarian state in the interest of Czechoslovak unity — goes back to this circle around Masaryk. Out of it also emerged the Slovaks who realized Czechoslovak state unity in 1918 — e.g. Milan Hodža, Ivan Dérer and Vavro Šrobár. The Czechoslovak idea was not the idea of the whole Czech and Slovak people, but solely the affair of a small minority of no more than twenty men who aspired to power. From this fact clearly indicates the pseudo-democratic character of the Czechoslovak national idea.

The fiction of Czechoslovak unity, which generalized the Czechs as the principle of all that was progressive, and represented the Slovaks on the other hand, as backward, after 1918 engendered an anti-Czechoslovak Slovak opposition. The latter harked back to the ideas of Hurban-Vajanský and regarded the Western-radical bourgeois position which Masaryk advocated not only as an alien, Czech phenomenon, but also as an atheistic ideology destroying the specific Slovak character.