

# IN THE PARLIAMENT OF THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

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The First World War ended with the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. On 28 October 1918, the Czech National Committee — which up to then had been secret — proclaimed in Prague the Czechoslovak Republic, containing the lands of the former Bohemian crown and the upper Hungarian counties. The German delegates of the former Austrian Reichsrat resisted the incorporation of the Sudeten-German areas, and attempted to recover for the newly established Republic of Austria, German Bohemia under Dr. Lodgman, the Moravian-Silesian Sudetenland under Dr. Freissler, and the district of Znaim under Count Oldofredi. This attempt collapsed after a few weeks, when Czech military occupied the German areas, and then the Treaty of St. Germain incorporated them into Czechoslovakia, thus bringing the Sudeten-Germans under Czech rule.

In the meantime, the Czech National Committee had been expanded into the National (Constituent) Assembly, with 268 members — with the exception a few Slovaks exclusively Czechs — which adopted the Constitution of 29 February 1920 and all of the fundamental laws of the new state, such as the Language Law, which was so disadvantageous for the German minority, the Land Reform, the currency reform, and the capital levy. Not before these laws had been approved elections for the National Assembly were called. The

first elections for the Chamber of Deputies (300 members) were held on 18 April 1920, and those for the Senate (150 members) on 25 April of the same year. After that, the structure of the National Assembly of the First ČSR was changed three times through new elections, in autumn of 1925, in October 1929 and in May 1935. The German minority received each time, corresponding to its share of the population, about one-fourth of all the seats. This minority status of the Germans in the Czechoslovak National Assembly made it impossible for them to prevail in their attempt for self-preservation against the nationalistic policy of the Czech government. As a result, the German minority was forced to fight within and outside the government against its Czechization. At first the gaining of the right of self-determination was in the foreground, and later the aim of achieving the self-administration that had been promised but not realized. Though in outward form a parliamentary democracy, the First Czechoslovak Republic was in its inner essence a nationalistic dictatorship of the Czech National Committees, organized throughout the area of the state. The latter strove systematically, using all the means at their disposal, to de-nationalize the other ethnic groups, in order to create the uniform „Czechoslovak“ people, which had been asserted in the Constitution. For this reason, even the provisions imposed upon the state in the Minority Treaty of 10 September 1919 were so guarded by clauses within the constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, that their implementation became illusory. Every attempt at a national settlement was nipped in the bud by the pre dominating Czech nationalistic power, until, through the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938, it had become too late for a settlement within the framework of Czechoslovakia.