

“THE SPIRIT OF DICTATORS”

Rusyn Accusations of Corruption and Imperialism against František Svojše
and Officials in Czechoslovak Ruthenia

Geoffrey Brown

The decision of the Paris Peace Conference to include the territory of Carpathian Ruthenia in Czechoslovakia provided the Czech nation with the opportunity to become leaders for a fellow Slavic nation. As an underdeveloped corner of the former Hungarian kingdom the region and its Slavic Rusyn inhabitants were significantly behind the Czech Lands both economically and culturally. In spite of the 1919 Saint Germain Treaty's promise of political autonomy for Rusyns, a Czech-dominated system of administration for the region developed, with stability of the Czechoslovak state seen as paramount. Most Rusyn intellectuals initially welcomed Czech leadership as a means of improving living conditions, but by the mid-1920s tensions heightened over corruption by Czech officials and a lack of respect for the autonomous rights of Rusyns. Gendarme and publisher František Svojše personified this shift towards Czech imperialism and arrogance in the eyes of the Rusyn intelligentsia. As the editor of confrontational newspaper *Podkarpatské hlasy* he presented Czech chauvinist plans for assimilation of Rusyns which made him a lightning rod for their anger against Czech officials. Despite attempts by Czech officials to highlight the positive benefits of their administration, by the late 1920s the Rusyn intelligentsia, composed of Russophile, Ukrainophile and Rusynophile factions, had lost faith in the Slavic cooperation initially offered to them.