

The Tragedy of the Masaryks

Austrian Idealism on Czech Realism

Ernst Karl Winter

THE NAME Masaryk has been a shibboleth of "progressivism" in two world wars. It may well be worthwhile to look at it, on the occasion of its extinction, from the angle of "conservatism" also, which duality, after all, is the law of history. While the name of Masaryk the father stands enduringly in the books of history as the founder of the independent Czechoslovak State on the ruins of the Austrian Empire, the name of Masaryk the son is the symbol of the disastrous consequences brought by his father's ambiguous act after thirty years. Hardly anywhere in history have the Apocalyptic horsemen ridden as swiftly as in these two generations of the Masaryks.

A hundred years ago, the sage of the Czech nation, Frantisek Palacky, must have had a real premonition of events to come. For, invited in 1848 to join the German national parliament in Frankfurt, he coined, refusing the invitation, the ever famous phrase: "If the Austrian Empire did not exist, it would have to be created in the interest of Europe and humanity." Hardly twenty years later, it is true, Palacky, disillusioned about the good will of the ruling German Austrians, nearly reversed his position by saying: "We, the Czechs, have existed before Austria and we shall exist after her." Nevertheless, the intellectual leaders of the Czech nation did not seriously take notice of the latter utterance of disappointment, but stuck to the constructive saying of 1848. Palacky's son-in-law, Frantisek Ladislav Rieger, the leader of the "Old Czechs," adhered to the "Austrian idea" down to his political testament, in which he admonished the Czech nation never to separate itself from the dynasty. It was Karel Kramar, protagonist of Czech national independence long before Masaryk—and for that reason sentenced to death by an Austrian military court in World War I, but amnestied by Emperor Charles in a splendid gesture of reconciliation—who wrote as early as 1906, paraphrasing both sentences of Palacky, the truly realistic words: "Any weakening of Austria means a strengthening of the influence of Germany. It means especially for our people the weakening of their importance and the strengthening of those who dream of nothing else save how to subject us to a ruthless régime of Ger-

manization. The situation of our people in the heart of Europe and the development of the international situation force us more than ever before to ask for a strong and healthy Austria as the best guarantee of the future of our people. I believe in the words of Palacky (concerning the existence of the Czech nation before and after Austria) and I believe in his belief in the future of our people, but I believe too that it would be, I am sure, better for us, if we never had to prove the truth of these words."

In fact, the Czech leaders have always been realists and consequently, down to Masaryk, champions of *Austro-Slavism* as the only alternative for their little nation hedged in by the double menace of German and Russian imperialism. Old Masaryk himself was a lifelong Austrophile. Only at 64 did he abruptly turn against Austria, convinced by the turn of World War I that the Czech nation ought to be radically "de-Austrianized." Masaryk, in contradiction to the national tradition of the Czech people, turned to this self-destructive policy influenced by *Eduard Benes*, at that time a youth of 30, who was the only Czech leader in exile without an Austrian intellectual background. Thus, Masaryk and Benes, aided by international freemasonry and the American president, became the gravediggers of an Austrian empire which, for more than half a millenium (at least since 1437), had been an essential moderator of the European balance of power and a check to German and Russian expansion alike. While the Czechs under Masaryk the father were the foremost destroyers of the Old Austrian coexistence of nations (which certainly needed modernization, but did not deserve complete liquidation), they became, under Masaryk the son, quite logically the first sufferers from that destruction.

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Genealogical research shows that Masaryk's ancestors were Czech, Slovak and German Austrian. This is representative of many intellectual types originating in the Sudeten countries, where Czechs, Slovaks and German-speaking Austrians (the so-called "Sudeten Germans," who in fact are Sudeten Austrians) have mingled for more than a thousand years. One of the oldest

roots of the Masaryks can be traced back to a small Moravian village close to the ancient pilgrimage at Velehrad, the sanctuary of the Slavonic Apostles, Cyrillus and Methodius, where the Eastern liturgy and the tradition of the Western-Eastern union of churches still are realities. One of the most popular modern Austrian saints, Klemens Maria Hofbauer, now the patron of Vienna, was of Moravian descent.

The Masaryks came from old Catholic stock, as do the overwhelming majority of all Moravians, Czechs, Slovaks and German-speaking Sudeten Austrians. Also, the Moravian people always have been deeply integrated into the Danubian coexistence of nations (with the March River flowing into the Danube and not the opposite way). When the elder Masaryk at the age of 30 first turned from Catholicism to Protestantism (as was the fashion among the Prussianizing Sudeten German intelligentsia) and later called himself a "freethinker," following a vague nineteenth century pseudo-liberal "enlightenment," his tragedy began. He had cut his roots. A year later, when a young teacher in the University of Vienna, he wrote his book against suicide, a book which now his eldest son has demonstrated to have been a dialectical failure.

As a "positivist" in philosophy and sociology, imitating Comte and Spencer in German (the language of most of Masaryk's publications), his political creed was determinedly "realistic": he was Austrophile as long as the Austrian empire existed as a world power, and he turned against Austria with the outcome of World War I. Masaryk's heirs showed exactly the same "realism" in their similar acceptance of historical events, as they unfolded themselves: national independence guaranteed by the victors of World War I, the pact of Munich concluded by the same victors, the inevitable protectorate as the consequence of Munich, the victory of the Allies in World War II, and, last but not least, Russian domination east of the so-called Iron Curtain which, in fact, is the strategical line agreed upon by the Allies. It was due to Hitler, not to Benes, that the acceptance of Munich resulted in the exile of the Benes school, while Hacha and his followers stayed on to accommodate the German rulers, offering collaboration to a higher degree than existed anywhere else in Europe, although it was cleverly masked by Czech propaganda abroad. Again it was the Benes school which, after the strategical division of Central Europe had been established by agreement between the Allies, at once totally embraced the Russian hegemony which formerly nobody had resented more than Masaryk.

Although Masaryk's "realism" contributed a heavy share to the destruction of the Danubian balance (in spite of the requirements of both

Europe and humanity, for which Palacky had pleaded), he could not make the Danube flow back into her Sudeten tributaries and check the fateful consequences of his errors, for which his heirs now pay. Each new accommodation of Masaryk or Benes to the existing pattern of power brought the Czech nation another step toward entanglement and confusion. Masaryk's vain intellectualism let him completely misjudge the forces of history which have confronted the Czechs since times immemorial: the Germans, the Russians, and the coexistence of smaller nations on the Danube, of which the Austrian empire has been the most effective integration. The Czech nation, as all the other Danubian nations, will always be under the sway of imperialism, German or Russian, so long as they cannot find some means of federation. No imperialism will be strong enough, however, to prevent the development of such a tendency. Even today, the "Austrian idea" in the highest sense of federalization among the Danubian nations is still a reality, against which "positivism" may sin gravely indeed, yet cannot permanently prevail.

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When the Hitler menace began to threaten the emancipated Danubian nations in the 1930's, there came a moment in the history of the Czech leaders when they felt anew their sympathy and solidarity with Austria. After the Danubian Successor States had liquidated their common interest and protection, it was quite logical that the German menace should arise and that thereby not only the weakest spot of the postwar system, Austria, should be gravely endangered, but also Czechoslovakia, the most favored nation of all, the leader of the Little Entente, supposed to replace the great power on the Danube. Never did an artificial scheme collapse so thoroughly in the lifetime of its authors as this substitute for the Austrian Empire. Even if politicians by nature are deaf to the teaching of history, some faint inkling reached their ears when Hitler disturbed their complacency.

In those years I met many of the Czech leaders and quite a few of them spontaneously emphasized their Austrian background once again. "We all are Austrians, aren't we?" one of them said to me, quite penitently, who today holds a key position in the present Czech system. In those years of crises I also met Benes several times, first in Czernin Palace, when he still was foreign minister, later in Hradcany Castle, when he had become Masaryk's successor. Although I have been a rather pronounced adherent of "Greater Austrian reconstruction" and did not hide my conviction that the restoration of the Austrian monarchy would be preferable to chaos in the Danube region, Benes was always very eager to

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talk to me. Even when he tried to convince me that a "Starhemberg monarchy" would be much more suitable to Austria than the Habsburgs (who would lose, as he said, both Slovakia and Croatia), he showed, by the very content of such discussions, that he had long forgotten his unfortunate saying of former years that he would prefer the Anschluss to the Habsburg restoration.

x In those days one could feel the true pulse of Czechoslovak foreign policy through one of Benes's most intimate French associates, Professor Louis Eisenmann, the Slavist of the Sorbonne, who never neglected to visit Karl Renner (now the president of the Austrian Republic), when passing through Vienna. Eisenmann, an old French freemason of Eastern European Jewish descent, who once had been foremost among the intellectual destroyers of the Austrian empire, became, when the 1930's threatened, one of the most eager foreign advocates of Danubian reconstruction—if need be—on a dynastic basis. (Less outspoken, but still the same apparent repentance existed in Englishmen like H. W. Steed or R. W. Seton-Watson, who now could measure the destructive results of their attitude about the problem of nationalities within the old Austrian Monarchy by their consequences in European insecurity.) What Benes told me under the diplomatic cloak, Eisenmann, a courageous scholar, said frankly. If there had been in Austria at that time a really constructive statesman, instead of a brave but incompetent one, who in an extraordinary historical situation was incapable of performing the extraordinary, it might have been possible to carry out the restoration of the Habsburg dynasty in Austria as the nucleus for Danubian reconstruction on a modern basis. Historically, this may well have been the last chance to regain for Central Europe the continuity with the nineteenth century which was broken by the events of 1918, and which, to any non-partisan, now, after the events of 1938 and 1945, looks lost forever.

When we Austrians went into exile in March, 1938, the Czech leaders still were riding high. In order to keep the Nazis benevolent, they refused refuge even to very respectable Austrians who had frequently sided with the Czechoslovak interests (such as Robert Danneberg, Social Democratic leader, who was caught on a train at the Czechoslovak frontier, and who died in a concentration camp). Six months later, the first Czechs went into exile too. The same tragedy occurred even more grotesquely the following year among Czechs and Poles, for the former, after Munich, took over the rôle of the Austrians, while the latter contrived for another year the rôle of the Czechs, appeasing the Nazis at all costs.

In 1939, representatives of all three Danubian nations in exile, Austrians, Czechoslovaks and

Poles, met in America. At that time, we founded the "American Committee on European Reconstruction" round a nucleus of Austrian-Czechoslovak-Polish cooperation, and Jan Masaryk sponsored the movement. I still cherish the letter of encouragement which he then wrote in favor of our endeavors, in which, besides a few independent Austrians, the official representatives of the Czechoslovak and Polish governments-in-exile took part. It was a very short intermission. The only positive result was that in London a year later the two governments-in-exile concluded their treaty of federation which proposed a universal scheme for Southeastern European reconstruction. For a few months the two governments were rightly the spokesmen of all the Danubian nations. (The Austrians, unable to agree on an integrated national policy in exile, went into oblivion, primarily because of the farcical adventures of the Legitimists, blown up beyond their real importance by the snobbishness of Washington society and backed for a while by Rooseveltian Machiavellianism.)

All this, before Germany attacked Russia. The idea of the Czechoslovak-Polish federation was directed against both German and Russian imperialism, as corresponding with the continuous tradition of Austro-Slavism. Instead of logically continuing this fundamental orientation even after the alliance of the West with Russia, Benes and Masaryk capitulated to Russian force and thereby drew Russia closer and faster into the heart of Europe than the Russians themselves contemplated at that time. Thus they contradicted the most basic principle of the traditional Czech anti-Panslavism, to which the Austrophiles had remained faithful from Palacky to Masaryk; just as the elder Masaryk, together with Benes, had leaned upon the League of Nations, so Benes and the young Masaryk trusted the United Nations. The close alliance of Czechoslovakia with Russia was possible and safe only within the United Nations, yet it was this alliance precisely which helped tragically to destroy the balance of the United Nations. By trusting in the abstract formula of an untried world organization instead of sticking to the historic realities, of which the connections of Czechoslovakia with Poland and Austria are integral parts, the Czech leaders led their nation into the abyss.

The test case came for Benes and Masaryk with the problem of the Sudeten Austrians (wrongly called Sudeten Germans by the Czechs themselves in their mania for "de-Austrianization"). In spite of a millennial symbiosis between Slavonic and Germanic speakers in the Sudeten countries of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, the victorious Czechs, urged by Russia, went so far against their own most vital interests as to expel with utmost cruelty, worthy of their German enemies, three million Sudeten Austrians. A hu-

manitarian Czech (who had cooperated with our committee) characterized this expulsion as "understandable from the point of view of mere revenge; a crime from the humanitarian point of view; and a stupidity politically." By uprooting the Sudeten Austrians the Czechs lost their real historic partner and became spiritually satellites of the Russians, who insisted on this solution in order to make secure their own hold over the Czechs. The Sudeten Austrians have been expelled, but no expert will maintain that the problems involved have really been solved. Not even the return of the Sudeten Germans is possible in a world situation such as ours. Here again the tragedy of the Czechs has been the tragedy of American foreign policy, whose consent alone made the expulsion of the Sudeten Austrians in 1945 both possible and legal.

Neither Benes nor the younger Masaryk ever had the intellectual strength to "discern the spiritual," which is the virtue *sine qua non* of the statesman. They were opportunists of "positivism," the evil heritage of the old Masaryk. They underestimated therefore the historic truth, known to Palacky and to his successors, and even to the elder Masaryk for the greater part of his lifetime, which is that the Czechs inevitably will become the slaves of either Germans or Russians or, God forbid, of the two—unless there be an integrated system of power on the Danube, organized by the federation of the smaller nations between Germany and Russia.

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Such a Central European system of equilibrium, without which there cannot be any political integration of Europe as a whole, was once the Austrian Empire, and it existed continuously for four hundred years (after 1526), based primarily upon the union of the German speaking Alpine Austrians (of Lower and Upper Austria, Styria, Carinthia, and the Tyrol), on the Czechs as the most Western promoters of Slavonic interests, and on the Magyars as the main organizers for many centuries, of the Southeastern European areas. The great historic function of the Austrian empire in balancing Europe during the centuries of modern civilization is undeniable. Equally, there can be little doubt that the complete collapse of the Austrian Empire after World War I, without the slightest trace of any substitute, was the main reason for the German expansion which led to World War II and now the analogous lack of any integrated power on the Danube is the greatest temptation for a Russian expansion which may well precipitate World War III.

It is true, however, that Austria has by no means been simply the passive victim of this development, in each phase leading to another world

conflagration. There is more positive substance, more "virtue" in Austrian history than is generally recognized in the West, but there is, equally, much "guilt." It was certainly the historic merit of both Austrian socialism and Czech nationalism to have put the finger upon this guilt. There is not the slightest doubt that the ruling caste of German Austria, particularly the dynasty and the nobility, especially after 1848, were never up to the problems of the empire, and missed dozens of opportunities to modernize it. In spite of the legends surrounding the figure of Francis Joseph I, in which Austrian sentimentalists indulge, the historian must state objectively that the dynasty under the long leadership of that emperor—a youth of 18 in the revolutionary year of 1848 and an old man of 86 in the midst of World War I—eliminated itself from the historic scene through unpardonable mistakes and incompetence. The Habsburg dynasty fell by historic necessity, and no force on earth in all human probability will ever revive its ghost, after the last chance was gambled away by the Austrian Legitimists themselves. Only had Habsburg prevented the Anschluss, the gulf of twenty years might have been bridged.

Yet it was the climax of the tragedy of Benes and the Masaryks that they were unable to distinguish clearly between Austria and Habsburg. They could have stood as the great emancipators of their nation, and rebelled against the ruling caste of the German-Austrians, without destroying the Austrian empire which, even with a cardboard king for the time being, would have served them better than the complete vacuum they created. The elimination of the dynasty from active interference with the destiny of the Empire, even if the English system had been maintained, would have been a great blessing to all the Danubian nations—while the ruthless destruction of the Empire was like Samson's deed, burying those under its ruins who had shaken its pillars.

This is the lesson of history. While the Russians know the problem and try to solve it within the Soviet orbit, the Americans still either parrot their mistakes, which created the Masaryks, or simply reverse them, thinking that the restoration of the Habsburgs will repair the damage done by their expulsion. It may seem pretty hopeless today, in the light of the elder Masaryk's "positivism," to find any positive solution for the smaller nations in the Danube basin—and thus the son logically committed the deed the father resented so strongly (who possessed still the substance of his inheritance which he denied to his own son). If "positivists" find the situation hopeless, "idealists" may be better off. Not the realism of "positivism," but of "idealism" is required in the impasse of history which

+ for "discerning the spirit"

is ours. It will not be possible to pass through that narrow defile without the thread of continuity which characterizes the progress of civilization. Yet a nation conscious of itself must always be able to distinguish between the essentials of national life and paraphernalia and have the courage to adapt the latter to the former. The Austrian monarchy went down, not without grandeur in its last representative, Charles, whose prayer was that the peoples of the Austrian empire would again find each other united. Since that time even the name of Austria has been crushed under the German heel and nobody can tell whether or not, in a third world war, the Alpine Austrians will go down the same road of history the Sudeten Austrians did. It is not the name, however, but the essence which surely will survive and, in any durable era of peace, will bring again into the foreground the perennial coexistence of those smaller nations on the Danube, whose civilization once rose, in the Austrian architecture of the Baroque and in the classical age of Viennese music, to the highest level of humanity.

1. April 1948

Tenafly N.J.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE MASARYKS

Tenafly, N. J.

TO the Editors: The great actuality of the positive ideas contained in my essay, "The Tragedy of the Masaryks," in *THE COMMONWEAL* of April 23, could hardly have been better underlined than by Winston Churchill's remorseful survey about "the follies of the victors." He calls the complete break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire the second cardinal tragedy of the post-war settlement. The age seems to have ripened into fruitful reminiscences. Also Don Luigi Sturzo (*People and Freedom*, April, 1948) revives discussions with Benes at Geneva in 1922, in which an Italian scheme of Danubian cooperation was rejected by the Czech leader as leading automatically to the resurrection of Austria and Vienna.

Already David F. Strong in "Austria 1918/19" (New York, 1939) quoted Benes from American sources as preferring the Anschluss to any Danubian reconstruction, on purely Czech national grounds. Yet Professor Frederick Hertz in his recent book "The Economic Problem of the Danubian States" (London, 1947) correctly remembers a prewar publication by Benes (1908), where the federalization of Austria is advocated and her dismemberment

have been New Englanders of Puritan stock who were involved in this conflict, either in their lives or in their works. My somewhat morbid interest in the subject has been reinforced of recent years by a study of French Canada, where Jansenism, the Gallic equivalent of Puritanism, has exerted

an influence upon Catholicism in Quebec similar to that of Puritanism upon Catholicism in New England. In both regions the coloring of the Catholic tradition by strong environmental forces has raised problems for the Catholic writer, and it is some of these problems that I want to discuss this afternoon.

It is one of the many ironies of history that Puritanism should exert an influence upon Catholicism, for the Puritans got their name from their effort to "purify" the Church of England of all traces of "papisty." The medieval Church believed that beauty was "a kind of good," and made lavish use of the resources of architecture, music, art, and literature in order to praise God the better. The English Puritans, in their revolt against "papisty," fanatically destroyed the books, statues, stained glass, and paintings which filled the cathedrals which were the greatest monuments of the Middle Ages. Here in Massachusetts the Puritans built gaunt, bare churches in which no music was heard save that of the nasal psalmsinger, and they even denied their congregations the blessing of warmth for winter worship. Agnes Repplier, in an essay on "The Masterful Puritan," writes of the "stagnant" and "dead" atmosphere of the Puritan churches.

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deemed impractical and unreal. Professor Hertz himself, an old friend of Eisenmann, representing the Austrian voice in Western liberalism, today embodies best all the experiences which led the liberal intellectuals from the war cry of their youth that "Austriam esse delendam" to the full understanding of Danubian reconstruction. . . .

May I correct here two printing errors in my essay as well? On p. 648, line 4, the correct wording is the following: "to whom, as he said, both Slovakia and Croatia would be lost." On p. 649, line 13, the wording should be: "Not even the return of the Sudeten German is impossible in a world situation as ours."

ERNST KARL WINTER.

company," and when we look at the literary remains of Massachusetts Puritanism it is difficult not to agree. But as Miss Repplier points out, "Men who believe that, through some exceptional grace of good fortune, they have found God, feel little need of culture. If they believe that they share God with all races, all nations, and all ages, culture comes in the wake of religion. That is one great difference between Catholics and Puritans."

Now, as a Catholic writer, who believes that American Catholic culture is becoming a fact and is no longer a dream, I am disturbed when our separated brethren call us the modern Puritans, and when I find a marked rise of anti-Catholic

* This is the text of a talk given this winter under the auspices of the Gallery of Living Catholic Authors, in Boston, Mass.