

Jaroslav Rokoský

“A small country, but ours”. The Czechoslovak autumn of 1938

There are victories that are a shame¹

Munich, 29 September 1938. The German chancellor Adolf Hitler, the Italian duce Benito Mussolini, the French premier Édouard Daladier and the British prime minister Neville Chamberlain have just signed the Munich Agreement. With this document, the western powers, fearful of war, have resolved the “Czechoslovak crisis”. The agreement will see Czechoslovakia’s Sudetenland border regions ceded to Germany. Hitler’s policy of aggression has succeeded. Democracy in Europe has failed.²

At 1.30 in the morning on 30 September 1938, in a room at Munich’s Hotel Regina, Czechoslovak diplomats Vojtěch Mastný and Hubert Masařík were informed of the decision reached over Czechoslovakia by the four powers at the Munich conference. *The atmosphere was one of grief. Daladier had apparently just realised what this would mean for French prestige*, recalled Masařík, who had given two decades of faithful service as an official and diplomat in Masaryk’s republic.³ *Chamberlain gave a brief introduction in which he acquainted us with the signed agreement and gave Mastný the complete text of the agreement to read [...]. As Mastný was speaking to Chamberlain about the small details – Chamberlain was making no effort to stifle repeated yawns – I asked Daladier and Léger whether they were expecting some sort of declaration or answer from our government towards the agreement they had just presented us with. Daladier, apparently in some discomfort, found himself incapable of answering, while Léger – explaining that the four statesmen did not have a great deal of time – told me that they were no longer expecting any answer from us, that they considered the agreement as accepted, and that our government must by five o’clock that afternoon send an emissary to a meeting of the international commission in Berlin. On Saturday one of our officers would have to arrive to immediately discuss the evacuation of the first zone of territory. In this fairly brutal fashion was it explained to us – and by a Frenchman no less – that there would be no appealing the decision, which was final and unamendable. The text was read, we were handed a second, slightly redrawn map and we said our goodbyes and left...⁴*

1 ČAPEK, Josef: *Psáno do mraků 1936–1939 /Written in the Clouds 1936–1939/*. Pražská edice, Prague 1993, p. 262.

2 There are countless studies on the 1938 Munich Agreement; it is without doubt one of the key moments in 20th century history. Amongst Czech historians, the leading experts on the Munich crisis are Robert Kvaček and Jan Tesař.

3 MASAŘÍK, Hubert: *V proměnách Evropy. Paměti československého diplomata /In the Changes of Europe. Memoirs of a Czechoslovak Diplomat/*. Paseka, Prague – Litomyšl 2002, pp. 243–244.

4 Report file by Vojtěch Mastný on the course of the Munich conference on 6 October 1938. See MASTNÝ, Vojtěch: *Vzpomínky diplomata /Memoirs of a Diplomat/*. Karolinum, Prague 1997, pp. 237–242.

Munich came as a shock. On the morning of 30 September 1938 there was a meeting attended by the government's caretaker cabinet, led by the legionnaire general and war hero Jan Syrový, who had a week previously replaced the Hodža government and declared general mobilisation, President Edvard Beneš, representatives of former governing parties and senior army officers to discuss the Munich Agreement.⁵ In this oppressive atmosphere, they decided not to put up resistance and accept what Czechs and Slovaks still refer to as the Munich "Diktat". The government at least communicated to the world its protest against the decision, which had been taken unilaterally without Czechoslovak representation. Prime Minister Syrový informed citizens of the government's stance in a radio address, in which he announced: *We were given the choice between mounting a desperate and hopeless defence, entailing the sacrifice of not only the entire adult population but also women and children, and accepting conditions which, regardless of the fact that they were presented under pressure and without war, have no equal in history. We wanted to contribute towards peace. We would gladly have done so. But not if it meant being forced into doing so. However, we were abandoned. We were left on our own...*⁶ The violation of treaty commitments was regarded as a betrayal by the democracies of the West.⁷ Czechoslovakia's concept of strategic defence rested on coalition warfare, i.e. upon the effective and comprehensive military aid of its allies, which were obliged to come to the country's defence within three weeks at the latest. An attempt to withstand an assault by Nazi Germany on its own would have been suicidal. The chief of Czechoslovakia's General Staff, Ludvík Krejčí, issued a command for soldiers to remain calm and sensible in this difficult moment.⁸ The troops, who had been ready to fight, heeded the command and abandoned their forward positions in the Sudetenland. Ever since, Czechs have argued ceaselessly over this crucial question: Should we have defended ourselves?

Czechoslovakia's First Republic had collapsed. It had ceased to exist in the boundaries laid down for it in 1918. Overnight, everything Czechs had believed in for the previous twenty years, everything for which they had worked selflessly and had been willing to lay down their lives, was torn down and cast into doubt. Munich was a deep nervous trauma for the entire Czech and Slovak nation. The Second Czechoslovak Republic, which lasted five and a half months and was filled with contradictions, was

5 The Czech public made clear they were ready to defend the country. Demonstrators in front of Prague Castle chanted *Give us weapons!* and *We want General Syrový!* On the evening of 23 September 1938, after the collapse of the second round of negotiations between Chamberlain and Hitler in Godesberg when Hitler raised further territorial demands, the government had declared a general mobilisation. Mobilisation was rapid and successful. There spread the conviction: *We will defend ourselves.*

6 Prohlášení ministerského předsedy generála Syrového /Declaration by the prime minister General Syrový/. *Právo lidu*, 1. 10. 1938, p. 1.

7 The main reason for accepting the "diktat" was the failure of Czechoslovakia's key alliance; the agreement with France. Without the support of France and Great Britain, a war against Hitler's Germany would have been a thoroughly uneven contest and doomed to defeat from the outset. See KVÁČEK, Robert: *Nad Evropou zataženo. Československo a Evropa 1933–1937* /Overcast Over Europe. Czechoslovakia and Europe 1933–1937/. Svoboda, Prague 1966; TESAŘ, Jan: *Mnichovský komplex. Jeho příčiny a důsledky* /The Munich Complex. Its Causes and Effects/. Prostor, Prague 2014.

8 Armádní rozkaz: Chladný rozum v těžké chvíli /Army Command: Cool and Calm in this Difficult Moment/. *Právo lidu*, 1. 10. 1938, p. 1.

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first and foremost a consequence of Munich. For Masaryk's republic this marked nothing less than a moral, political, economic, social and cultural catastrophe. Its acrimonious existence was only ended by the Nazi occupation of 15 March 1939.

Historiographic reflection

The Second Republic is a serious, even tragic subject of research; both contradictory and sensitive. It's a hidden chamber which most people would rather avoid entering. Historically, it has been treated with either silence or denigration. The first work published on the period was Miloš Hájek's *Od Mnichova k 15. březnu*. This text, published in 1959, is very much a reflection of its time. The Second Republic is described in overwhelmingly negative terms; in essence, the country's right-wing and reactionary leaders with fascist leanings dragged the country into slavery and the only one who attempted to defend both itself and the remnants of democracy was the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). Hájek, who had joined the resistance during the Nazi occupation, was teaching at a Communist Party university at the time. Ten years later, František Lukeš composed his work *Podivný mír*, with the same outlook, albeit more moderate compared to Hájek's effort during the Stalinist 1950s. Another decade on, and Miloslav Moulis published his *Osudný 15. březen*, a popular scientific discourse once again taking a one-sided view of the officials of the state, who are subject to severe condemnation. Ten years after that saw the publication of popular scientific studies by Karel Douděra (*Republika na úvěr*) in 1987 and Dušan Tomášek (*Deník druhé republiky*) in 1988, neither of which sought to avoid the same simplistic narrative of the earlier works, especially when it came to evaluating the political development and system of post-Munich Czechoslovakia. Vilém Hejl, who penned his essay *Rozvrat. Mnichov a náš osud* in exile, attempted to adopt a more balanced approach, analysing the defeats of Czechoslovak democracy in the 20th century.⁹

The fall of the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia opened the way for a dispassionate and critical examination of the Second Republic, free of prejudice and ideological restriction. In 1992 the historian Jan Kuklík published several of his studies in his work *Sociální demokraté ve Druhé republice*. The lawyer Pavel Mates, meanwhile, carried out an analysis of the judicial environment and legal norms in his text *Mezi Mnichovem a Berlínem. Státoprávní problémy druhé republiky*. In 1993, the Czech Army's Institute of History published a two-part volume entitled *Z druhé republiky*, in which five historians examined its various aspects, while further publications included *Ideový řád* (Ideological Order) of the *Mladá národní jednotu* (Young National Unity) and a short report on a discussion held at a seminar entitled *Rozklad druhé republiky*

9 HÁJEK, Miloš: *Od Mnichova k 15. březnu* /From Munich to March 15th/. Státní nakladatelství politické literatury, Prague 1959; LUKEŠ, František: *Podivný mír* /A Strange Peace/. Svoboda, Prague 1969; MOULIS, Miloslav: *Osudný 15. březen* /A Fateful March 15th/. Mladá fronta, Prague 1979. From factual literature there is DOUDĚRA, Karel: *Republika na úvěr* /Republic On Loan/. Novinář, Prague 1987; TOMÁŠEK, Dušan: *Deník druhé republiky* /Diary of the Second Republic/. Naše vojsko, Prague 1988. Essays: HEJL, Vilém: *Rozvrat. Mnichov a náš osud* /Disintegration. Munich and Our Fate/. Univerzum, Prague 1990.

(Decomposition of the Second Republic). The historian Jan Rataj in his book *O autoritativní národní stát* later examined the ideological transformation of Czech politics, although he too was held hostage by ideology, so on one hand we have the base and wretched Czech right driving the country towards the embrace of Nazi Germany, and on the other the Czech left, including the Communists, and their heartfelt defence of the remnants of democracy.¹⁰

To understand the Second Republic, the works of historians Jan Gebhart and Jan Kuklík are key. Together they have authored a number of studies, which initially appeared separately in expert publications and later in a monograph entitled *Druhá republika 1938–1939. Svár demokracie a totality v politickém, společenském a kulturním životě*. The publication represents a comprehensive examination of a contradictory period of Czech modern history. This intensive work became part of the fifteen-volume *Velké dějiny země Koruny České*, which depicts in two parts the periods of the Second Republic and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1938–1945).¹¹

The post-1989 era also saw a number of works mapping the bitter fates of the key figures in the Second Republic. There were three biographies of President Emil Hácha published in the 1990s. Historian Robert Kvaček and columnist Dušan Tomášek in their work *Causa Emil Hácha* attempted to provoke a public and expert debate on him, to no avail. But they were followed by the historians Tomáš Pasák, author of *Dr Emil Hácha (1938–1945)*, and Vít Machálek, with his *Prezident v zajetí. Život, činy a kříž Emila Háchy*. The historian Jaroslav Rokoský wrote the comprehensive biography *Rudolf Beran a jeho doba. Vzestup a pád agrární strany*. The theme of refugees was artfully handled by Jan Benda in his *Útěky a vyhánění z pohraničí českých zemí 1938–1939*. The literary historian Jaroslav Med completed many years of research with his book *Literární život ve stínu Mnichova 1938–1939*, in which he examines events in the literary world. Mary Heimann, an American historian living in the U.K., devoted a chapter to the Second Republic in her book *Czechoslovakia. The State that Failed*. A much neglected look at this period was also provided by the collection of works in *Česká politická pravice v letech 1938–1945*. Expert studies examining Jewish life of the period can be found in *Roz-*

- 10 Post-1989 history books have included: KUKLÍK, Jan: *Sociální demokraté ve Druhé republice /Social Democrats in the Second Republic/*. Univerzita Karlova, Prague 1992; MATES Pavel: *Mezi Mnichovem a Berlínem. Státoprávní problémy druhé republiky /Between Munich and Berlin. The Constitutional Problems of the Second Republic/*. Masarykova univerzita, Brno 1993; RATAJ, Jan – KLÍMEK, Antonín – ZUDOVÁ-LEŠKOVÁ, Zlatica: *Z druhé republiky 1–2 /From the Second Republic – parts 1–2/*. Historický ústav Armády ČR – Památník odboje, Prague 1993; RATAJ, Jan: *O autoritativní národní stát. Ideologické proměny české politiky v druhé republice 1938–1939 /The Authoritarian Nation State. The Ideological Transformations of Czech Politics in the Second Republic 1938–1939/* Karolinum, Prague 1997.
- 11 Of these studies see GEBHART, Jan – KUKLÍK, Jan: *Pomnichovská krize a vznik Strany národní jednoty /The Post-Munich Crisis and the Creation of the Party of National Unity/*. ČČH, 1992, Vol. 90, No. 3, pp. 365–393; GEBHART, Jan – KUKLÍK, Jan: *Strana národní jednoty – strana vládní a vládnoucí /The Party of National Unity – A Governing and Ruling Party/*. *Moderní dějiny*, 1993, No. 1, pp. 211–251. See the monograph: GEBHART, Jan – KUKLÍK, Jan: *Druhá republika 1938–1939. Svár demokracie a totality v politickém, společenském a kulturním životě /The Second Republic 1938–1939. The Struggle of Democracy and Totalitarianism in Political, Social and Cultural Life/*. Paseka, Prague – Litomyšl 2004; GEBHART, Jan – KUKLÍK, Jan: *Velké dějiny země Koruny České /Great History of the Czech Crown Lands/*, Vol. XV.a (1938–1945). Paseka, Prague – Litomyšl 2006.

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klad židovského života. 167 dní drubé republiky, a collection of texts by authors who are researchers in various fields. While the most recent attempt at examining the period is another collection of studies entitled *Druhá republika: 167 obyčejných dnů. Politické a mediální klima a jeho reflexe*.¹² But why, you ask, should we be interested in the Second Republic in the first place? There are many reasons, but one remains key: what happens to a society that is a functioning parliamentary democracy when it is exposed to a deep and fundamental shock?

A Sudetenland Separated

The Nazi military began occupying the Czech borderlands immediately on 1 October 1938. The first area to be evacuated was in the Šumava; Volary, Horní Planá and Vyšší Brod. The next in line were the northern hooks of Bohemia as well as Podmokly and Děčín. Between 3 and 5 October, Western Bohemia including Jáchymov, Karlový Vary, Loket, Cheb, Tachov and Teplá were all annexed. Then between 6 and 7 October the northern tips of Moravia and Silesia were relinquished. A fifth zone, mostly German speaking, was to be determined by a conference of ambassadors in Berlin. Almost one third of the Czech Lands had been lost, and with it substantial natural resources, especially coal and uranium ore.

On the afternoon of 3 October 1938 the German Chancellor Adolf Hitler and his entourage crossed what had days earlier been the Czechoslovak-German border at Aš. Hitler embarked on a victory ride through the annexed Sudetenland, receiving a rapturous welcome reminiscent of that which had greeted him after the Anschluss of Austria. His speech at Cheb's Town Hall attracted great attention, as he declared that he was fulfilling his manifesto as laid down in *Mein Kampf*. In the book, he had said that Germany's natural allies were England and Italy, while Germany's natural and eternal enemy would always be France. Greater Germany's first task, however, would be to bring all Germans into the Reich, after which the country would begin a struggle for the gradual conquest of the world, beginning with the destruction of France and then embarking eastwards.¹³ Arriving in Karlový Vary, he gave a speech

12 KVAČEK, Robert – TOMÁŠEK, Dušan: *Causa Emil Hácha* /The Case of Emil Hácha/. Themis, Prague 1995; PASÁK, Tomáš: *JUDr. Emil Hácha (1938–1945)*. Horizont, Prague 1997; MACHÁLEK, Vít: *Prezident v zajetí. Život, činy a kříž Emila Háchy* /A Captive President. The Life, Work and Cross of Emil Hácha/. Regulus, Prague 1998; ROKOSKÝ, Jaroslav: *Rudolf Beran a jeho doba. Vzestup a pád agrární strany* /Rudolf Beran and His Era. The Rise and Fall of the Agrarian Party/. ÚSTR – Vyšehrad, Prague 2011; BENDA, Jan: *Útěky a vyhnání z pohraničí českých zemí 1938–1939* /Flight and Expulsion from the Border Regions of the Czech Lands 1938–1939/. Karolinum, Prague 2014; MED, Jaroslav: *Literární život ve stínu Mnichova 1938–1939* /Literary Life in the Shadow of Munich 1938–1939/. Academia, Prague 2010; HEIMANN Mary: *Czechoslovakia. The State that Failed*. Yale University Press, New Haven – London 2009; VAŠEK, Richard – KLEČACKÝ, Martin (eds.): *Česká politická pravice v letech 1938–1945* /The Czech Political Right in the Years 1938–1945/. Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR, Prague 2016; ZOUFALÁ, Marcela – HOLÝ, Jiří (eds.): *Rozklad židovského života. 167 dní drubé republiky* /The Disintegration of Jewish Life. 167 Days in the Second Republic/. Academia, Prague 2016; JIRÁK, Jan – BEDNAŘÍK, Petr – KÖPPLOVÁ, Barbara a kol.: *Druhá republika: 167 obyčejných dnů. Politické a mediální klima a jeho reflexe* /The Second Republic: 167 Ordinary Days. The Political and Media Climate and its Reflection/. Karolinum, Prague 2017.

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from the balcony of the town theatre. Following a welcome by K. H. Frank, deputy leader of the Sudeten German Party, Hitler told the crowd: *For twenty years you were far from your nation, and for twenty years I have remained faithful in my belief in the nation. The entire German nation stood ready to liberate the Sudeten Germans – with violence if necessary. I did not know how I would one day arrive here. But I knew that I would one day stand in this spot. At this moment we can do nothing but think about our eternal German nation and our Reich.*¹⁴ Hitler savoured his triumph. In truth he cared little about the Sudeten Germans; they were a mere excuse for the destruction of Czechoslovakia. He toured the Czechoslovak border fortifications, without doubt relieved that it would no longer be necessary to conquer them.

Most Sudeten Germans were euphoric, and openly manifested their joy at becoming part of the German Reich. There were rising attacks by the ordners, the armed paramilitary units of the Sudeten German Party, on local Czechs, Jews and other opponents of the Nazis. The majority of the minority Czech population fled or were driven out of the Sudetenland. Those Czechs who had decided to stay were deprived of all their national rights and became second class citizens.¹⁵

The final extent of territory that would be handed over to Germany was decided by a commission of ambassadors of the signatory countries which met in Berlin, again following a Nazi script. On 21 October, the borders of the fifth zone were drawn up, and the decision once more came as a shock. Germany was awarded all territory where, according to the 1910 census, the German population exceeded 51 %. The fact that the fifth zone was drawn up based on the results of an Austro-Hungarian census essentially ignored the existence of the Czechoslovak Republic. Great Britain and France also ignored the principle of national self-determination; the principle which had allegedly caused the Munich crisis and which was meant to be the basis of redrawing the borders.

From the seized territory the Nazis created a Sudetenland Reichsgau – an administrative region – in which Henlein’s Sudeten German Party, after five years of existence in the Czechoslovak Republic, merged with the German NSDAP.¹⁶ Jindřich

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- 13 Hitlerův projev na chebské radnici (Hitler’s speech at Cheb Town Hall). *Právo lidu*, 4. 10. 1938, p. 1.
- 14 Hitler v Karlových Varech /Hitler in Karlovy Vary/. *Právo lidu*, 5. 10. 1938, p. 3; Hitler v obsazeném území /Hitler in the occupied territory/. *Lidové noviny*, 10. 10. 1938, p. 2. See KERSHAW, Ian: *Hitler 1889–1936: Hybris*. Argo, Prague 2004; SAME AUTHOR: *Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis*. Argo, Prague 2005.
- 15 All political parties were banned, followed by all Czech associations with the exception of local volunteer fire brigades. Czech schools were closed, and from December 1938 official communication with the authorities was to be in German only. See KURAL, Václav – RADVANOVSKÝ, Zdeněk at al.: *„Sudety“ pod hákovým křížem /The “Sudetenland” Under the Swastika/*. Albis International, Ústí nad Labem 2002.
- 16 The Sudeten German Party was founded originally as the Sudeten German Homeland Front (Sudetendeutsche Heimatsfront – SHF) on 1 October 1933, following the banning of several nationalist ethnic German parties. In mid-April 1935 it was renamed the Sudeten German Party (Sudetendeutsche Partei – SdP) for the parliamentary elections, as it could not participate as a free-standing grouping. With its agile demagoguery it won the support of a substantial proportion of the German-speaking population and in the elections became the single largest party in Czechoslovakia. At first the party was internally quite varied, but under the leadership of Konrad Henlein, a former gym teacher from AS, it fell increasingly under the sway of Nazi Germany. In March 1938, following the

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Strauss from Dolní Žleb, a village which is now part of the town of Děčín, remembered the period: *After Munich the Děčín Railway Inspector Köhler called my dad and said: "So what are we going to do with you Strauss? You're not a founding member of the Party. You're not an honorary member of the Party. You're not even IN the Party! Strauss, you can go and get your spade."* So Dad started digging holes for railway sleepers. His father Herman was a Czech German, while his mother Antonie was Czech. The family were Social Democrats.¹⁷ German anti-fascists, who found themselves in a substantial minority, were persecuted in various ways. Czech Germans, enchanted by Hitler's successes, did not realise that they would pay for their annexation from the Czechoslovak Republic with the loss of democracy.

A Shaken Society

Czechoslovakia's territorial losses were painful and were not confined to ceding land to Germany. Following the signing of the Munich Agreement, Poland and its powerful foreign minister Józef Beck also made territorial demands, delivering an ultimatum to Czechoslovakia to immediately give up the area of Teschen Silesia. Poland had never been able to reconcile itself with the area's division under a treaty signed by the Entente powers in 1920, in which Czechoslovakia exploited the fact that Poland was heavily distracted by its war with Soviet Russia. The dispute over the Teschen region, where it was difficult to draw clear borders on a map, had permanent consequences for relations between the two states in the interwar period. On 1 October 1938 the region was occupied by the Polish Army and immediately integrated into Poland's political and social system.¹⁸

The determination to defend the country, so visible in Czech society from the mobilisation or the 10th Sokol gathering from the summer of 1938, was replaced with disillusionment and a sense of disaster. The editor-in-chief of the Social Democrats' party newspaper *Právo lidu* Josef Stivín said in despair: *The governing circles of every nation are selfish and think only of themselves. We said in the introduction to our constitution [of 29 February 1920] that "We aspire to join the society of nations as an educated, peaceful, democratic and progressive member."* We may now be forced to search with a candle for other nations who think the same.¹⁹

Anschluss of Austria, two German civic parties merged with the SdP, the Farmers' League (Bund der Landwirte – BdL) and the German Christian Social People's Party (Deutsche Christlich soziale Volkspartei – DCV). The SdP refused to cooperate with the Czechoslovak government, carried out an attempted putsch, which was put down, and on 16 September 1938 the party was formally dissolved by the Czechoslovak authorities.

17 *Archive of the author*, testimony of Jindřich Strauss, Ústí nad Labem, 20. 3. 2018.

18 BORÁK, Mečislav: Těšínské Slezsko v rámci okupovaného pohraničí v letech 1938–1945 /Teschen Silesia as part of the occupied borderlands in the years 1938–1945/. In: *Historie okupovaného pohraničí 11 /History of the Occupied Borderlands No. 11/*. Univerzita J. E. Purkyně – Albis International, Ústí nad Labem 2006, pp. 83–136.

19 STIVÍN, Josef: Zachráněný mír? /A Rescued Peace?/. *Právo lidu*, 2. 10. 1938, p. 1. See *Ústava republiky Československé /Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic/*. Všeohr, Prague 1920.

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Those who had stayed loyal to Masaryk's republic and believed that democracy would win in the end found themselves in a desperate situation. The painter and writer Josef Čapek made the following entry in his diary: *For many of us, almost the entire world collapsed that autumn of 1938. We live in ruins, our ideas about the justice of history, the price of morality and the strength of the truth deeply shaken. What misery, and yet – what a lifetime's task!*²⁰

In his immediate reaction to Munich, still in the initial shock, his more famous brother Karel Čapek wrote the following in *Lidové noviny*: *The blow landed; we took it with clenched teeth, but we will not wail and moan. Quietly and firmly we make a promise: we will live and help each other live in order to see a better outlook for our future. And a better outlook for the future of humanity, not the one that disappointed us today, but one which will make even the fate of nations. Let us be sure of ourselves: sure in history, and in of itself. Let us be sure of ourselves and that is all we require at this moment.*²¹

The Munich Agreement immediately made its mark on internal political developments and the country's foreign policy. It led to a cascade of upheavals. President Edvard Beneš, for years the architect of Czechoslovak foreign policy, was forced by Berlin to resign. Even the majority of Czechoslovak politicians and army officers were convinced he must stand down. Beneš quickly did so, but he never forgot how many of his own supporters joined the calls for his abdication, which wounded him deeply.²² In his resignation speech, he spoke of how he could be seen as someone who would *serve as an obstacle to developments which our country must now adjust to.*²³

But even before his resignation, General Syrový reorganised his cabinet.²⁴ The most fundamental change in the reshuffle, which took place on 4 October 1938, was at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the historian and diplomat Kamil Krofta, who was a close confidante of Beneš, was replaced by the Agrarian Party member and long-time Vatican envoy František Chvalkovský. It was once again a caretaker government, filled with several new ministers. The ministries of Post, Railways, Public Works and Defence were to be run by army generals while the Mayor of Prague, Petr Zenkl, became Minister for Social Care and Health.

Fifty-year-old Syrový was a soldier, and had no great desire to remain as prime minister; he was not a general-turned-politician. His interest in politics was restricted to how it affected the interests of the army. He did not consider himself to be a politician; he merely carried out the wishes of President Beneš and the government. The second Syrový government was forced to quickly take many important decisions and issue a range of measures to allow the weakened state to make the transition to the new

20 ČAPEK, Josef: *Přáno do mraků 1936–1939*, p. 283.

21 ČAPEK, Karel: *Budeme žít / We Will Live /*. *Lidové noviny*, 1. 10. 1938, p. 1.

22 See for instance MASÁŘÍK, Hubert: *V proměnách Evropy. Paměti československého diplomata*, p. 258.

23 KUBÁTOVÁ, Ludmila – MALÁ, Irena – SOUKUP, Jaroslav – VRBATA, Jaroslav (eds.): *Protifašistický a národně osvobozenecký boj českého a slovenského lidu 1938–1945. Edice dokumentů / The Anti-Fascist and National Liberation Struggle of the Czech and Slovak People 1938–1945. Edition of Documents /*, Part I, Vol. 3, Book 1. National Central Archive, Prague 1985, Document No. 700, pp. 51–53.

24 *Prezident Beneš provedl rekonstrukci vlády / President Beneš Reorganised Government /*. *Lidové noviny*, 5. 10. 1938, p. 1.

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conditions without further heavy damage. The state administration was streamlined; five ministries were merged together. Numerous lower state bodies simplified their activities, the army was gradually demobilised and the defence measures overturned – a million men who had been ready to fight to defend their country returned home.

In mid-October 1938 Foreign Minister František Chvalkovský departed for an audience with Ribbentrop and Hitler in Berlin. He was not, of course, the only one. At the same time Ernst Kundt, who spoke for the Second Republic's ethnic Germans, had also departed for the Reich to receive his instructions.²⁵ During his talks with Ribbentrop, Chvalkovský learnt that Hitler would instead receive him in Munich, not Berlin. The new minister's chief secretary Hubert Masařík remembered the night-time train journey as one of the worst experiences of his life: *They gave us a dusty old turn-of-the-century saloon car that had once belonged to the King of Saxony; threadbare and reeking of mothballs and preserving fluids. The main problem, though, was Chvalkovský's deteriorating health – he was prone to attacks of tuberculosis. He was really in terrible shape; probably due to the nervous tension he had a fever of more than forty degrees. It was just the two of us in the carriage and I had to administer to him all the way to Munich. I wasn't sure he would even be well enough to meet Hitler.*²⁶

The 53-year-old Chvalkovský, aware of the importance of the meeting for retaining “good relations” with Germany, arrived on time to meet the Nazi leader. A number of Nazi officials, including Minister Ribbentrop, were waiting in the antechamber. *I felt not the slightest inkling of the greatness of his personality*, said Masařík, recalling the moment when he first set eyes on Hitler, adding that he was simply curious to see him in the flesh. *He was an absolutely ordinary looking man in black trousers and a brown coat who reminded me of an Indian fakir, who was charming not snakes but Germans. There was nothing remarkable about him except his eyes, the eyes of a fakir.*²⁷ Hitler ushered Chvalkovský into a conference room, where he threatened him that there was no other way than with Germany. The Czech nation must abandon the redundant policies of Beneš and rid themselves of his entire influence in the internal politics of the much reduced state. For emphasis he slammed his fist onto the table and roared that if this did not come to pass by 8am, he would destroy everything that remained of the Czechoslovak Republic.²⁸

A glance at the map brought about feelings of anxiety; the German border now ran just forty kilometres from Prague, so any attempt to hold off an attack by Hitler would be an act of desperation. *Our former allies have all taken away all the assumptions upon which we could have come to some political arrangement with them. So we will not do so. All we ask, is that no-one tells us that what we are about to do is the ideal solution. It is enough for us to know that it is a necessity*, wrote the disappointed, but pragmatic columnist Ferdinand Peroutka.²⁹

25 For more on the German minority see GEBHART, Jan – KUKLÍK, Jan: *Druhá republika 1938–1939. Svár demokracie a totality v politickém, společenském a kulturním životě*, pp. 141–150.

26 MASARÍK, Hubert: *V proměnách Evropy. Paměti československého diplomata*, p. 261.

27 Ibid., p. 262.

28 Ibid.

29 PEROUTKA, Ferdinand: *Co se změnilo /What Has Changed/. Přítomnost*, 1938, Vol. 15, No. 42 (19. 10. 1938), p. 658.

Looking for Someone to Blame

Czech society was struck by a feeling of anger and injustice over its cruel fate. People looked for scapegoats who could be held responsible for what had happened. Pointing the finger at the main culprit – Hitler’s Germany – was impossible under the circumstances. So blame was sought closer to home.

An angry public turned its gaze towards President Beneš, who following his abdication retreated to his villa in Sezimovo Ústí, where he spent two weeks surrounded by his relatives and closest advisers. The fierce attacks on Beneš came not just from the political right wing, but also from disheartened left-wing supporters and even from the Castle itself.³⁰ His popularity amongst a wide spectrum of the public had evaporated. Beneš refused to respond to the attacks. Even though he felt deeply wounded by them, he remained silent. It must be said that in many cases the attacks were exaggerated and unjust. On 22 October, Beneš left what remained of Czechoslovakia and flew with his wife Hana to London, from where he departed for Chicago, one of the main centres of the Czech and Slovak community in the United States. Here he taught at university, and began work on the Czechoslovak foreign resistance.

Is it the fault of one man? asked Ferdinand Peroutka. He complained bitterly that the entire blame for Munich was being heaped at the door of President Beneš, and that this was also being done by those on the left, who had been his supporters. The literary historian Václav Černý recalled how he had fallen out with František Bidlo at the *Kritický měsíčník* (Critical Monthly) for what he saw as an unforgivable act.³¹ He was referring to Bidlo’s caricature in the publication *Obnova* (Renewal), which showed a smiling Beneš with a huge, crippled republic above him – a depiction which he found outrageous.³² The designer and cartoonist Bidlo, who had been a lifelong leftist and for some time a Communist, also produced several illustrations for František Hrubín’s epigram in *Obnova*.³³

The former political rivalry between President Beneš and the Agrarian Party, the largest state-forming party in the First Republic, also changed to reflect the new circumstances, as can be seen in articles appearing in the Agrarian press. *The course of events hurtles past us like a waterfall. The map of Europe is changing, opinions and values that once seemed eternal have gone up in flames*, wrote Rudolf Halík, editor-in-chief of the Agrarian newspaper *Venkov* (Countryside), in a call for balance and calm. *Let us believe,*

30 The Castle – a specifically Czech phenomenon, a centre of power built during the 1920s which contributed to the country’s stability and democracy. The “Castle” refers to a group of politicians and personalities who initially defended and implemented the interests of Tomáš G. Masaryk and later Edvard Beneš. Castle policy in Czechoslovakia’s First Republic can be defined as implementing general democratic principles with an emphasis on the humanist aspect of politics and moderate support for socialist parties, especially in social matters.

31 ČERNÝ, Václav: *Křik Koruny České. Paměti 1938–1945* /The Cry of the Czech Crown. Memoirs 1938–1945/. Atlantis, Brno 1992, p. 23.

32 JEHLÍČKA, Ladislav: *Křik Koruny svatováclavské* /The Cry of St Václav’s Crown/. Torst, Prague 2010, p. 244.

33 Ibid.

that [Beneš] was led [to resign] by the most serious reasons that he considered in order to make his decision. This is not the time to examine causes and reasons. At this time, the ability to keep silent will serve as balsam for our open wounds. At this time, we must not criticize, we must not draw conclusions. Instead we must accept this fateful decision as a matter of our own.³⁴ But the disappointment was too painful for the Agrarians to keep silent. The Agrarian press joined the critics of Beneš's foreign policy; not even the party's initial rejection of Beneš's election as president in December 1935 was forgotten – an election about which Venkov journalist Ferdinand Kahánek had just written a book called *Behind the Scenes of Dr Beneš's Presidential Election*.³⁵ Let us not judge, but let us understand that the era of Beneš is over, wrote Halík, adding the less we say about the man after whom this era is named, the better.³⁶

Blame was also directed at those political parties who had allegedly put party interests first and neglected those of the country. The columnist Ferdinand Peroutka, who took pride in realistic writing and criticism of political parties in the periodicals *Přítomnost* and *Lidové noviny*, held them to account and was regularly criticised for doing so. Now he watched with astonishment as the parties themselves went far beyond his reproaches and subjected one another to crushing and ruthless criticism.³⁷ *People are sick to death of political parties*, wrote Stříbrný's tabloid *Polední list* newspaper. *Party meetings are forbidden. If they were allowed, the meeting rooms of most political parties would probably be empty. There is no mood for meetings. People are sick and tired of party politics. They say: Leave us alone! and far worse things. You know what they say. You hear it daily in the tram, on the street, in the workshop, the office, or wherever you happen to be.*³⁸

The Agrarians did not in fact turn on the First Republic, as they are so often (stereotypically) accused of doing. To do so would have been to turn on themselves; they were the only party that had been represented in every single coalition government of the First Republic, and the prime minister was almost invariably an Agrarian. On the contrary, they resented the attacks against their party and its leaders. Accusations of treason were levelled at former Prime Minister Milan Hodža, former Interior Minister Josef Černý, former Minister of National Defence František Machník, whose wife Antonie – a Czech from town Chrudim – was accused of being a relative of Henlein or Hitler, and also Rudolf Beran, who had been chairman of the party since the autumn of 1935. In the party newspaper, they called for an end to the “whispered propaganda” which they suspected was mainly the work of the Communists and Czech

34 HALÍK, Rudolf: K odstoupení presidenta republiky dra Beneše (On the Resignation of President Beneš/. *Venkov*, 7. 10. 1938, p. 1.

35 KAHÁNEK, Ferdinand: *Zákulisti presidentské volby Dr. Beneše* /Behind the Scenes of Dr Beneš's Presidential Election/. Evropské vydavatelstvo, Prague 1939.

36 *Venkov*, 11. 11. 1938, p. 1.

37 PEROUTKA, Ferdinand: Úvaha o stranách /Thoughts on Political Parties/. *Přítomnost*, 1938, Vol. 15, No. 45 (9. 11. 1938), p. 705.

38 Jednotu! /Unity!/. *Polední list*, 19. 10. 1938, p. 3.

39 HALÍK, Rudolf: Vypátrejte prameny zločinné propagandy /Root Out the Source of Criminal Propaganda/. *Venkov*, 13. 10. 1938, p. 1; Prameny lživé propagandy /The Sources of Lying Propaganda/. *Venkov*, 19. 10. 1938, p. 3.

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fascists.³⁹ The Agrarians were democrats who remained faithful to the legacy of their former leader Antonín Švehla, whose memory they honoured, respected and protected. *If my system fails, Svehla once said, I will leave politics. I will take my walking stick and satchel and go from village to village and tell people what they have gained from Republican independence, and what would happen to them if they lost it.*⁴⁰

Evidence of the “popularity” of politicians in this turbulent atmosphere can be seen in the decision by General Syrový’s cabinet to clamp down harshly against the authors, publishers and distributors of pamphlets condemning members of the government.⁴¹ However, it was of little use. In a hostile atmosphere which saw an explosion of Czech negativism, everyone was blamed; President Beneš, Tomáš G. Masaryk, political parties, ministers, politicians, journalists, teachers, freemasons, Jews...

The Czech politician Jiří Strjíbrný had no intention of immediately settling scores with the past, even if he had been left smarting from his expulsion from the National Social Party in September 1926; instead his response was to ask for help for those in need. But the newspapers of the publishing company Tempo, which he founded with his brother and which published several periodicals of a tabloid character, were filled with demands for a break with the past, including the dissolution of all political parties.⁴² And Strjíbrný, who was involved in the birth of Czechoslovakia on 28 October, 1918, insisted that the new system could not be constructed by those who had been responsible for Munich.⁴³ He launched a fierce newspaper campaign against Beneš, culminating in the treatise *Kramář’s Trial of Beneš*.⁴⁴ He himself went after the followers of the man he saw as the chief culprit: *The first three days they were silent. But now they’re twitching into life. They’re crawling out like earthworms after the rain. You see them again in almost all the newspapers with the “Gaston Cadets” and perfumed socialists of the Castle, who for 20 years bravely lashed out at all sides with their Indian tomahawks as soon as some defiant soul dared to peep his head above the parapet.*⁴⁵

Right-wing intellectuals, especially Catholic writers, were enraged – not with spiteful pleasure “*that things had turned out the way they had*” but fury “*that things had turned out the way they had*” as Ladislav Jehlička aptly put it in hindsight.⁴⁶ As one of them pointed out; they had grown up in an atmosphere of anti-Catholic struggle, that from

40 The Agrarians always had one of Švehla’s remarks to hand, but this one was quoted to them by Peroutka, who believed they could be more moderate. PEROUTKA, Ferdinand: Švehlova tradice I. /Švehla’s Tradition I/. *Prítomnost*, 1938, Vol. 15, No. 50 (14. 12. 1938), p. 786.

41 *The National Archives Prague* (hereafter referred to as NA), f. Předsednictvo ministerské rady (Presidium of the Council of Ministers, hereafter referred to as PMR), Box 4144, inventory (inv.) No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 21 November 1938.

42 Rozpusťte všechny politické strany /Dissolve All Political Parties/. *Polední list*, 4. 10. 1938, p. 1.

43 STRÍBRNÝ, Jiří: Stavitelé, jimž už dvakrát spadl barák /The Builders Who Have Twice Constructed A Building That Has Fallen Down/. *Polední list*, 12. 10. 1938, p. 1.

44 *Kramářův soud nad Benešem. Spor dr. K. Kramáře s ministrem zahraničních věcí dr. E. Benešem* /Kramář’s Trial of Beneš. The Dispute Between Dr K. Kramář and Foreign Minister Dr E. Beneš/. Tempo, Prague 1938.

45 STRÍBRNÝ, Jiří: Neopakujme chybu 28. října /Let Us Not Repeat The Mistake of 28 October/. *Polední list*, 19. 10. 1938, p. 1.

46 JEHLIČKA, Ladislav: *Křik Koruny svatováclavské*, p. 242.

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a political perspective they had succumbed to the foolish idea that everything could have been different if only the nation had been raised in the Catholic spirit instead of gradual but continual laicization, if only there had been a different interpretation of history, if instead of landless progress which did not know which way to jump true tradition was cultivated, if only the spirit of writers Březina, Dyk and historian Pekař had prevailed over the spirit of Masaryk. He admitted that in that case things would truly have turned out differently but it would not have changed the country's geopolitical position or its situation.⁴⁷ The Catholics, especially concentrated around the magazines *Řád* and *Obnova*, expressed their anger and indignation.⁴⁸ To this day one is struck by the lack of tolerance shown by so many excellent writers and Christians.⁴⁹

In this case, however, it is particularly obvious that many of the phenomena of the Second Republic had deeper roots and certainly did not come as a bolt from the blue, but rather the result of long-term processes, discourses and polemics. Throughout the 1930s, democracy was criticised as slow, cumbersome and incapable of dealing with the problems of the time. In the wake of the Great depression, this was primarily its failure to offer adequate solutions to social matters. Liberal capitalism had no answer for them. The crisis of democracy only grew, and culminated in Munich: democracy was weak, and it lost.

It was not just the right, as is still often claimed, but the left too. Columnist Ferdinand Peroutka, writing about the disturbance of the nation's character, wrote: *It won't help to run madly from one thing to another, spitting without dignity on things that yesterday we worshipped and going from one extreme to another, as some people and magazines have been doing – people and magazines whom we would have least expected to do so. Some articles published recently by people from the former left wing were written without dignity. Their only significance was in showing the world that the author was in such a mental state that he was beating blindly about himself.*⁵⁰ Peroutka missed the ability to look at matters in a sober light: *Although we are living in bad times, I have not ceased believing that the truth has its price, if not another, then at least that by searching for it judgment is improved and character strengthened. Some people now mock the fact that we have the slogan "Truth Will Prevail" in our national emblem. But what should we do? Should we – in a cowardly act of revisionism – replace it with the words: "Run From The Truth?"* asked Peroutka.⁵¹

Almost everyone wrote or said something that he bitterly regretted. It was the result of the pain and despair suffered by democrats on both right and left. On 4 October, *Lidové noviny* published an article signed "Petr Bily", in which he wrote: *We have made mistakes, as we have many times in the past, out of idealism [...] We were naïve,*

47 Ibid., p. 243.

48 For details see MED, Jaroslav: *Literární život ve stínu Mnichova 1938–1939.*

49 Catholic intellectuals and writers had serious reservations about the liberal democratic character of the Czechoslovak First Republic, especially in its attitudes towards Christian values. They were irritated by Masaryk's very reserved relationship with religion, Čapek's pragmatism and relativism and Peroutka's lukewarm feelings about faith.

50 PEROUTKA, Ferdinand: *Zavinil to jeden muž? /Is This The Fault Of One Man?/. Přítomnost, 1938, Vol. 15, No. 41 (12. 10. 1938), p. 641.*

51 Ibid.

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and believed that fidelity would be repaid by fidelity, rather than betrayal [...]. We wanted to die for a better tomorrow and maybe we would have been better off dead. Well, we will live this bad present for a better tomorrow, and if we cannot sing with the angels, we will howl with the wolves [...]. If the world is not to be ruled by law, but by force – then let us ensure our place is where there is greater power and greater determination.⁵² The text, which is improperly attributed to Ferdinand Peroutka, was actually written by journalist and politician Jan Stránský. It is hard to imagine the author writing these words during the First Republic; even a week previously they would have been unthinkable. Now, however, they perfectly depicted the hangover and malice of Munich.

The literary historian Václav Černý penned the following apt words about the Second Republic: *Those five months of the Second Republic, the most incredible moment in our lives, the most fantastic dream as if we were living on the Moon, as if we were about to wake up or fall into the abyss at any moment! A voyage of punished castaways, clinging to a broken sailboat without a sail, launched with no idea of a destination onto the open sea.*⁵³

Changes to the Constitutional Order

In the stormy days after Munich the Slovak Question was once again put on the agenda. Syrový had no choice but to address Slovak demands as swiftly as possible. The chief demand was clear: the Slovaks were demanding autonomy, and the Czechs had no option but to grant it. In this frantic period, when events were accelerating at a dizzying pace, it was essential to maintain the integrity of the state and prevent it from falling apart. What Czech politicians had denied to the Slovaks for twenty years, out of fear that if they granted it to the Slovaks, the Sudeten Germans would claim it too, became reality within a few days. Under the baton of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSES), autonomy for Slovakia was proclaimed on 6 October 1938 at the Catholic House in Žilina.⁵⁴

Political autonomy for Slovakia changed the country's constitutional order. The most fundamental change was the de facto federalisation of the state, as well as the rapid rise to power of the HSES. Led by the charismatic Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka, it had been the most powerful political party in Slovakia since the mid-1920s, when it triumphed in each parliamentary and municipal election, although its share never exceeded 30 % of the vote. In the 1930s, it pursued a consistent policy of opposition, skilfully interconnecting religious and national ideology and benefitting from the reluctance of Czech politicians to understand and recognise the existence of a separate Slovak nation. The most powerful politician in Slovakia was Jozef Tiso. A Catholic priest who just a few weeks earlier had spoken at Hlinka's grave about remaining faithful to the Czechoslovak Republic, he was now appointed to head an auto-

52 BÍLÝ, Petr: *Nová Evropa /A New Europe/*. *Lidové noviny*, 4. 10. 1938, p. 1.

53 ČERNÝ, Václav: *Křik Koruny české. Paměti 1938–1945*, p. 65.

54 Constitutional law No. 299/1938 Sb. z. a n. on the autonomy of Slovakia was passed by the National Assembly on 22 November 1938. For more on the legal establishment of Slovak autonomy, see RYCHLÍK, Jan: *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Spolupráce a konflikty 1914–1992 /Czechs and Slovaks in the 20th Century. Cooperation and Conflict 1914–1992/*. ÚSTR – Vyšehrad, Prague 2012, pp. 162–165.

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mous Slovak government.⁵⁵ Tiso held not only the post of Prime Minister but also Interior Minister. Matúš Černák, a professor at a state secondary school in Bratislava, was responsible for education, Ferdinand Ďurčanský, a Bratislava lawyer, was given justice, social care and health, MP Pavol Teplanský was put in charge of agriculture, public works and finance, and finally MP Ján Lichner was made responsible for transport. The Slovak ministers were simultaneously members of Czechoslovakia's central government, which retained exclusive control over foreign affairs, national defence and certain financial matters. In spite of internal contradictions, the Slovaks agreed that politics in Slovakia would first and foremost reflect Slovak interests and that Slovaks themselves would bear responsibility for them.⁵⁶

National unity was also in the Slovak interest, because the Great Powers demanded that Czechoslovakia settle the border claims of the Poles and the Hungarians within three months.⁵⁷ Poland and its foreign minister Józef Beck were not satisfied with the occupation of the Teschen region and reiterated its old claims to the northern Slovak regions of Spiš and Orava, where it acquired several villages. But the most palpable demands came from Hungary. And they exceeded all expectations. The position of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia was to be resolved by the Great Powers of Germany and Italy as arbiters of territorial claims, and the worst fears were fulfilled.

At 7 p.m. on 2 November 1938, the Czechoslovak delegation arrived at the Belvedere Palace in Vienna. Shortly afterwards Foreign Minister František Chvalkovský and the Slovak Prime Minister Jozef Tiso were invited to join the arbiters, the German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop and his Italian counterpart Ciano. The pair announced the results of the arbitration and handed them a protocol, with an attached map showing the new borders drawn on top. In the wake of persistent lack of interest by the western powers, who had promised at Munich to guarantee the borders of the Second Czechoslovak Republic, Slovakia lost a substantial part of its territory. It contained 860,000 people, of whom more than a third were of Slovak nationality.⁵⁸

55 See for example KAMENEC, Ivan: *Tragédia politika, knäza a človeka. Dr. Jozef Tiso 1887–1947* /The Tragedy of a Politician, Priest and Person. Dr Jozef Tiso 1887–1947/. Archa, Bratislava 1998.

56 Negotiations on Slovak autonomy between President Beneš and the HSEŠ had taken place even before Munich. On Monday 3 October 1938, Matúš Černák, Minister Without Portfolio in Jan Syrový's caretaker government, requested an audience with President Beneš, in which he demanded that all executive power in Slovakia be handed over to Slovak officials determined by the HSEŠ within 24 hours. If Beneš refused, he said, he would resign. When the president pointed out that it would be impossible in both constitutional and technical terms to accede to such a demand in such a short time, Černák answered that other significant things had happened in the country when relations were being consolidated and when such serious circumstances demanded it. *Slovák*, 4. 10. 1938, p. 1.

57 In October 1938 Nazi Germany annexed Petržalka, a suburb of Bratislava, and also Devín Castle. Petržalka – prvá územná strata Slovenska /Petržalka – Slovakia's First Territorial Loss/. *Slovák*, 11. 10. 1938, p. 2.

58 The post-Munich republic lost Košice, Užhorod, Rožňava, Levice, Lučenec, Senec, Galanta, Nové Zámky, Komárno and Rimavska Sobota; all were ceded to Hungary, which occupied 10,400 km² of Slovak territory. The loss reopened old wounds in Slovak society; wounds which people thought had healed over the previous twenty years. See Report by Foreign Minister Chvalkovský on the course of negotiations in Vienna on 2 November 1938 about the causes of the final results of the arbitration. NA, f. PMR, Box 4144, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak gov-

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From the 5th to the 10th of November 1938, Czechoslovakia was forced to cede to the Kingdom of Hungary a substantial swathe of southern and eastern Slovakia, which it had obtained in 1920 under the Treaty of Trianon.⁵⁹ Miklós Horthy, the conservative nationalist Regent of Hungary, rode a white horse into Košice at the head of his Royal Honvéd Army.⁶⁰ The Slovaks were deeply dismayed. Jozef Tiso bitterly declared that a great wrong had been committed against the Slovak nation, but that nothing could be done, except bow one's head and continue working. Responsibility was immediately attributed to the politicians of Czechoslovak's First Republic, who had for the previous twenty years decided our fate with neither our participation nor our will.⁶¹

Relatively quickly, conditions in Slovakia became more radical than in the neighbouring Czech Lands. Calls such as *Discredited politicians – Disappear!* were far from unusual.⁶² Karol Sidor, a thirty-seven-year-old who had challenged Tiso for the post of party leader, said that this marked the end of Czechoslovak political parties, the end of their repackaged versions in Slovakia, because they had totally failed. He wrote that the youth who supported them were young idealists who had entirely compromised themselves, these young people who thought they were being good Slovaks and Christians even when they were working for Czechoslovak political parties and recruiting gullible Slovaks into voting for them.⁶³ The ruling HSĽS promised a new, better Slovakia.⁶⁴ This meant not only the “unification” of political parties, but also trade unions, sports organisations and other social organisations. Opposition newspapers were banned, censorship intensified, and public life was “purified”. Slovak medical students in Bratislava, for example, demanded the radical purging of the faculty of certain Czech professors. They were professors, as the *Slovák* daily reported,

ernment held on 4 November 1938. See BYSTRICKÝ, Valerián: *Od autonómie k vzniku Slovenského štátu / From Autonomy to the Emergence of the Slovak State/*. Prodana, Bratislava 2008; LIPTÁK, Eubomír: *Slovensko v 20. storočí / Slovakia in the 20th Century/*. Kalligram, Bratislava 1998.

- 59 On the basis of the Trianon peace treaty of 4 June 1920, Hungary was deprived of two-thirds of the territory it enjoyed during the Austro-Hungarian Empire and as a result, more than three million Hungarians found themselves living outside the country's borders. The newly-drawn borders were influenced by the economic and strategic interests of Hungary's neighbours. The new state of Czechoslovakia obtained Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia and the territory of Slovakia. Hungary strove for the revision of the treaty, regarding it as unjust and humiliating.
- 60 Bells rang out across Hungary on 11 November 1938. Horthy promised Slovaks freedom of language and culture. Among those who welcomed him was János Esterházy, up until that point MP for the Košice electoral region, who would remain a citizen of Czechoslovakia. Thirty-seven-year-old Esterházy proclaimed that he would surrender his mandate and asked for the national feelings of those Slovaks who now found themselves in Hungary to be respected, and for them to be allowed to live as those Hungarians who remained citizens of Czechoslovakia. Horthy vjel do Košíc /Horthy Rides Into Košice/. *Právo ľudu (Ranní noviny)*, 12. 11. 1938, p. 1.
- 61 A speech by Slovak Prime Minister Jozef Tiso, broadcast on all Slovak radio stations before midnight on 2 November 1938. Niet príčiny k maľomyseľnosti! /No Cause For Despondency!/. *Slovák*, 4. 11. 1938, p. 1.
- 62 „Musí sa vymeniť garnitura!“ Zmiznite, skrachovaní politici! /“The Governing Elite Must Be Replaced!” Discredited politicians – Disappear!/. *Slovák*, 5. 10. 1938, pp. 2–3.
- 63 SIDOR, Karol: Slovo k politickej situácii /A Word to the Politic situation/. *Slovák*, 19. 10. 1938, s. 1.
- 64 See for example ĎURČANSKÝ, Ferdinand: Som sluhom svojho národa slovenského /I Am A Servant To My Slovak Nation/. *Slovák*, 16. 10. 1938, p. 5.

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who had for the past twenty years not served Slovak interests, but rather were tools of a policy which had prioritised the unity of the Czechoslovak nation at any cost, even if this had destroyed the lives of dozens of young Slovaks. Slovak medical students walked out of their lectures in silent, disciplined columns, to emphasise in no uncertain terms that Slovak, not Czech professors should be lecturing at a Slovak university. And they did not let a single Jew into the auditorium.⁶⁵

Thousands of Czechs were forced to flee Slovakia at short notice, while teachers, officials and other state employees either resigned or were chased out of their posts. The newly established Hlinka Guard, the military wing of the HSEŠ, intimidated citizens of different nationalities or those with opposing views.⁶⁶ *We in the government received daily reports of injustices committed against Czechs, and that the Hlinka Guard was persecuting Czech officials*, recalled Minister of Agriculture Ladislav Karel Feierabend, adding that the reports came not only from the affected persons and their families, but also from those Slovaks who had remained loyal to the Czechoslovak Republic.⁶⁷ Successive prime ministers of the Second Republic raised the issue of the treatment of Czech employees with their Slovak counterparts on several occasions, and even called for anti-Czech articles in the press to be toned down, but without great success.⁶⁸

Slovak society became increasingly radicalised, and the first attacks against the Jews took place. Leaders of the autonomous Slovak government legalised the activities of the Deutsche Partei, the German Nazi Party in Slovakia, headed by Franz Karmasin. An office of propaganda was established, led by Alexander Mach. Young Slovaks in particular enthusiastically welcomed the return of the pardoned Vojtech Tuka⁶⁹ to public life, attacked the “hegemony of the Czechs” and did not hide their sympathies with Berlin. Some ambitious leaders, such as 36-year-old Ferdinand Ďurčanský, had negotiated with the Nazis in Vienna and held reserved attitudes towards Prague.

Only one party list – that of the HSEŠ – was submitted in the elections to the newly created Slovak Assembly that were held on 18 December, 1938. This was perhaps unsurprising; the elections were called on 26 November and the deadline for the submission of candidate lists was the next day. Opposition groupings had been either dissolved or banned. In addition to the election of individual deputies, voters

65 Vytrvle za očistou /Permanently For A Purge/. *Slovák*, 9. 11. 1938, p. 2.

66 SOKOLOVIČ, Peter: *Hlinkova garda 1938–1945* /The Hlinka's Guard 1938–1945/. ÚPN, Bratislava 2009, pp. 101–120.

67 FEIERABEND, Ladislav Karel: *Politické vzpomínky I* /Political Memoirs I/. Atlantis, Brno 1994, p. 89.

68 NA, f. PMR, Box 4145, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of second Czechoslovak government held on 16 December 1938.

69 On 1 January 1928, Vojtech Tuka (1880–1946), a leader of the HSEŠ, had published an article entitled *Vacuum iuris* in the daily *Slovák*, in which he claimed that the Declaration of the Slovak Nation of 30 October 1918 contained an unpublished section which stated that after ten years of a common state Slovaks would be asked whether they wished to remain in the union. Following the affair Tuka was condemned as an agent of Hungary and in October 1929 sentenced to 15 years in prison. In protest at the imprisonment of their leader the HSEŠ walked out of the government. In the final days of the First Czechoslovak Republic, Tuka received an amnesty, but was banned from returning to Slovakia and from any kind of public activity there – a ban which was lifted in the period following Munich.

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were asked the following question: *Do you want a new, free Slovakia? – Yes, or No?* On November 29, 1938, the *Slovák* newspaper reported that the answer had been a unanimous *Yes*. This, they believed, would be the answer to all the injustices committed by foreign elements against Slovakia over the past twenty years, to the dismissal of Slovaks from public services, to the fact that Slovak national leaders had been sent to do hard labour, that Slovak citizens had been persecuted, that Slovakia had been wronged in state delivery quotas and land reforms.⁷⁰ Under the electoral law of the First Republic, participation was mandatory. The elections were supervised by the Hlinka Guard. The HSEŠ claimed to have won 97 % of the vote.⁷¹

Czech state-forming parties and democratic society watched events unfold in Slovakia with alarm, but – aware they no longer enjoyed the support of the Great Powers – acted with caution and restraint. They were still guided by the principle that things would be easier together rather than apart. Among the Agrarians it was Milan Hodža, the most influential Slovak politician in the inter-war period, who refused to join Hlinka’s party and chose instead to travel to Switzerland to treat his broken health.⁷² Czech politicians, who were loath to abandon the centralised model of the country, watched with growing concern as separatist tendencies within the governing HSEŠ grew stronger. They believed, however, that political autonomy was the ultimate goal of Slovakia’s new constitutional order.

There were also changes in the administration of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. Conditions there were complicated, and worsening. Czechoslovakia’s weakened central authorities agreed on 11 October 1938 that the region could form an autonomous government.⁷³ It was headed by Andrej Bródy as Prime Minister, with Edmund Bačinský as Interior Minister, Julian Révay as Transport Minister, Avgustyn Voloshyn and Ivan Pješčák as State Secretaries, while Štefan Fencik was appointed Minister of State responsible for negotiating the border between Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. Autonomy had already been guaranteed to Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia under the Czechoslovak constitution; it was to be granted its own assembly and governor.⁷⁴ This autonomy, however, had been “delayed” because the easternmost part of Czechoslovakia was so politically, economically and culturally backward. It was only in 1937 that Parliament passed a law regulating the legal status of the governor and two laws on self-administration.⁷⁵ Following the declaration of Slovak autonomy, events began to move rapidly, but the situation remained tense. Bródy, the first prime minister of

70 Jednotne volíme prvý slovenský snem /Together We Will Elect The First Slovak Assembly/. *Slovák*, 29. 11. 1938, p. 1.

71 See RYCHLÍK, Jan: *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Spolupráce a konflikty 1914–1992*, pp. 164–165.

72 The HSEŠ harshly criticised Hodža’s political activities, saying he was full of beautiful promises that, however, he never fulfilled. For this reason, said the party, he would now be forced to play only an inferior role – a role he had earned by his sinful disregard for Slovakia. See Hodža odohral svoju úlohu /Hodža Has Played His Part/. *Slovák*, 1. 10. 1938, p. 1.

73 NA, f. PMR, Box 4143, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 11 October 1938.

74 *Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic*.

75 For a more detailed account see ŠVORC, Peter: *Zakletá zem. Podkarpatská Rus 1918–1946 /A Cursed Land. Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia 1918–1946/*. Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Prague 2007.

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autonomous Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, remained in office for a matter of days. On 27 October 1938 he was arrested as a Hungarian spy, while Fencik managed to escape to Hungary. General Syrový's cabinet appointed Avgustyn Voloshyn to lead Ruthenia's second autonomous government.⁷⁶ Under the leadership of this Ruthenian but pro-Ukrainian politician, Greek-Catholic priest and teacher, the dismantling of democratic institutions continued, and a concentration camp was established at Rachov; the first on the territory of Czechoslovakia.⁷⁷

Under the First Vienna Award, Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia lost territory totalling 1,523 km², including several large towns, 97 villages and 173,233 inhabitants.⁷⁸ Following the loss of Užhorod the capital was moved to the city of Chust, and both local officials and refugees arrived soon after.⁷⁹ When the Social Democrat newspaper *Právo lidu* calculated the territorial losses suffered by Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, it stated with bitterness that the annexation by Hungary of Užhorod, Mukachevo and the entire fertile lowlands had paralysed the economic life of this beautiful but poor land. *All that's left of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia is a pitiful torso*, wrote the newspaper.⁸⁰

The Chamber of Deputies of Czechoslovakia's National Assembly enshrined the autonomy of Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia into law on 19 November, 1938, and the Senate followed suit on 22 November, 1938.⁸¹ The state had been federalised, without the change being reflected in the administration of the Czech Lands. From now on, the country's official name would be Czecho-Slovakia.

The Transformation of the Political System

There were no festivities on 28 October. The government decided to cancel all celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the foundation of Czechoslovakia, and the day was declared an ordinary working day.⁸² Sombre Czech politicians laid flowers at the

76 NA, f. PMR, Box 4144, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 26 October 1938. Compare with FEIERABEND, Karel Ladislav: *Politické vzpomínky I*, pp. 40–43.

77 Inmates of the camp, which was established by government decree on 18 November 1938, mostly included Ruthenes and Russophiles, who were opponents of Voloshyn's government. POP, Ivan: *Podkarpatská Rus /Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia/*. Libri, Prague 2005, p. 140. Compare with PLACHÝ, Jiří: *V zájmu klidu a veřejného pořádku. Ke vzniku prvního koncentračního tábora na území Československa /In the Interests of Calm and Public Order. The Establishment of the First Concentration Camp on the Territory of Czechoslovakia/*. *Paměť a dějiny*, 2018, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 49–54.

78 POP, Ivan: *Podkarpatská Rus*, pp. 138–141. Compare with RYCHLÍK, Jan – RYCHLÍKOVÁ, Magdaléna: *Podkarpatská Rus v dějinách Československa 1918–1946 /Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia in the History of Czechoslovakia 1918–1946/*. Vyšehrad, Prague 2016.

79 NA, f. PMR, Box 4144, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 4 November 1938.

80 *Tragédie dovršena /The Tragedy is Complete/*. *Právo lidu*, 4. 11. 1938, p. 1.

81 The constitutional law on Slovak autonomy was published on 23 November 1938 in the *Collection of Laws and Mandates of the State of Czecho-Slovakia*. The law on Sub-Carpathian autonomy (No. 328/1938 Sb. z. a n.) was not published until 16 December 1938 and was accompanied by a government decree (No. 329/1938 Sb. z. a n.) on the full statute of autonomy for Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia.

82 NA, f. PMR, Box 4143, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 11 October 1938.

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tombs of Tomáš G. Masaryk in Lány, Antonín Švehla in Hostivař and Karel Kramář at Olšany cemetery. They were preoccupied with the transformation of the country's party political system, which was to undergo fundamental change.

All political parties that had been active in the Czech Lands since the turn of the century were abolished over a matter of days.⁸³ With not a little euphemism, the process was referred to as the “simplification” of the political system. It was in fact a rather complicated process. It produced different reactions in the various political groupings. It was accepted with a heavy heart; many politicians were reluctant to accept it or greeted it in a state of denial, but there was a general belief that with the acceptance of the Munich Agreement an epoch had ended, and if what remained of the state was to survive, the political system would have to be rebuilt from its foundations.

This did not happen because of pressure from the Agrarians, despite unjustified claims to the contrary, but was instead a general consensus. *If democracy is to be maintained in our country, a democracy that reflects not only our national tradition of the last twenty years, but the political national tradition of the entire century, it can only be maintained in the current Central European conditions if it is reduced from its external form, which is a system of various parties, to a form representing only its most essential and necessary elements. And this is a system of two parties, because a one-party system would mean an end to democracy as we know it, and a system of various parties would either bury democracy in a short period of time, or would simply threaten the deepening of the current confusion and the state itself*, wrote Josef Martínek in *Právo lidu*.⁸⁴ There was a widespread belief that if democracy was to be retained at all, there had to be just two parties; any more would have been impossible in the post-Munich era. This was a difficult decision for the political parties to take. Inside the parties there were mixed and contradictory voices, but the overwhelming mantra was the desire to preserve the unity of the nation.

The Agrarians were not striving for autocracy; on the contrary, it was they who insisted on two political parties in order to preserve democracy. They agreed with other democratic parties that it was unacceptable for all the current political parties to be replaced by just one, in the knowledge that a one-party state would mark the end of democracy. The political system of Czechoslovakia's First Republic, built on a compromise between state-forming parties – a compromise agreed on condition it would result in some benefit for them – was consigned to the past, and now two new parties had to be formed to replace it.

The Agrarian Party, which had been the main state-forming party and the pillar of all coalition governments up to this point, declared its will to share in the construction of a new state. It enjoyed widespread support in the countryside, where the party controlled a comprehensive network of interest and affiliated organisations that were founded to support farmers and agricultural workers in their toil.

83 Compare MERTL, Jan: *Co s politickými stranami?* /What To Do With The Political Parties?/. Jan Laichter, Prague 1938; HOLZER, Jan: *Stranický systém druhé republiky* /The Political System of the Second Republic/. In: MAREK, Pavel et al.: *Přehled politického stranictví na území českých zemí a Československa v letech 1861–1998* /An Overview of the Political Parties on the Territory of the Czech Lands and Czechoslovakia in the Years 1861–1998/. Gloria, Rosice u Brna 2000, pp. 289–298.

84 MARTÍNEK, Josef: *Jen dvě strany* /Only Two Parties/. *Právo lidu*, 12. 11. 1938, p. 1.

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The Agrarians' strength lay in that it was not merely a political party but a huge colossus linked to the country's economy, via trade unions, educational institutions and financial corporations. The pragmatic Agrarians, as the country's chief domestic policy-makers, quickly seized the initiative in order to preserve their privileged position. On 22 October 1938, Rudolf Halík, editor-in-chief of the party newspaper *Venkov*, wrote an editorial defending the simplification of politics but rejecting the dissolution of all political parties: *Dissolve all the parties yet still want democracy? Dissolve all the parties and put what in their place? It is not a good thing to dismiss everything out of hand, to remove and improve everything that was at fault. No, it is necessary to think about this a bit. Would our nation, at its core a democracy, tolerate dictatorship? Who should run this dictatorship? Would it be more suitable for the nation to have a fascist regime or a Nazi regime with violent totalitarianism? This nation knows that it could not tolerate the anarchy that would arise if we abandoned everything we had and failed to replace it with anything else.* For him the solution was an authoritarian democracy, tough and strictly disciplined for everyone and for all, rational but not repressive, radically cleansed of all its faults. *A new democracy and new party system, which not by words and promises but by deeds that will be audited and obvious for all to see will serve the nation and the state only, and not political parties,* Halík wrote. *Political affiliation divided not into ten or more parties, but cleansed and packaged neatly into two or at most three parties.*⁸⁵

Similar opinions were voiced by the other political parties; the time had come, they argued, for swift and vigorous decision-making. Lengthy argument, eternal discussion and fruitless debate must be cast aside. Before the 28 October state holiday, there was a meeting of representatives of six former coalition parties, of whom Agrarian Rudolf Beran, Social Democrat Antonín Hampl and Emil Franke from the National Socialist Party announced they were willing to recommend the liquidation of their own parties. One condition, however, was that the old parties would not simply be joined together. Instead, the whole process must be started from scratch, an idea that gained the support of František Hodáč of the National Unification party. The Czechoslovak Traders' Party and the Czechoslovak People's Party wished, for the moment, to remain independent political parties in their own right. Representatives of the Social Democrats announced the establishment of the National Labour Party.⁸⁶ This emerged from confidential talks led by Rudolf Beran and Antonín Hampl. The two political leaders were keenly aware of the need for their two parties to cooperate in order to preserve some form of democracy, so that the Czech nation would not be divided by its own politicians.

The Party of National Unity (Strana národní jednoty – SNJ) was formed on 18 November, 1938. The new political grouping comprised the Agrarians, the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak Traders' Party, National Unification and the Bohemian half of the Czechoslovak People's Party. They were joined by

85 HALÍK, Rudolf: *Jdeme ke zjednodušení politických poměrů /Let Us Move Towards Simplification of Political Relations/*. *Venkov*, 22. 10. 1938, p. 1.

86 *Ke změnám v politickém stranictví českém /On the Changes to the Czech Party Political System/*. *Venkov*, 29. 10. 1938, p. 1.

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the National League and later on by the Moravian half of the People's Party under the leadership of Jan Šrámek.⁸⁷ The party's manifesto announced that the SNJ would be a movement of constructive nationalism, whose *task and mission is to build a new state, bring about a revival of national life and lead the nation towards advancement*.⁸⁸ It would be based on a system of “authoritarian democracy”; swift and effective, uncompromising towards what had let down and weakened the nation, a democracy of action, not words. The SNJ would assume responsibility for political life and the leadership of the new state. It would concentrate all national civil forces. It would be *the leading state party that will create a parliamentary majority and a national government*.⁸⁹ In foreign policy, the party would ensure that *the Republic would live freely, cooperate peacefully with all nations, especially with its nearest neighbours*. It would soon publish a comprehensive policy programme corresponding to the national, economic, cultural and social needs of the nation. In economic matters, the SNJ defended the principle of private ownership and private businesses. The education and life of the nation was to follow the tradition of St Wenceslas. In building a nation state, the SNJ *would make it impossible for foreign elements to act in damaging ways [...] we will quickly resolve the issue of emigration, especially Jewish emigration*. The old ways of hatred and political revenge should not be brought into public life, it said.⁹⁰

The politician who was to stand at the forefront of the SNJ was Rudolf Beran, the chairman of the Agrarian Party, a talented orator with strong organisational skills and an easy-going manner, capable of seeking acceptable compromises. He had not come to the fore during the events of September 1938, but had stood resolutely behind President Edvard Beneš and the Czechoslovak government.⁹¹ The posts of deputy chairman were taken by Otakar Klapka of the National Social Party, Bohumil Stašek of the People's Party, Karel Chalupa of the Traders' Party, František Hodáč of the National Democrats, Jiří Sříbrný of the National League, Radola Gajda of the National Fascist Community (Národní obec fašistická), and Josef Černý of the Agrarians.

It was Beran who had opposed the idea of a one-party state from the outset, insisting that there must also be an opposition party. For this reason, he agreed with the Social Democrat chairman Antonín Hampl on the creation of a left wing party grouping. The 63-year-old Hampl, a metal-worker by trade, had led the Social Dem-

87 The initial proposal was for three parties, rather than the two which were eventually formed. Mon-signor Jan Šrámek in particular saw the People's Party as a possible third party. For more on the creation of the SNJ see GEBHART, Jan – KUKLÍK, Jan: *Druhá republika 1938–1939. Svár demokracie a totalita v politickém, společenském a kulturním životě*, pp. 50–61.

88 For the announcement of the creation and programme of the SNJ see KUBÁTOVÁ, Ludmila – MALÁ, Irena – SOUKUP, Jaroslav – VRBATA, Jaroslav (eds.): *Protifašistický a národně osvobozenecký boj českého a slovenského lidu 1938–1945. Edice dokumentů*, Part I, Vol. 3, Book 2. National Central Archive, Prague 1983, Document No. 951, pp. 140–142.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Rudolf Beran's attitude is reflected in the fact that in late September 1938, he wrote to his elder son Rudolf, then living in London, to tell him that if anything should happen, he should present himself to Jan Masaryk at the Czechoslovak embassy and offer his services to him. See ROKOSKÝ, Jaroslav: *Rudolf Beran a jeho doba. Vzestup a pád agrární strany*, p. 320.

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ocrats since April 1924 and had consistently defended the interests of the workers. Agrarian Oldřich Suchý wrote the following about him: *Hampl, whom I met for many years at the Central Social Insurance Company and with whom I have been friends over the years, was a rare thing in our political life [...]. Whether as a minister or party chairman, he was always modest and down-to-earth, a man who would draw people's attention and convince them to agree – whether at worker's meetings or in Parliament – with plain facts and an openness with which he was able to deal with the most intractable problems. He was a man who loved his working class. But he had the same love for his nation...*⁹²

The National Labour Party (Národní strana práce – NSP) quickly brought together the Social Democrats and part of the National Socialist Party. The NSP had several capable and experienced politicians, such as Jaromír Nečas and Josef Macek, who would give the new party its ideological focus. Under the leadership of Antonín Hampl, the NSP would represent a loyal, state-forming opposition.⁹³ This would preserve the impression of democracy, which was restricted not only by Berlin but also by some on the Czech extreme right. The two parties – the SNJ and the NSP – would therefore not fight each other for power, but instead work closely together. Hampl, *the chairman of the National Labour Party, knew he must not attack Beran and his public statements, and must not exploit the government's difficulties. Beran, on the other hand, was fully aware that he must not use the government's power against Hampl and the opposition*, said Minister Ladislav Feierabend, who observed the two men's actions closely. It was not easy for them. They had to withstand various influences and interests, especially on the side of the SNJ, but they stuck together.⁹⁴

At the close of 1938, the former president Beneš sent them a message from exile, saying that the creation of a second political party was a good thing, since it raised sympathy in the democratic West that might prove useful amidst the rising tensions in Europe, especially in the case of a war. He urged both parties to help each other, and that if war did break out, it must be evident to all that there were neither different camps nor rival parties in Czechoslovakia.⁹⁵

The Opposition – Communists and Czech Fascists

After Munich, and the subsequent simplification of the political system, it was expected that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia would be dissolved. The Communists themselves knew that Hitler would not tolerate their existence. It was the Communist Party in Slovakia that was banned first. This took place on 9 October, 1938. Slovak ministers decided to dissolve the party, prohibit the publishing and

92 SAME AUTHOR: *Dvakrát otrokem. Paměti agrárníka Oldřicha Suchého / Two Times a Slave. The Memoirs of Agrarian Oldřich Suchý*. ÚSTR, Prague 2014, pp. 50–51.

93 Viz GEBHART, Jan – KUKLÍK, Jan: *Drubá republika 1938–1939. Svár demokracie a totality v politickém, společenském a kulturním životě*, pp. 61–73.

94 FEIERABEND, Karel Ladislav: *Politické vzpomínky I*, pp. 75–76.

95 BENEŠ, Edvard: *Šest let exilu a druhé světové války. Řeči, projevy a dokumenty z r. 1938–1945 / Six Years of Exile and the Second World War. Talks, Speeches and Documents 1938–1945*. Orbis, Prague 1946, p. 22.

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dissemination of all Communist publications in Slovakia, and ban the distribution by post of all Communist magazines. On 20 October, 1938, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was formally suspended in the Czech Lands. There was no public uproar.⁹⁶ In Prague, Communist MPs continued to attend meetings of the National Assembly, and were still making speeches in the Chamber of Deputies as late as December 1938.⁹⁷

The Communists had always been in opposition; they had never been chosen as coalition partners in the First Republic. Under the baton of Moscow, they were striving for revolution and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat. Never one of Czechoslovakia's state-forming parties, in terms of party members and voters they were among the largest parties in the Third International and posed a threat to democracy even though they changed tactics. In the critical year of Munich, the Communist Party fashioned itself as defenders of democracy and the Republic, claiming they had never wavered even during the hardest moments when all other political leaders had given ground.⁹⁸ Democrats – on both the right and the left – remained fundamentally opposed to the Communists, but even after the party was banned, members and functionaries of the Communist Party were treated the same as other citizens. Syrový and later Beran's government gave them sufficient time to clean out their archives, salvage party property, destroy membership record systems and reintroduce officials into regular non-party life.⁹⁹ Nobody prevented party leaders from leaving the country. In fact, behind the scenes, there was an effort to help them, including financial support for liquidating their debts and obligations.¹⁰⁰

Officially, the party was dissolved on 27 December 1938, when 25 of its MPs and senators lost their mandates.¹⁰¹ But the dissolution was essentially formal; there was almost nothing left of the party to dissolve. Most former Communist Party members joined the National Labour Party. No Communists were imprisoned or persecuted.

Up until that point, the far right had found themselves incapable, unlike the Communists, of gaining widespread public support. If it hadn't been for the Munich

96 PEROUTKA, Ferdinand: Nekrolog /Obituary/. *Lidové noviny*, 23. 10. 1938, p. 1.

97 They included Antonín Zápotocký, who led the so-called Red Unions and who was one of the few Communist Party leaders who did not leave for the Soviet Union.

98 Pozadí a cíle protikomunistických útoků /Background and Aims of Anti-Communist Attacks/. *Rudé právo*, 15. 10. 1938, p. 1.

99 On 11 October 1938, the government of General Syrový tasked the Minister of the Interior with holding talks with MP Bohumír Šmeral on the Communist Party's stance as well as its press regarding the current political conditions. NA, f. PMR, Box 4143, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 11 October 1938.

100 The Communist MP Jaromír Dolanský asked his Agrarian counterpart Oldřich Suchý to lobby Prime Minister Rudolf Beran to provide financial support for the Communists. ROKOSKÝ, Jaroslav (ed.): *Dvakrát otrokem. Paměti agrárníka Oldřicha Suchého*, p. 40.

101 The decree on the dissolution of the Communist Party read as follows: *The Government of the Czecho-Slovak Republic hereby dissolves the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (a section of the Communist International) in the Czech Lands and Moravia-Silesia under § 8 of the Government Decree of 23 December, 1938, No. 355 Coll. on political parties as its activities constitute a threat to the public interest. The dissolution shall take effect on the day of its announcement in the Central Publication of the Republic of Czecho-Slovakia. Prague, 27 December 1938. Signed: Minister Dr Fischer. Quoted according to České slovo, 28. 12. 1938, p. 2.*

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Agreement, they would have remained on the fringes of Czech society, as they had done throughout the First Republic. In the autumn of 1938, however, they sensed an opportunity. A shaken society, up until that point Francophile in orientation, was devastated. The Czech fascists were convinced that their moment had finally come, that their former insignificance and irrelevance was a thing of the past. They loudly, crudely announced their presence. They had previously rejected German Nazism, but now they changed their minds. They had always admired respect for strength and adhered to the Führer principle. But they were disunited; their fragmentation (there were some four dozen different fascist groups and factions) persisted. They were renegades from various political groupings, and there was often deep animosity between them.

The most dangerous was Vlajka (The Flag); a radical right-wing nationalist group with extreme anti-Semitic and anti-Marxist views which had operated since 1925. These political renegades were not only noisy but also dangerous. They did not hesitate to become Gestapo informants. On 11 November, 1938, the Second Republic government issued a decree banning Vlajka, and its leaders were later imprisoned.¹⁰²

Another group demanding that Czech politics take a conservative turn was the Action for National Renewal (Akce národní obnovy – ANO). It came into the wider consciousness with its proclamation *Národe!* (Nation!) published at the end of October 1938.¹⁰³ ANO's chairman was the former vice-chancellor of Charles University, Karel Domin, a renowned botanist. Other members included famous names from the ranks of the Czech intelligentsia. *We declare an uncompromising war against the old party political criminals, Jewry, and subversive secret societies, with the aim of filling all leading posts with Aryans and anti-Semites and unifying the whole nation in a totalitarian party,* read ANO's manifesto.¹⁰⁴ Prior to Munich, the most famous fascist group was the National Fascist Community, founded in 1926, and led by the former general and legionnaire Radola Gajda. He now merged the party into the Party of National Unity, although many of its members were unhappy with the move and continued to make clear their anti-democratic attitudes.

The Czech fascists made the already difficult life of the Second Republic even more so, but they never managed to dominate public opinion and never won the confidence of Czech society – not even amidst the shock that followed the Munich Agreement.

102 NA, f. PMR, Box 4144, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 11 November 1938. See NAKONEČNÝ, Milan: *Vlajka. K historii a ideologii českého nacionalismu* /The Flag. The History and Ideology of Czech Nationalism/. Chvojkoovo nakladatelství, Prague 2001.

103 *Národe!* /Nation!/. *Národní politika*, 30. 10. 1938, p. 1.

104 See GREGOROVÍČ, Miroslav: *Kapitoly o českém fašismu. Fašismus jako měřítko politické dezorientace* /Chapters on Czech Fascism. Fascism as a Measure of Political Disorientation/. Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Prague 1995, p. 96. Compare with PEJČOCH, Ivo: *Fašismus v českých zemích. Fašistické a nacionálně socialistické strany a hnutí v Čechách a na Moravě 1922–1995* /Fascism in the Czech Lands. Fascist and National Socialist Parties and Movements in Bohemia and Moravia 1922–1995/. Academia, Prague 2011.

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Economic and Social Difficulties

No matter where we look, we're confronted by hundreds if not thousands of the most difficult problems. We're losing regions and factories, workers are unemployed, and we're left with billions in debt, wrote Jiří Stříbrný in response to Munich. The words appeared in the first edition of the *Nedělní list* newspaper on 2 October, 1938, but the passage was censored from later editions.¹⁰⁵ The country's economic performance had been fatally undermined. Czechoslovakia lost industrial areas – losses that represented two fifths of the country's industrial capacity. The loss of heavy industry in the Ostrava, Most and Falknov regions was particularly keenly felt; metallurgical, heavy engineering and chemical enterprises were all appropriated. Another painful fact was the loss of energy resources, primarily the forfeiture of ninety power stations. The substantial reduction in fuel resources forced the country to import fuel from abroad. Electricity for the capital Prague was supplied by power stations in the German Reich, and many of Czechoslovakia's cities relied on water supplies from foreign countries. Huge losses were suffered by light industry, especially glass, textile and paper. The truncated state had lost one third of its arable land and significant areas of forest. Transport, too, found itself in an extremely difficult position; the main railway network was severely disrupted.¹⁰⁶ All this is but a brief overview of the complicated economic situation which does not begin to explain the major changes, obstacles and complications that the weakened state had to face. *Work and save*, announced the Minister of Finance Josef Kalfus in a radio address on 18 October, 1938, in which he described the financial and economic situation of the new Czech-Slovak Republic.¹⁰⁷

Hitler's Germany, with the support of the United Kingdom and France, had won the right for goods manufactured in the Sudetenland to be exported to post-Munich Czechoslovakia with no customs duties or any other charges. Hitler knew well that Sudeten industry could not survive without the Czech export market and therefore it would be unthinkable to create a customs border between the two. *The economic pressure of the Reich was so strong after Munich that in essence we found ourselves part of the German Grossraumwirtschaft*, said Ladislav Karel Feierabend, Minister of Agriculture and, briefly, Minister of Justice.¹⁰⁸ This was also related to the continued flight of French and British capital, which allowed the expansion of Dresdner Bank and

105 STŘÍBRNÝ, Jiří: Přestaňte fňukat a jednejte /Stop Whimpering and Act/. *Nedělní list*, 2. 10. 1938, p. 1.

106 To travel Bohemia to Moravia and from Moravia to Slovakia it was necessary to pass through German territory; the new borders were drawn in such a way that rail and road networks were completely disrupted. All the most important rail links, which connected the border areas with the interior and abroad, were disrupted. See SOMMER, Karel: *Hospodářský vývoj v českých zemích 1938–1945 /Economic Development in the Czech Lands 1938–1945/*. In: LACINA, Vlastislav – PÁTEK, Jaroslav (eds.): *Dějiny hospodářství českých zemí od počátku industrializace do současnosti. Období první Československé republiky a německé okupace 1918–1945 /History of the Czech Economy from the Beginning of Industrialisation to the Present. The Period of the First Czechoslovak Republic and the German Occupation 1918–1945/*, Part III. Karolinum, Prague 1995, pp. 190–195.

107 Např. „Pracovat a šetřit“. Finanční situace nového Československa /For example: “Work and Save”. The Financial Situation Of The New Czechoslovakia/. *Venkov*, 19. 10. 1938, p. 3.

108 FEIERABEND, Karel Ladislav: *Politické vzpomínky I*, p. 50.

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Deutsche Bank and large German corporations into Czecho-Slovakia's banking sector and industry.¹⁰⁹

The Second Republic had to face the major social problem represented by refugees. Thousands of people fled the occupied Sudetenland for what was left of Czechoslovakia. By mid-December 1938, the numbers included 125,000 Czechs, more than 11,000 Germans, and over 7,000 people of Jewish nationality. And that was just part of the story.¹¹⁰ Refugees came not only from areas occupied by Nazi Germany, but also from the Czech half of Teschen as well as occupied areas of Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. They included not just civil servants such as gendarmes, postal workers, teachers and railway employees, but also entrepreneurs and tradesmen who had been forced to relinquish their businesses.

In those autumn months, they sought shelter with relatives or friends or waited for what was left of the state to help. They dosed down in schools, hostels, pubs, Sokol halls or lived on the street. The Syrový government set up refugee camps and attempted to mitigate the suffering of those who had been made homeless.¹¹¹ A government decree passed on 11 November 1938 established an Institute for Refugee Care.¹¹² It concentrated on social and healthcare provision, provided accommodation, facilitated their reintroduction into the economic life of the state and was in charge of paying financial support.¹¹³

Czech society looked on the refugees with sympathy. Numerous support and charitable organisations emerged, such as the Committee for Assistance to Refugees, which brought together financiers and national economists such as the former Governor of the National Bank, Vilém Pospíšil, whom the government commissioned to negotiate a loan with the British and French Governments. Another organisation providing assistance to refugees was the Free Association – the Committee for Aid to Refugees, comprising representatives of the Czechoslovak Red Cross, the Czechoslovak Sokol organisation and the group Czech Heart.

Czech Heart, which had become popular in Czech society during the Great War, took over from the Red Cross in feeding refugees at Prague's railway stations, where a continuous flow of people was arriving from border regions having had to abandon everything and flee to Prague with their children in their arms and a bundle of possessions on their backs. Crowds of people thronged the stairs and corridors of Czech Heart's offices in Prague's Křemencova street, sometimes left with nothing but the shirts on their back. Czech Heart provided them with linen, footwear and clothing.

109 For more detail see GEBHART, Jan – KUKLÍK, Jan: *Druhá republika 1938–1939. Svár demokracie a totality v politickém, společenském a kulturním životě*, pp. 163–171.

110 *Archiv Národního muzea* (Archives of the National Museum, hereafter referred to as ANM), f. Vladislav Klumpar, Paměti JUDr. Vladislava Klumpara, část Ministrem v druhé republice /Memoirs of JUDr. Vladislav Klumpar, Part: A Minister in the Second Republic/, pp. 46–47. Compare with BENDA, Jan: *Útěky a vyhánění z pohraničí českých zemí 1938–1939*.

111 NA, f. PMR, Box 4143, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 7 October 1938.

112 Ibid., Box 4144, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 11 November 1938.

113 For more detail see BENDA, Jan: *Útěky a vyhánění z pohraničí českých zemí 1938–1939*.

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Every day it was providing such items for two hundred people. The kitchen was in continuous operation, serving eight hundred lunches a day. People arrived constantly to donate clothes or money. The period was marked by overwhelming solidarity and self-sacrifice, and not just by the Agrarian Czech Heart organisation. The old Czech saying *God save everyone who can help* applied across the land.¹¹⁴

In spite of all the difficulties, the Second Republic did manage to cope with the problem of refugees and displaced persons, even if various restrictive measures had to be introduced for businesses, unemployment increased and the already bad economic situation continued to deteriorate. But the Second Republic proved itself in this difficult test, which is one thing that must be counted to its credit.

Emil Hácha, Third President

The constitutional mandate that a new President of the Republic must be elected within 14 days of the presidential office being vacated could not be fulfilled. In the wake of the Munich Agreement, the state lacked solid borders and a segment of the population was on the move, with no permanent address, and the constitutional relationship between the Czech Lands and Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia had first to be precisely defined. Presidential power was transferred to General Syrový's government, a provisional arrangement that ended up lasting nearly two months. This gave candidates even more time to think about standing. Even though their names were not mentioned in the press, some of them were circulated amongst the public, who wondered who would become Czechoslovakia's third president.¹¹⁵ In fact, only two men were serious candidates: Emil Hácha, a respected lawyer, and František Chvalkovský, Minister of Foreign Affairs. He, however, was criticised by the public for failing to adequately defend the interests of the country when the new borders were decided. His wife was also Dutch, which in the present atmosphere hardly won him sympathy amongst the wider public. In any case, he refused the offer, saying that he could better serve his country as a diplomat. Thus, the decision was made that Emil Hácha, sixty-one, with an unblemished career as a judge behind him, would be the most suitable candidate. He did not refuse, but it was also a difficult decision for him to make. He had recently become a widower, and was looking forward to beginning a well-earned retirement, not adopting the presidency in a difficult period. Hácha told Justice Minister Feierabend, who had been asked by the Council of Ministers to approach him, that never in his life had he entertained the thought of serving as President of the Republic. He made no secret of his misgivings, before finally announcing; *It is a great sacrifice, but I will make it if it is necessary in the interests of the nation and the country.*¹¹⁶

114 O nové činnosti „Českého srdce“ /The New Activities of “Czech Heart”/. *Venkov*, 23. 10. 1938, p. 3.

115 The names of various personalities from Czechoslovakia's public and cultural life were mentioned, including the entrepreneur Jan Antonín Baťa, who found himself in charge of the prosperous Baťa company in Zlín after the tragic death of his stepbrother Tomáš in 1932, the national economist Jaroslav Preiss, director of Živnostenská banka, the composer Josef Bohuslav Foerster and the owner of the Jawa motorcycle company, Frantisek Janeček.

Czech politicians agreed with his candidacy, but equally important was that he enjoyed the support of Slovaks, Ruthenians and Germans. Rudolf Beran, chairman of the Party of National Unity, stayed with him late until the night before the election in fear that Hácha would change his mind about the candidacy at the last minute. The post was to be a representative one, and the person occupying it would not be asked to make any important decisions. Hácha still enjoyed good health, and his fair verdicts during his time as a judge in the First Republic were well regarded by all. *So far the general public has little knowledge of Dr Hácha. Yet, in the relatively short period of time in which his name has become known, he has gained particular attention and popularity*, the German chargé d'affaires Andor Hencke informed Berlin. He added that Hácha was someone about whom no-one had anything bad to say, and that meant a great deal in the country at that moment. However, in his otherwise favourable assessment, he also added that Hácha lacked political experience, something which might become evident in the "Jewish question" – a subject in which he had not yet appeared to show much insight. Otherwise, he possessed all the prerequisites to lead the post-Munich Czecho-Slovakia.¹¹⁷

The election of a new president took place on 30 November 1938 in the Rudolfinum hall, where the Parliament was located (rather than the Vladislav Hall at Prague Castle). The election proceeded smoothly with little pomp and ceremony. Emil Hácha was elected with 272 of 312 votes cast, which was more than the required three-fifths majority. No-one voted against. The Communists returned 39 blank ballot papers. German MPs ignored the election. The new president had no challenger. Hácha's election had been pre-negotiated and agreed in advance by Czechoslovakia's political parties. *Finding a man to elect was harder than electing him*, as *České slovo* aptly put it.¹¹⁸

The election of the new president was welcomed both at home and abroad. Edvard Beneš, who was aware of the difficult position of both his successor and the government, was among those who sent a telegram to congratulate him. The following day, a mass was held in St Vitus Cathedral, served by the Archbishop of Prague, Karel Kašpar. Afterwards, President Hácha went to the chapel of St Wenceslas, where he bowed to the remains of Prince Wenceslas, the patron saint of Bohemia and Moravia and a symbol of Czech statehood.¹¹⁹

116 FEIERABEND, Karel Ladislav: *Politické vzpomínky I*, p. 62. Compare with KVAČEK, Robert – TOMÁŠEK, Dušan: *Causa Emil Hácha*; PASÁK, Tomáš: *JUDr. Emil Hácha (1938–1945)*; MACHÁLEK, Vít: *Prezident v zajetí. (Život, činy a kříž Emila Háchy)*.

117 In its negotiations with Czechoslovak diplomats Berlin simultaneously exerted pressure on them to "solve" the "Jewish problem". NA, f. Národní soud (National Court), sign. 136-68-1/143-147, Message from German chargé d'affaires Hencke from Prague to the Foreign Office in Berlin, 1 December 1938.

118 Dr. Emil Hácha třetím prezidentem republiky /Dr Emil Hácha Third President Of The Republic/. *České slovo*, 1. 12. 1938, p. 1.

119 The newly elected president Hácha later laid wreaths at the graves of T. G. Masaryk, Antonín Švehla and Karel Kramář and on 5 December 1938 paid his respects to the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, an unknown legionnaire who had fallen at the Battle of Zborov, at the Old Town Hall. It was a symbolic gesture stressing the continuity of internal policy and simultaneously a call for national unity.

“A small country, but ours”

The Government of Rudolf Beran

The severely tested Czecho-Slovak Republic was being run by a temporary provisional government. On the day the presidential election was held, Syrový's government, as had been previously agreed, handed in its resignation. President Hácha entrusted MP Rudolf Beran with the task of forming a new government. It was vital to proceed without delay; there was no room now for the long, drawn-out negotiations of the past. The majority view inside the governing SNJ party was that the new cabinet should consist mostly of politicians. However, there were also voices in favour of maintaining the continuity of the government of experts, which had been received positively by the public. In the end, it was agreed that the new cabinet would again be a government of experts, in which the only senior politician would be its prime minister, Rudolf Beran.

Fifty-year-old Beran was appointed Prime Minister of Czecho-Slovakia on 1 December, 1938. For many decades, the common interpretation was that he had long asserted himself and now, finally, he had succeeded in seizing power, and as a Germanophile he set about steering the country towards Hitler's Germany, which regarded him as its “servant”. But the reality was somewhat different. Beran had learnt the craft of politics from his predecessor Antonín Švehla, the renowned master of compromise. He had not, in fact, attempted to assert himself, preferring to remain in the background and pull political strings from behind the scenes. He consistently turned down ministerial posts in the thirties, and even now he resisted the post of prime minister and proposed others instead. But ultimately, when he realised there was no alternative, he agreed. In the political constellation of the time, as the chairman of the newly established Party of National Unity that brought together all civic parties, what was decisive was that he enjoyed a strong and respected position in domestic politics and, above all, he was an acceptable candidate for all democratic parties.¹²⁰

Beran opened his first cabinet meeting as Prime Minister that evening, at Prague Castle. He highlighted the importance of the outgoing government, saying of his predecessor General Syrový that by his resolve and fortitude he had rescued the state from chaos. *The task of the new government*, said Beran, *is now to secure the state and consolidate the life of the nation. The government wishes to fulfil this task by sincere cooperation between the Czech people and Slovaks and Ruthenes.* He added: *We are and will remain absolutely united over the army, to which we express our gratitude for its strength and discipline. We are and will remain absolutely united in foreign policy in the pursuit of friendly relations with all our neighbours. And we are and will remain absolutely united in everything else when it is required for the interests of the state.*¹²¹

Beran's cabinet was a government of experts.¹²² Of the Syrový government, Minister of Foreign Affairs František Chvalkovský, Minister of Finance Josef Kalfus, Minis-

120 ROKOSKÝ, Jaroslav: *Rudolf Beran a jeho doba. Vzestup a pád agrární strany.*

121 NA, f. PMR, Box 4145, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of second Czecho-Slovak government held on 1 December 1938.

122 The Cabinet had a total of 21 members: the Prime Minister, two Deputies, two Joint Ministers, nine

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ter of National Defence Jan Syrový and Minister of Agriculture Ladislav Karel Feierabend remained in their posts. In the oppressive shadow of Munich, the most pressing tasks were primarily economic, and this was logically reflected in the composition of the government, which was made up of respected personalities with a broad economic outlook. Vlastimil Šádek, who as General Secretary of the Central Association of Czecho-Slovak Industrialists had a good grasp of industry, trade and commerce, was appointed Minister of Commerce. Dominik Čípera was a man of practical business experience, which he had gained working alongside Tomáš Baťa and became one of the leading personalities in the Baťa shoemaking company following Baťa's tragic death. He was also a long-time mayor of the town of Zlín. On the recommendation of NSP chairman Antonín Hampel, Vladislav Klumpar was appointed Minister of Social and Health Administration; he brought with him knowledge of social affairs from the Central Social Insurance Company. Union leader Otakar Fischer became Minister of the Interior. Jan Kapras, Professor of the History of Czech Law at Charles University and Chairman of the Czechoslovak National Council, was appointed as Minister of Education and National Enlightenment. Divisional General Alois Eliáš, a member of the Army General Staff, was made Minister of Railways, and was simultaneously made responsible for the Ministry of Post and Telegraphs (and from 11 December 1938, the Ministry of Transport also fell under his portfolio). At the request of President Hácha, university professor Jaroslav Krejčí was nominated as Minister of Justice, who was also responsible for managing the Ministry of the Unification of Laws and Organisation of Administration, and Jiří Havelka was appointed Minister without Portfolio, who was also chosen to head the President's Office. Havelka enjoyed a close working and personal relationship with the president. Karol Sidor was also appointed as government minister representing Slovakia in the central government.

Jozef Tiso remained Prime Minister of the autonomous Slovak government, and as such was also formally in charge of matters falling within the remit of the Ministry of Interior, Social Care and Health as they pertained to Slovakia. The members of Slovakia's five-man government were MP Pavol Teplanský, in charge of managing the Ministry of Finance, Industry, Trade and Business, and Agriculture; lawyer Ferdinand Ďurčanský, formally responsible for managing matters pertaining to the Ministries of Railways, Post and Telegraphs, and Public Works; Professor Matúš Černák, formally responsible for matters pertaining to the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, and MP Miloš Vančo, who was put in charge of overseeing matters pertaining to the Ministry of Justice. Avgustyn Voloshin remained Prime Minister of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia and was joined by MP Julian Révay in a two-member autonomous government.¹²³

Czech Ministers, five Slovak Ministers and two Sub-Carpathian Ruthenian Ministers. Ministers of all the autonomous parts of Czecho-Slovakia met in a central government, which decided on all common issues. The government did not meet once in this complete composition in the three and a half months of its existence. However, there was always at least one minister from the Slovak and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenian governments present up until the first days of March 1939.

123 For more on the make-up of the government see for example KUBÁTOVÁ, Ludmila – MALÁ, Irena – SOUKUP, Jaroslav – VRBATA, Jaroslav (eds.): *Protifašistický a národně osvobozenecký boj českého a sloven-*

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The central government was received positively and with understanding for the challenges that it had to face in difficult times. Let us recall at least one response to the new cabinet. Karel Zdeněk Klíma, editor-in-chief of *České slovo*, which was always aligned towards the Castle policy of Masaryk and Beneš, opined that the government appointed with Beran at its head was not strictly a political government, and even less a government of a certain party type which wanted and was meant to represent the SNJ and which united six former parties and groups, coalition and opposition. Like many others, he stressed that party affiliation had not been the decisive factor, but rather professional and official capability. He then wrote the following about Beran: *He did not push to become head of the government when it was offered to him, and accepting it would have been a matter of course for anyone else who had been offered the opportunity to lead a political government. There was of course a time when the job of governing was easier and more enjoyable than it would be now, when the government's primary mission is to be a rescue station on all sides.*¹²⁴

But the responses were not all favourable. Czech fascists rejected the new government, as evidenced by a leaflet, signed simply “A Faithful Czech”: *Beran's government for the Czech Lands is an old coalition of people who favour Jews and Freemasons, because most of the ministers are Jews and Freemasons! You know well these Feierabends, Fischers, Kaprases, Kalfuses and so on. What can we expect from them? What's happened to the true fighters for the rights of a nation of little people? Where is General Gajda [...]? It's time to leave the Party of National Unity and down with the new Beran government! [...] There's still time! Let's work, for a new, nation state and for a new government of the nation!*¹²⁵

The new government still found itself in an extremely difficult situation. It could not do what it deemed right. It constantly had to keep an eye out for what Berlin thought. It often found itself choosing the lesser of two evils, and prioritising what would be the least painful decision for the nation. There were intensive negotiations over the government programme. Preparations for the state budget were underway, which was to be an interim budget for the first quarter of 1939. The adoption of an Enabling Act, which would exclude Parliament from political life, was just days away. But the demand to rule by fiat without the approval of Parliament was not made by the Beran government. It had been drafted on 16 November, 1938 by Prime Minister Srový and subsequently submitted to the Chamber of Deputies as a governmental draft of a Constitutional Law on “changing the Constitution of the Republic of Czechoslovakia and introducing emergency executive powers”.¹²⁶ Now, however, this serious political decision was on the agenda. It was agreed at a cabinet meeting with

ského lidu 1938–1945. Edice dokumentů, Part I, Vol. 3, Book 3. National Central Archive, Prague 1987, Document No. 957, p. 3.

124 KLÍMA, Karel Zdeněk: S novou vládou /With The New Government/. *České slovo*, 4. 12. 1938, p. 1.

125 GREGOROVÍČ, Miroslav: *Kapitoly o českém fašismu. Fašismus jako měřítko politické dezorientace*, p. 100. Compare with PASÁK, Tomáš: *Český fašismus 1922–1945 a kolaborace 1939–1945 /Czech Fascism 1922–1945 and Collaboration 1939–1945/*. Práh, Prague 1999.

126 What was approved was essentially a government amendment to a constitutional law on a change to the Constitution of the Republic of Czechoslovakia and on emergency executive powers. NA, f. PMR, Box 4144, inv. No. 2960, notes from Council of Ministers meetings of first Czecho-Slovak government held on 15 and 26 November 1938.

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the understanding that the Minister of the Interior, Minister of Justice and Minister without Portfolio would begin immediate talks on the remarks submitted on the proposed outline by the Slovaks so that the wording could be approved at the next Council of Ministers meeting and the draft submitted to Parliament for debate.¹²⁷

On 13 December, 1938, Beran presented his government's policy statement in Parliament.¹²⁸ A system of authoritarian democracy had been introduced to a sorely-tested country. After Munich, a tremendous number of problems, circumstances and questions emerged that had to be dealt with and decided upon quickly. The prime minister softened the fateful nature of the decision by emphasising repeatedly that he and the entire government wanted to rely on cooperation with chosen experts, and would therefore establish a State Economic Council which would advise the government on all social, economic, financial and transport matters. *Under no circumstances do I want to avoid public scrutiny*, Beran told Parliament, adding that on behalf of the government he was proposing a bill to establish a parliamentary austerity and control committee, as a permanent committee that could act even after the session – which would dissolve both houses – had ended, and whose work would not be interrupted.¹²⁹

The next day, the Chamber of Deputies discussed the government's policy statement and at the same time discussed the draft Enabling Act. After a debate in which various opinions were expressed, 148 members voted in favour and only 16 voted against, which exceeded the required three-fifths majority of all MPs.¹³⁰ A day later, the Enabling Act was approved by the Senate: out of 85 senators, 71 were in favour of the government's proposals and only 14 were against.¹³¹ MPs and senators therefore supported by a convincing majority both the government's policy statement and the Enabling Act, which was to enter into force on the date of the establishment of the Slovak National Assembly. In one fell swoop, Parliament had excluded itself from political life.¹³² The focus of political decision-making was shifted to the government

127 Ibid., Box 4145, inv. No. 2960, notes from Council of Ministers meetings of second Czecho-Slovak government held on 6 December 1938.

128 Government declaration by Prime Minister Rudolf Beran to the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the National Assembly on Tuesday 13 December 1938. Ibid., notes from Council of Ministers meetings of second Czecho-Slovak government held on 12 December 1938.

129 *Národní shromáždění republiky Československé 1935–1938* /National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic 1935–1938/, Chamber of Deputies, typed notes of the 156th session, Tuesday 13 December 1938 – see <http://www.psp.cz> (quoted version dated 22. 7. 2019). Also published in KUBÁTOVÁ, Ludmila – MALÁ, Irena – SOUKUP, Jaroslav – VRBATA, Jaroslav (eds.): *Protifašistický a národně osvobozenecký boj českého a slovenského lidu 1938–1945. Edice Dokumentů*, Part I, Vol. 3, Book 3, Document No. 987, pp. 40–47. A final version was also printed in the national press on 14 December 1938.

130 *Národní shromáždění republiky Československé 1935–1938*, Chamber of Deputies, typed notes of the 157th session, Wednesday 14 December 1938 – see <http://www.psp.cz> (quoted version dated 22. 7. 2019).

131 *Národní shromáždění republiky Československé 1935–1938*, Senate, typed notes of the 127th session, Thursday 15 December 1938 – see <http://www.psp.cz> (quoted version dated 22. 7. 2019).

132 The role of parliament was shaken in Czechoslovak society. *Parliament seemed to feel*, said Minister Klumpar later, *that the terrible events had somehow bypassed it, that Czech society, devastated by the events and disappointed by the political figures of the time, would not trust it and would be willing to seek salvation in new ideas or at least in new people. Slovak MPs were much more interested in elections to the Slovak Assembly than*

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and the president. The government was given power of attorney to govern the state by decree for two years, while the president was given the right to change even the constitution by his decrees, but he was not allowed to violate the autonomy of Slovakia or Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia.¹³³

Thus, the Beran government received, at least formally, the kind of power that no Czechoslovak government before it had ever enjoyed. It did not exploit it. It was assumed that the government would – without parliamentary scrutiny – try to resolve the unpopular consequences of the Munich Agreement for a maximum of two years, at which point Parliament would then be invited to exercise its original rights once again. Despite some reservations, the prevailing view was that in the given situation, no other policy other than that announced by the prime minister could have been adopted. *Personal trust in Beran, Lidové noviny* wrote with slight exaggeration, *truly spreads from the Slovak right to the Communist benches, where it ends*.¹³⁴ Few, however, were in any doubt as to how difficult it doubted how difficult it was to “govern” in the unforgiving period after Munich.¹³⁵

The Effects on Society

The post-Munich crisis was keenly felt in the everyday life of the population. The word of the moment was “unity”. The declared unity of the nation took various forms: from the boycott of German shops and tradesmen to the purchase of exclusively Czech products. Non-Czech names disappeared from advertising posters and billboards. Businesses were supposed to be in Czech, not foreign hands. Czech cinemas were supposed to play mostly Czech films, and were to offer a form of escape from the sombre atmosphere of the time.¹³⁶ In the interests of the most effective possible physical exercise, the government tasked the Minister of Health to call upon the Sokol, DTJ, Orel, Selská jízda and other organisations pursuing the same objectives to concentrate on physical activities.¹³⁷

in elections to the National Assembly in Prague. And to this he added his impression of the work of the National Assembly, that what was discussed in the Chamber of Deputies is then repeated quite unnecessarily in the Senate, with the apathetic participation of the gentlemen present, mostly gentlemen of an advanced age. ANM, f. Vladislav Klumpar, Memoirs of JUDr. Vladislav Klumpar, Part: A Minister in the Second Republic, p. 16.

133 Article I of the Enabling Act contained the authorisation that the President of the Republic may issue statutory decrees with the power of law. Throughout what remained of the Second Republic, Hácha did not use this option once. When these powers were transferred to him under the Nazi Protectorate, Hácha issued a single decree on this basis, namely Decree No. 83 on 3 March 1940, on the oath of office taken by members of the government and civil servants. Article II gave the government the authority to issue governmental decrees with the power of law. Such government decrees required the signature of the president, which was not necessary with ordinary governmental regulations.

134 *Lidové noviny*, 18. 12. 1938, p. 1.

135 For example HAVELKA, Jiří: *Dvojitý život. Vzpomínky protektorátního ministra / A Double Life. Recollections of a Protectorate Minister/*. Masarykův ústav a Archiv AV ČR / Masaryk Institute and Archive of the AV ČR/ – Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Prague 2015, pp. 15–26.

136 On 11 November 1938 was the premiere of a comedy directed by Martin Frič called *Škola základ života / School – The Basics Of Life/*, a film adaptation of Jaroslav Žák’s play of the same name about students and teachers. *The shameful deeds of students on screen!* read the posters in a bid to attract cinemagoers.

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Censorship in the Second Republic was beefed up. Journalists were constantly reminded that in the interests of the state it was necessary for newspapers to realise that in the wake of Munich the country was extremely weak, that it was a neutral state, and that they must not give Germany an excuse to take action against Czecho-Slovakia. Mid-December 1938 saw the expiration of extraordinary measures governing the press, which according to the law could only be enforced for three months. Preliminary censorship was tightened, meaning that each newspaper edition had to be submitted to the censor's department, which had two hours to make the required changes. Only then could the newspaper in question go to the printers and appear on the newsstands. This hampered the newspapers' capacity to report the news, as it was impossible to include the most up-to-date reports in them, even if it was important, as the edition had been "locked" by the censor. The authorities considered how to proceed; how to achieve "unity" in the newspapers by other means. There was a consensus that some kind of oversight must be put in place to avoid cases of reoccurrence of previous cases that had not contributed to national unity, cases that presented individual views on state requirements. But how to achieve unity in the press by other means? There was a call for increased personal responsibility by journalists. Václav Černý said that the government had introduced press censorship and had allowed protests against it. *It was a form of censorship that begged the censored to associate itself with it and let itself be guided by it, because the very goal of such censorship was to prevent our press from giving the Germans an excuse to threaten and accuse us of not wanting to allow "Munich".*¹³⁷ Publication of some newspapers, such as *National Liberation*, once the magazine of the Czechoslovak legionaries, was halted. The satirical *Liberated Theatre* was deprived of its licence and its chief protagonists, Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich, accompanied by the composer Jaroslav Ježek, soon left for the United States, like many others rationally choosing exile over the oppressive national reality back home.

Few suffered the bitter autumn of 1938 like the writer Karel Čapek. Even before the signing of the Munich Agreement, when Hitler gave his rabid Nuremberg speech, a speech that prompted a wave of thunderous proclamations from Henlein, Čapek appealed to German listeners – still with hope – with a radio address: *Germans on either side of the border, a human voice is speaking to you who does not shout or threaten, neither does it preach nor promise; it is nothing but a quiet voice that reminds you that you are people like us, who want to live in truth like us, that you want both our world and the world of the future to be ruled by justice and not by furious hatred.*¹³⁸ After the abdication of President Beneš, whose political decisions he defended, he became the most visible symbol of the First Republic of Czechoslovakia. Though he always refused to blame others – he considered it inappropriate and unbecoming – he found himself being blamed by many for the disaster of Munich. In Karel Čapek, the indignant street had found

137 NA, f. PMR, Box 4145, inv. No. 2960, notes from Council of Ministers meetings of the second Czecho-Slovak government held on 6 December 1938.

138 ČERNÝ, Václav: *Křik Koruny české. Paměti 1938–1945*, p. 69.

139 ČAPEK, Karel: *Tichý hlas. Neznámé i známé texty z roku 1938 / A Quiet Voice. Unknown and Known Texts from 1938/*. Nakladatelství ARSCI, Prague 2005, pp. 63–64.

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a scapegoat. The author, who, with all his writings and speeches, had always striven to make mankind more human and more just, now received insulting anonymous letters and phone calls, and faced threats. Three weeks before his death in a feverish atmosphere that was only slowly calming, he wrote: *Yes, much has changed, but people have remained the same; but now we know who is who. Who is decent has always been decent; who is faithful is faithful even now. Who is spinning with the wind was spinning with the wind before. Who thinks his moment has now come, always thought only of himself. No one becomes a defector who has not always been one; who has changed faith never had any; a man can't be remade, only repainted. A nation can't be made, unless you have centuries to do it; all you can do is lead crowds one way today and another tomorrow. He who hates has always had hatred within him; where would this hatred come from all of a sudden? Whoever served will continue to serve; whoever wanted good will want good again...*¹⁴⁰

Karel Čapek, an intellectual, was deeply wounded by the attacks, but he did not die from them. The well-known writer, who had been nominated for the Nobel Prize for Literature seven times in the 1930s and had organised the International Congress of the PEN Club in Prague in the summer of 1938, was already ill. Clearing flood damage at his country retreat in Strž near Prague, he contracted the flu, and then severe pneumonia. He died on 25 December 1938 at his villa in Prague's Vinohrady district.¹⁴¹ The National Theatre, which owed its high attendance and considerable profits to him, did not even hang up a black banner. The funeral took place four days later at Vyšehrad Cemetery in Prague. In the cold winter weather, a crowds of friends and admirers came to bid farewell to Čapek. Senior officials sent their respectful condolences to the family. One of the funeral speakers, the literary and theatre critic Miroslav Rutte, said: *Death has carried out an unjust annexation. Even this death has diminished our borders.*¹⁴²

Czech anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism was the most repulsive aspect of life in the Second Republic. The national disaster of Munich opened the floodgates.¹⁴³ Hostility towards Jews also existed in the First Republic, but it was impolite to talk about it. Now there were no barriers and it was not a very edifying view of Czech society. *What could be more brutal in this unfortunate country than German oppression? – Why, Czech oppression of course!* – wrote Josef Čapek.¹⁴⁴

Barely two weeks after Munich, and doctors, lawyers and engineers began asking Jews to leave their professions. On 14 October 1938, the professional chambers of Czechoslovakia's doctors, lawyers, notaries and engineers sent a memorandum to the

140 ČAPEK, Karel: Od člověka k člověku /From Man To Man/. *Lidové noviny*, 4. 12. 1938, p. 2.

141 HORA, Josef: Čím byl Karel Čapek /What Karel Čapek Was/. *České slovo*, 28. 12. 1938, p. 1; VODÁK, Jindřich: Smrt velkého spisovatele /Death Of A Great Writer/. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.

142 Pohřeb Karla Čapka /The Funeral of Karel Čapek/. *České slovo*, 30. 12. 1938, p. 1.

143 For more detail see ZOUFALÁ, Marcela – HOLÝ, Jiří (eds.): *Rozklad židovského života. 167 dní druhé republiky*.

144 ČAPEK, Josef: *Psáno do mraků 1936–1939*, p. 199.

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Syrový government, proposing it restrict the number of Jews in their professions to a percentage that would correspond to their representation in Czechoslovak society. And that was meant to be just the beginning; they expressed the desire, in the interests of the nation, that there be no Jewish doctors, lawyers or engineers at all in future. Such manifestations did not, in fact, have a racial motive; rather they were primarily an effort to eradicate the competition. A Czech lawyer would say to himself: *What happens if a Jewish fellow lawyer is banned from practicing? His clients will come over to me, and I will make a bigger profit.* That was the essential and decisive motivation, and a classic Czech one; there will be something in it for me.

Jewish origin was not an obstacle for individuals to join the ranks of the Sokol organisation, but in spite of this the board of the Czechoslovak Sokol Community (ČOS), on behalf of its local Sokol leaders, offered the following solution to “the Jewish problem” to Minister of Education Stanislav Bukovský: *The Jewish question should be resolved on an ethnic and social basis so that those Jewish immigrants who have arrived here since 1914 should return to their original homelands. Meanwhile those Jews who declared themselves of Czechoslovak nationality in 1930 should gradually be assimilated into our society relative to their abundance, while the rest should leave for those countries whose nationality they voluntarily claimed in the 1930 census.*¹⁴⁵

Anti-Semitism was also caused by growing nationalism. The youth wing of the Party of National Unity put pressure on the leadership to address this issue more closely. In relation to Jews, its manifesto read: *Therefore, Jews who are a separate nation in their own right even if they speak several Slavic languages are not our nationals [...] they will be expelled from the civil service, and their influence on the nation’s education will be banned [...] immigration from different national elements will be banned. All citizenship applications granted after 26 July 1914 will be reviewed and all Jews who have settled in our country will be expelled [...]. For Jews and gypsies, general conscription will be replaced by special work duty. [...] The appropriate care will also be devoted to national extra-curricula education, which will also be conducted in a national and Christian spirit. To this end, all ideologically and morally unhealthy works will be removed from all public libraries and folk education will be rebuilt along national and Christian lines. [...] Studying at university will be tied to a rigorous entrance exam and will assume a further six-month stay in a work camp for university students...*¹⁴⁶

The nation’s hostile gaze settled not only on the Jews, but also on the Roma population. The editor-in-chief of *Venkov*, Rudolf Halík, proposed in response to complaints from the countryside that “bands of Gypsies” were stealing, begging, and sometimes even murdering: *It would be a good thing to build concentration camps for gypsies, rogues and professional beggars, the young and healthy ones. Humanity cannot be applied in this case as it would be too one-sided.*¹⁴⁷

145 According to a report by the Press Department of the ČOS, delivered to the Czechoslovak News Agency (CTK).

146 Quoted according to GREGOROVÍČ, Miroslav: *Kapitoly o českém fašismu. Fašismus jako měřítko politické dezorientace*, p. 98.

147 *Venkov*, 17. 12. 1938, p. 3.

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The growing pressure from Berlin, which wanted to “solve” the “Jewish question” in the Second Republic along Nazi principles, supported by growing Czech anti-Semitism, forced the Beran government to address a “solution to the Jewish question.”¹⁴⁸ Hitler of course had placed special emphasis on it in his warnings and threats, but the Czecho-Slovak government tacked back and forth on the issue. This was confirmed by the wording of the government’s policy statement. In it, the passage concerning the country’s Jewish population originally read: *We will also address the Jewish question. The state’s attitude to those who are long established in this country will be governed by their relationship to the needs of the state and to those nations who carry with them the idea of the state. In all circumstances, those especially who have not grown up alongside Czechs, Slovaks and Ruthenes, must assume that their position in our lives, and especially in the economy, must not be disproportionate to their power, and this is also in their own interests.*¹⁴⁹ This was the wording submitted to the government on the day before the deadline for approval, but the government made it more neutral: *We will also address the Jewish question. The state’s attitude to those Jews who have long lived in this country and who enjoy a positive relationship to the needs of the state and its peoples will not be hostile.*¹⁵⁰ It is clear that the government opted for a more concise and cautious formulation. But there were also external reasons for the change in the government statement. At that time negotiations were underway for a British-French loan, and the Czech delegation in charge of the negotiations asked for the utmost restraint in statements on the Jewish question, as the British had made this a condition of the ten-million-pound loan. So the pressure from outside hindered the government from introducing anti-Semitic measures. *This explains Beran’s poor formulation of the Jewish problem*, Hencke reported back to Berlin. Hitler, however, was dissatisfied, even though the proposed steps had been added by the Czecho-Slovak government in a bid to moderate his anger.¹⁵¹

- 148 The Beran cabinet proposed that the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the National Statistics Office, produce a draft decree for a census of Jews. Anyone who on a certain day in 1918 was a member of a Jewish religious community, as well as his descendants, was to be considered a Jew. *In addition to the data collected during the census, the survey data will also include what nationality the person declared in 1921 and in 1930, how long he or she has lived on the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic, and, finally, the place of the person surveyed, which will remain strictly confidential. In this way, it would be religious affiliation which will be taken as a basis for determining the term “Jew”, and not the criteria laid down in the so-called Nuremberg Laws.* NA, f. PMR, Box 4145, inv. No. 2960, notes from Council of Ministers meetings of second Czecho-Slovak government held on 6 December 1938.
- 149 KÁRNÝ, Miroslav: Politické a ekonomické aspekty „židovské otázky“ v pomnichovském ČSR / Political and Economic Aspects of the “Jewish question” in the post-Munich Czechoslovak Republic/. In: *Sborník historický / Historical Textbook/*, 1989, No. 36, p. 183.
- 150 *Národní shromáždění republiky Československé 1935–1938*. Chamber of Deputies, typed notes of the 156th session, Tuesday 13 December 1938 – see <http://www.psp.cz> (quoted version dated 22. 7. 2019). Also published in KUBÁTOVÁ, Ludmila – MALÁ, Irena – SOUKUP, Jaroslav – VRBATA, Jaroslav (eds.): *Protifašistický a národně osvobozenecský boj českého a slovenského lidu 1938–1945. Edice Dokumentů*, Part I, Vol. 3, Book 3, Document No. 987, pp. 40–47. A final version was also printed in the national press on 14 December 1938.
- 151 The diplomat Hencke also wrote that the head of cabinet of the Foreign Ministry had informed him that day in confidence that a ministerial committee set up by the Prime Minister and chaired by Minister Havelka would be preparing the following measures to rework Jewish affairs: 1. A ban on Jews practicing law – measures were essentially already in place; 2. Appropriate measures for doctors were

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The Second Republic hesitated as much as it could, sometimes even in an undignified fashion. However, the Nazis' Nuremberg Laws were never implemented by the government of the Second Republic; this they prevented. But step by step the country was forced to make concessions. Anti-Semitism cannot solely be blamed on the Syrový and Beran governments, as is popular. It cannot even be blamed on the extreme right, which was loudly and crudely anti-Semitic. No, the anti-Semitism of the Second Republic was also the product of the elite of Czech civil society, however much it might pain them to admit it.

Sad Reality, Mournful Prospects

Munich 1938 became a symbol of the political blindness that persisted in the months that followed. The Western democracies believed they had rescued the peace. At the end of a tumultuous year, they still enjoyed that fleeting illusion besides their bad conscience. They must, however, have painfully been realising that it was not possible to retreat in the face of Hitler. Those politicians who were more far-sighted than the ones who supported appeasement were already well aware of it. They were equally aware that forced decisions implemented to the detriment of others do not last long.

At Christmas 1938, President Hácha paid a visit to Slovakia, to try and improve relations with the Slovaks.¹⁵² He received a warm welcome; his Catholicism and personal cordiality were much appreciated. His Christmas message on the radio was delivered partly in Czech, partly in Slovak and partly in Ruthenian. The man who was supposed to give the presidential office more of a representative meaning turned out to be successful in political negotiations. This served as an encouragement to those who still believed in a common state of Czechs and Slovaks. However, this could not stop the separatist tendencies behind the radical nationalist and fascist wing of the HSĽS, especially when the Beran government no longer commanded any real power in Slovakia.

The men who led the Second Republic were professional, proficient, polite and responsible, and managed to save what they could save. However, they found themselves in a hopeless situation, because whatever they did, it was not enough for Hitler, yet too much for the Democrats who were still accustomed to conditions in the First Republic of Czechoslovakia. *It will be a small country, but ours!* Czechs hoped in vain. But it was just an illusion. They believed that the Second Republic had a longer future than that already carved out for it. Few, however, doubted that things would continue to be tight and difficult.

The international isolation of the weakened country was obvious to all; there was nothing on the immediate horizon to improve its position, and it was particularly difficult to put together a state budget for 1939.¹⁵³ Czecho-Slovakia's dependence

being prepared; 3. A law prohibiting Jews from accessing public offices; 4. A law on the surrendering of Jewish property was being prepared. See KUBÁTOVÁ, Ludmila - MALÁ, Irena - SOUKUP, Jaroslav - VRBATA, Jaroslav (eds.): *Protifašistický a národně osvobozenecký boj českého a slovenského lidu 1938–1945. Edice dokumentů*, Part I, Vol. 3, Book 3, Document No. 992, pp. 54–55.

152 KVAČEK, Robert - TOMÁŠEK, Dušan: *Causa Emil Hácha*, pp. 20–23.

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on – more accurately subordination to – Nazi Germany, which was now deciding the fate of Central Europe, was clear. It is telling that the weakened state, which by rights should have received guarantees of its continued existence in exchange for meeting the territorial demands of its neighbours, received none. The West responded to each such demand, each such warning with the words: *You'll have to speak to Berlin*.

Czechoslovakia's envoy to Great Britain, Jan Masaryk, who watched the traditional values of his father being mercilessly stripped away, had already requested early retirement in mid-October.¹⁵⁴ At the end of the year, he thanked everyone in London who had contributed to various refugee funds in Czecho-Slovakia. He also thanked all the Britons who had sent him thousands of letters of support and encouragement at a time when *Czechoslovakia was being subjected to surgical pacification with unprecedented harshness and without a single trace of anaesthesia in an effort to implement a prophylactic measure that was supposed to provide Europe with a lasting peace*.¹⁵⁵ And to the question worried people were asking all over Europe he answered as follows: *If what we did in Munich and what we have been doing since then is truly laying the ground for a lasting peace, I am proud that my homeland was the first to make such a great sacrifice. If it is not, then God have mercy on our souls*.¹⁵⁶

The world lived in the shadow of the Nazi threat. Naturally, the public had no definite knowledge of the Nazis' plans, and that was true not only of the weakened Czecho-Slovakia but everywhere. The demands made on the central government in Prague – which nervously attempted to avoid any provocation that could invite an angry German response, and certainly avoided anything that could be perceived as a cause of conflict – only escalated. Hitler was well aware of his dominant position. No amount of concessions could satisfy him; he was determined to find a way to liquidate what remained of Czechoslovakia. For this he exploited what remained of the German national minority, anti-Czechoslovak propaganda was ramped up even further and he increasingly contemplated using the “Slovak card”. The policy was best expressed – clearly and plainly – by the German chargé d'affaires in Prague, Andor Hencke: *We can briefly summarise the foreign policy result that the fatal year of 1938 brought to Czechoslovakia by saying that the state has lost its importance as an independent factor in international politics. In today's international political and geographical conditions, Czechoslovakia is essentially only formally independent, and even this can only be maintained if the Prague government and the Czech nation – there is no reason to talk about the Slovak nation in this context – will find such a relationship with the Reich that we ourselves desire*.¹⁵⁷

153 NA, f. PMR, Box 4145, inv. No. 2960, Notes from Council of Ministers meeting of second Czecho-Slovak government held on 23 December 1938.

154 Jan Masaryk, son of the founder of Czechoslovakia, left for a lecture tour of the United States at the invitation of Columbia University. KOSATÍK, Pavel – KOLÁŘ, Michal: *Jan Masaryk. Pravdivý příběh* /Jan Masaryk. A True Story/. Mladá fronta, Prague 1998, pp. 141–146.

155 Jan Masaryk se věnuje emigraci z ČSR /Jan Masaryk Considers Emigration From The Czecho-Slovak Republic/. *České slovo*, 31. 12. 1938, p. 1.

156 Ibid.

157 KUBÁTOVÁ, Ludmila – MALÁ, Irena – SOUKUP, Jaroslav – VRBATA, Jaroslav (eds.): *Protifašistický a národně osvobozenecký boj českého a slovenského lidu 1938–1945. Edice Dokumentů*, Part I, Vol. 3, Book 3, Document No. 1020, pp. 96–100.

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A joint photograph of the participants after signing the Munich Agreement. First row from left: British Prime Minister Arthur Neville Chamberlain, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler, Italian “Duce” Benito Mussolini and Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano, 29 September 1938.



Removing one of the Czechoslovak border posts after the Munich Agreement, first days of October 1938

“A small country, but ours”



A group of Czech refugees from the occupied Sudetenland, Liberec, October 1938



From left, Catholic priest Jozef Tiso (“representative” of the Slovaks), Prime Minister General Jan Syrový and Minister of Foreign Affairs František Chvalkovský visiting President Emil Hácha at Prague Castle, 6 October 1938

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Having been elected President in the Parliament, which was then located in the Rudolfinum building, Emil Hácha left for Prague Castle. Vehicles driving through Mostecká Street, 30 November 1938

“A small country, but ours”



President Emil Hácha in Old Town Square in Prague at the tomb of an unknown soldier. General Jan Surový, Minister of National Defence, on the left; General Ludvík Krejčí, Chief of the General Staff of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces, on the right, 5 December 1938.



President Emil Hácha visiting the National Theatre in Prague. Prime Minister Rudolf Beran, also wearing a bow tie, on the right, 14 December 1938.



Poet Josef Hora speaking over the coffin of the writer Karel Čapek at the Prague Vyšehrad Cemetery, 28 December 1938

Source: All pictures are from Czech News Agency (ČTK)