

THE DEMISE OF DEMOCRACY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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## PREFACE

During the twenty year period between the Versailles settlement and the collapse of the European security system Czechoslovakia alone among the new states of Europe developed a viable democratic order. Yet within less than three years after the conclusion of the second World War this "model democracy" was overthrown in a coup d'etat by the Communist party with the support of the parliamentary majority and the organized working class. Czechoslovakia is the only democratic republic that has been subverted successfully by Communists, and the only country that the Communists have captured without either recourse to civil warfare--as in Russia, China, Yugoslavia and Vietnam--or to the intervention of the Soviet armed forces--as in the numerous satellite states of Europe and Asia which came under Russian occupation in the wake of the war against the Axis.

This thesis is an attempt to analyse the events which led to the demise of democracy in Czechoslovakia in February, 1948, and to discern the causes for the weakening of the democratic ideology, the spread of Communist influence, and the failure of the legal and political safeguards to preserve the constitutional order of the state.

It is the opinion of the author that the roots of the crisis of democracy in Czechoslovakia stemmed from the "betrayal of Munich" in 1938, when the French and British creators and allies of Czechoslovakia accomodated Hitler's demands for the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in violation of numerous solemm treaty commitments which guaranteed the

inviolability of that country's territorial integrity. The appeasement policy of the western powers shook the faith of the Czechoslovaks in the democratic heritage and contributed to the propagation of pan-Slavism and to the idealization of Soviet Russia during the course of the conflict against Hitler. This sentiment of reliance and trust in Russian protection paved the way for the Czechoslovak Communists and their supporters to win the adherence of the working class in 1946.

It is also the opinion of the author that Allied wartime diplomacy again "betrayed" the democratic government in exile of President Benes by accomodating to the Russian demands that Czechoslovakia be liberated by the Red Army, that its government include only leaders who were acceptable to Moscow, and that the Czech Communists be given positions of power and responsibility within the administration. This infiltration of the administrative structure of the state by the Communists became the lever by which an activist minority of the population was armed and directed for the seizure of total power within Czechoslovakia.

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## CHAPTER I

### FOUNDATIONS AND COLLAPSE OF CZECHOSLOVAK SECURITY

#### Diplomatic Foundations of Czechoslovak Security

Czechoslovakia was established as an independent state by the Allied and Associated Powers within the old boundaries of Bohemia. In carving out the national boundaries of the new state from the Hapsburg Empire, the Versailles peacemakers were forced to reconcile the principle of self determination with the economic and strategic requirements of stability. The 3,100,000 resident Germans who were included as citizens of the new state by the Treaty of Saint Germain had formed an integral population of Bohemia from the beginning of the thirteenth century when their immigration was encouraged by the Czech kings. They lived in eight territorially disconnected areas of Czechoslovakia, so that geographically they did not form a compact community. There was no consensus among them as to their future affiliation, as some preferred annexation by Austria, others sought inclusion into Germany, while many expressed acceptance of autonomous status within Czechoslovakia.<sup>1</sup>

The Peace Conference gave no consideration to the desires of the German minority in Bohemia, due to the active participation of the Czechoslovakian military units in the war against the Central Powers,

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<sup>1</sup>M. F. Kaspar, Why Without Sudeten Germans (Paris, 1953), p. 11.

and the French desire to contain and balance Germany's power through limitation of her territorial extent and population. To safeguard the interests of the German-speaking minority of the Czechoslovakian Republic, the latter was forced to submit to international servitudes, which were incorporated into the Treaty of Saint Germain and enforced by the League of Nations.

Czechoslovakia not only respected the internationally-guaranteed rights of the German minority, but conferred numerous additional legal rights and privileges upon this group in order to win its loyalty to the new Republic.<sup>2</sup> The universal suffrage act of 1919 provided for proportional representation in both Houses of Parliament and guaranteed local self-government to all districts with a German majority. The new Constitution and the Law of Nationalities of 1920 insured legal protection of the nation, racial, and religious rights of minorities and prohibited all discrimination. Separate schools staffed by German-speaking teachers were provided for as few as forty pupils, while German-language libraries were established in all towns having over four hundred German-Czech residents. Even a separate German university in Prague was established. In 1930 the German language was officially recognized in districts inhabited by 2,338,000 Germans. Ninety-seven per cent of the German children attended German-language schools, which averaged one per eight hundred fifty-two inhabitants, which was higher than the Prussian average.<sup>3</sup> The Ministry of Education spent fourteen

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<sup>2</sup>R. W. Seton-Watson, A History of the Czechs and Slovaks (London, 1943), p. 327.

<sup>3</sup>Jaromir Luza, Transfer (Vienna, no year), p. 6.

per cent per capita more for students in the German university than for those in the Czechoslovakian universities. Czechoslovakia guaranteed instruction in the languages of all the constituent peoples of the Republic, a privilege which the Czechs had not enjoyed under Austrian rule.<sup>4</sup>

For fifteen years there was little friction between Czechs and Germans, as the trust and loyalty of the Germans were won by the new Republic, thanks to the enlightened domestic and foreign policies of the Masaryk government. Czechoslovakia's foreign minister during the twenties, Dr. Edward Benes, supported the admission of Germany to the League of Nations and offered to vacate membership on the League Council in favor of Germany in 1925. He welcomed the Locarno pact of October 16, 1925, and included a separate treaty with the Weimar Republic to arbitrate all future disputes between the two states.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the democratic and constitutional parties of Czechoslovakia received more than two-thirds of the German minority vote in the elections of 1925 and 1929. After 1926 the German Agrarian and German Clerical parties, followed by the German Social Democratic party, became active collaborators of the governmental coalition, sharing responsibility within the Cabinet until the spring of 1938, when they withdrew under the pressure of the Nazi movement. Only a small minority of the Czechoslovakian Germans remained irreconcilably opposed to the Republic, to

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<sup>4</sup>S. Harrison Thompson, Czechoslovakia in European History (Princeton, 1953), p. 346.

<sup>5</sup>Edward B. Hitchcock, I Built a Temple of Peace (New York, 1950), p. 236.



become the breeding nest of irredentism and Nazism, and to provide Hitler with moral rationalization to dismember Czechoslovakia.<sup>6</sup>

The Paris conference of 1919-20 established a new status quo in Europe that was based partly upon the democratic principle of self determination and partly upon the punitive principle of retribution vis-a-vis the Central Powers, all of whom were stripped of territories. The new order had to be enforced by an adequate system of power, for as Poincare opined of Germany in 1922, "They will return".<sup>7</sup> France was not capable alone of enforcing the new peace in Europe, for she emerged greatly weakened from the war in 1918. Her effort to conclude a triple alliance with the United States and Great Britain failed, as the United States Senate rejected the proposal at the same time it refused to authorize the ratification of the League of Nations Covenant. The British government also declined to commit itself to an alliance with France as a result of the American refusal. Unable to obtain an unequivocal pledge of adequate military assistance from these sources, France sought to conclude alliances with the succession states of central and eastern Europe, whose security was also threatened by Germany. Among these countries was Czechoslovakia, to whom overtures for a treaty of mutual assistance were made in 1923 by the Paris government.

Initially, the president of the Czechoslovak Republic, T. G. Masaryk, was not at all enthusiastic towards the proposal, for he intended to keep aloof from the influence of any single great power and preferred to develop the Little Entente as an independent bloc in

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<sup>6</sup>J. O. ST. Clair-Sobell, "Post-War Czechoslovakia," International Journal, III (1948), p. 356.

<sup>7</sup>No Author, Ideas of Politicians (Prague, 1927), p. 117.

international politics.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the Czechs had strong sympathies for the French and were mindful that France was the first of the great powers to support the Czechoslovak national cause in 1918, and to insist firmly on the creation of the Czechoslovak state.

The Franco-Czechoslovak alliance was signed on January 25, 1924. Its main purpose was to defend the status quo resulting from the Versailles settlement and to consult on all international problems that might threaten the security of the signatories. The treaty required joint agreement on the specific measures which should be taken to protect their common interest in security and peace. The treaty re-affirmed opposition to any Austro-German union, and to the restoration of either the Hapsburgs or the Hohenzollerns to their former territories. Both parties promised to inform each other of all treaties to which they were a party and to consult one another before concluding any new ones.<sup>9</sup> The treaty did not provide for any plan of concerted military action or military cooperation. This omission was purposely made in order not to provoke any counter alliances and to lessen international resentment. However, a permanent military mission was maintained by the French in Prague from 1919 to 1938 to plan for concerted military action in the event of future war against Germany.<sup>10</sup> In order to bolster her security further, after the Locarno pact of October 16, 1925, France concluded

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<sup>8</sup> Kamil Krofta, Czechoslovakia in the International Police (Prague, 1934), p. 79.

<sup>9</sup> V. Vochoc, "Our Alliance with France," The International Politics, III (1925), pp. 1-6.

<sup>10</sup> Karel Lisicky, The Czechoslovak Road to Munich (London, 1956), pp. 9-12.

additional treaties with her east European allies, including Czechoslovakia, whereby mutual aid was promised in all cases of unprovoked attack.

Another goal of Czech diplomacy was to strengthen the League of Nations, collective security and international law. These were vital objectives for a small and insecure nation bounded by powerful revisionist states. Enforcement by an effective League of Nations of the rights of small states was viewed as an important guarantee of Czech independence and territorial integrity. Dr. Benes believed that Czechoslovakia as well as other small states could enjoy security only in a fully stabilized Europe, and that the League of Nations was the only agency that could adjust differences between the Great Powers. The League, he hoped, would furnish Czechoslovakia with security and prevent her from becoming a satellite of one of the Great Powers.<sup>11</sup> Benes became one of the strongest advocates of the League and collective security.

In regard to Germany, Czechoslovakia's foreign policy was one of rapprochement. After the abortive Geneva Protocol,<sup>12</sup> to which Benes had contributed significantly, he welcomed Stresemann's offer to participate in the negotiation of a modus vivendi that would recognize the status quo in Europe. Benes' opinion of the Locarno Pact was that: "it should inaugurate a new period of peace--which would be universal, or at least European in scope."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Benes, The Struggle for Peace and the Security of the State (1934), pp. 7-17.

<sup>12</sup> J. Krcmar, "Contributions to the Interpretation and Evaluation of Locarno Treaties," The International Politics, IV (1925), pp. 1332-1334. Geneva Protocol of Sept. 6, 1924--an attempt to prevent all aggressive wars by means of clear definition and an aggressor, provisions for sanction and alliances, and compulsory arbitration. The rejection of Great Britain doomed it.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Czechoslovakia sought, as yet another goal of her diplomacy, the establishment of close political and economic ties with the other states of eastern Europe which had benefited from the Versailles settlement and were therefore interested in the defense of the status quo and balance of power in Europe. Benes announced his aim to negotiate "a new system of planned collaboration" with Yugoslavia, Rumania, and Greece in 1919.<sup>14</sup> As the result of the negotiations, three separate bilateral treaties were signed in 1920 and 1921 between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Rumania, and Rumania and Yugoslavia. The alliances formed what became known as the Little Entente.

All of these treaties, which were identical in their content, specified that: (1) each state was to aid the other against an unprovoked attack by Hungary, (2) the method of assistance would be determined by a later agreement between the competent technical authorities, i.e., by a military protocol, (3) neither country might conclude an alliance with a third power without informing the partners in advance, (4) the treaties were to be renewable every two years, and (5) the treaties were to be registered with the League of Nations.<sup>15</sup>

Benes believed that the Little Entente would establish closer economic cooperation, greater internal stability, and lead to a regional understanding that would replace the role of the Austro-Hungarian empire in maintaining an equilibrium of law and order among the diverse nationalities of east-central Europe.<sup>16</sup> The economic discussions which

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<sup>14</sup>Josef Hanc, Tornado Across Eastern Europe (New York, 1942), p. 60.

<sup>15</sup>R. Machray, The Little Entente (London, 1929), pp. 105-106.

<sup>16</sup>Edward Benes, The Problems of New Europe (Prague, 1924), pp. 284-285.

accompanied the negotiation of the alliances resulted in the signature of commercial conventions between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

The Little Entente was directed primarily against the Hungarians, who were known to harbor revisionist aims that were incompatible with the interests of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Rumania. The Hungarian plot to restore the former Hapsburg monarch in 1926 was quickly frustrated by the Little Entente, which threatened intervention. The Little Entente also supported France in opposing the Austro-German customs union of 1931.<sup>17</sup>

The Nazi revolution of 1933 and Germany's new challenge to the status quo caused the foreign ministers of the Entente countries to conclude a treaty in Geneva, on February 16, 1933, whereby their mutual ties were strengthened. A Permanent Council of Foreign Ministers was created to ensure unity in the prosecution of a common foreign policy. Benes explained to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Czechoslovak Parliament that the pact was necessary to check the spread of internal political chaos in Central Europe, and provide for greater security in the event the disarmament conference in Geneva should fail and lead to an armaments race in Europe.<sup>18</sup>

The Permanent Council of the Little Entente met in Prague in June, 1933, to create an Economic Council, whose main purpose was to establish a preferential tariff system for the three states, propose a common economic policy, and create immediately a "special normalization committee which would extend to all branches of military equipment."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gerhard Schacher, Central Europe and the Western World (New York, 1936), p. 143.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Benes, The Struggle for Peace and the Security of the State (Prague, 1934), pp. 688-691.

<sup>19</sup> Gerhard Schacher, Central Europe and the Western World (New York, 1936), p. 93.

The reorganized Little Entente formed a relatively powerful bloc in 1933. It was numerically the third largest military power in Europe after the Soviet Union and France. On the other hand, it displayed certain weaknesses, particularly in the multi-national composition of the populations, one-fourth of which consisted of minorities, and in the limited scope of its collective security provisions, which guaranteed mutual assistance only against unprovoked aggression by Hungary. In the autumn of 1936, however, President Benes made an attempt to supplant the separate bilateral treaties with a single multilateral pact which would guarantee to each signatory mutual military and economic assistance against any unprovoked attack. He proposed, too, that the Entente conclude an alliance with France for mutual security against Germany and Italy. Benes' proposal was turned down, for the governments of Rumania and Yugoslavia had doubts about the utility of an alliance with France, because the latter's display of weakness and inaction against Nazi re-militarization of the Rhineland in the spring of the same year, and because they did not feel any immediate threats from Germany to their own national security. An official visit to Yugoslavia in 1937 by President Benes to plead for strengthening of the Little Entente was unsuccessful.<sup>20</sup>

The idea of recognizing the legitimacy of the Soviet regime and admitting it to the concert of powers in Europe for the purpose of strengthening the status quo was espoused by Benes during the twenties, but without success. Czechoslovakia was prevented from establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet government by the opposition of several of the parties which formed the majority coalition. A trade

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<sup>20</sup> Karel Lisicky, The Czechoslovak Road to Munich (London, 1955), pp. 23-24.

agreement was concluded in the wake of the Rapallo conference in 1922, and in 1928 a Soviet exposition of Russian products was held in Prague. There were increasing pressures from Czech manufacturers and exporters to recognize the Soviet government after 1931, when the depression created a stimulus to expand trade with Russia. It was not until the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1933 that the impetus to formalize relations with the USSR was able to override previous objections. The admission of Soviet Russia into the League of Nations in 1934 established its respectability among the Western Powers, and its energetic contribution to the policy of collective security to halt the march of the Fascist powers towards war enabled the Czech Foreign Minister to win the consent of Parliament for the de jure recognition of the USSR in June 1934.<sup>21</sup>

Increasing tension in Czech-German relations raised fears of aggression and induced the Czechoslovak government in 1935 to prepare a comprehensive plan of aerial defense and to strengthen its alliances. In the absence of united strength by the French and British to contain Germany, Benes was forced to seek additional security for his country in an alliance with the Soviet Union. Signature of a treaty of mutual assistance between France and the USSR at Paris on May 2, 1935 made it possible for Czechoslovakia to add Russia as an ally against Germany. Relations between Prague and Moscow had become very cordial following the appointment of diplomatic missions. Czech journalists were welcomed in Moscow and were received with unusual sincerity. Two new Soviet-Czechoslovakia commercial conventions providing for most-favored-nation treatment were

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<sup>21</sup>Kamil Krofta, Czechoslovakia in International Politics (Prague, 1934), p. 121.

signed early in 1935 and paved the way for the negotiation of the Treaty of Mutual Assistance between Czechoslovakia and Russia of May 16, 1935.

The pact was to be invoked whenever one of the signatories became the victim of unprovoked attack by any European state, and provided for mutual assistance against the aggressor. It was conditioned by the protocol of signature which stated that "both governments understood that the obligation of mutual assistance becomes effective only when it shall meet the foreseen conditions of the pact and when the victim of aggression shall receive also the aid of France."<sup>22</sup>

On November of the same year Benes, in summarizing his foreign policy before Parliament, concluded that Czechoslovakia was endangered by her geographical location. He linked his country's security to the balance of power and general peace of the European continent.

"Our State is the key to the whole post-War structure of Central Europe. If it is touched either internally or internationally, the whole fabric of Central Europe is menaced, and the peace of Europe seriously infringed. It would not be long ere all Europe would be grievously conscious of the fact. It is for that reason that today and for all future our international position and our internal stability are a matter of great interest equally to France and the Soviet Union, equally to England and Italy, and to the Little Entente as they ought to be to Germany and Poland. Thus, whenever we are in danger the vital interest of all the constructive forces of Europe would be on the side of our integrity and our prosperity."<sup>23</sup>

His conduct of the nation's foreign policy was approved with enthusiasm by Parliament, and in recognition of his statesmanship, a month later, just before Christmas, he succeeded Masaryk as President of Czechoslovakia.

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<sup>22</sup>Frederick Schuman, Europe on the Eve (New York, 1939), p. 561.

<sup>23</sup>Edward Benes, The Struggle for Peace and the Collective Security of the State (Prague, 1936), p. 58.



### Hitler and the Breakdown of Czechoslovak Security

The rise to power of Hitler in Germany undermined the strength of the democratic parties in the German-speaking regions of Czechoslovakia, although the prolonged economic depression of the early thirties had prepared the German-speaking population for a conversion to political extremism. In the 1935 elections the Nazi party of Konrad Henlein polled 62 per cent of the total German vote in Czechoslovakia. Although the Czechoslovakian government was providing financial assistance to the German-speaking areas to ameliorate their economic hardship, pan-Germanism and union with the Third Reich became the panacea for all ills among the majority of the German population of Czechoslovakia.

The 1935 electoral triumph of the Sudeten Nazis, however, did not force the German democratic representatives to withdraw from the Cabinet, nor did it affect Czech-German diplomatic relations immediately. On the contrary, Hitler made overtures in 1935 and 1936 to the Benes government for the conclusion of a treaty of amity, territorial guarantee and mutual non-aggression.<sup>24</sup> Germany did not assert any demands on behalf of the German-speaking minority of Czechoslovakia as late as December, 1936. President Benes recognized that the prospective treaty aimed to drive a wedge between Czechoslovakia and her allies, France and Soviet Russia, and to induce the Republic to leave the League of Nations, consequences which would have isolated Czechoslovakia diplomatically and left her exposed to subsequent German pressures. Following French advice, the Benes government declined the terms of the proposed pact.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Hodges, "Benes Ends an Era," Current History, XLIX (1938), p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

In the spring of 1937 Nazi propaganda for the first time began to denounce Czechoslovakia for alleged mistreatment of the German minority, and accused her of being a "bastion of Bolshevism". Both allegations aimed to influence world public opinion against Czechoslovakia, so as to isolate and expose her to German conquest. Hitler informed his government aides of his plan to annex Austria and Czechoslovakia at this time, by means of diplomatic pressure and military force if required.<sup>26</sup> After the annexation of Austria on March 12, 1938, the Czechoslovakian government was assured several times by Nazi spokesmen that Germany had no intention to commit aggression against the Republic, and Reich Marschal Goering re-asserted the validity of the 1925 treaty of arbitration, while at the same time the irredentist movement in Czechoslovakia among the German minority was loudly demanding cession of the "Sudetenland" to Germany. The Benes government made several compromise offers to the irredentist leader Henlein, the last of which, on September 6, 1938, would have granted complete autonomy to the Germans of Czechoslovakia, but Henlein refused each of them categorically, since his demands for political autonomy of the Sudetenland were simply a pretext to goad the Benes government into a policy of repression which might then justify a German invasion and annexation of the region to the Reich.<sup>27</sup>

The collective security system and the prestige of the League of Nations went untested during the twenties, but from 1931 to 1936 a sequence of events marked by treaty renunciations, aggressions, and conquests on the part of Japan, Germany and Italy undermined and shattered the Covenant

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<sup>26</sup>Henry C. Wolf, "The New Czechoslovakia," The Commentator, IV (1938), p. 28.

<sup>27</sup>Radomir Luza, Transfer (Vienna, no year), p. 11.

and the effectiveness of the new international law which it had engendered. The effectiveness of the Franco-Czech Alliance remained unimpaired until the Munich period. Following Germany's re-militarization of the Rhineland in 1936 the French were reminded that "only Prague was loyal and would remain loyal even unto death".<sup>28</sup> President Benes immediately assured the French Ambassador in Prague that the Czechoslovak army was prepared to enforce the provisions of the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty and those of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Unfortunately the French Cabinet decided against applying force against Germany, but accepted the advice of the British to deliver a diplomatic protest to Germany and to the League of Nations. The success of Hitler's bluff in re-militarizing the Rhineland, and the failure of France to act, might be considered as the turning point in the relations between France and her eastern european allies,<sup>29</sup> for in the autumn of 1937 French Foreign Minister Yvonne Delbos reported to the Chamber of Deputies that, although France still had friends in eastern Europe, only Czechoslovakia could be expected to fulfill any military commitments.

President Benes was aware of the profound crisis in France which might obscure the judgment of her leaders and prevent them from acting in their own interests; so after the outbreak of the crisis in Czech-German relations, President Benes informed the French government through its ambassador in Prague that the Nazi claims against Czechoslovakia imperiled European security and the balance of power, and that it was in the interest of France to oppose Hitler's demands. He asked for assurances that France would uphold her commitments to defend Czechoslovakia. The

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<sup>28</sup> Josef Hanc, Tornado Across Eastern Europe (New York, 1942), p. 159

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

French foreign minister, Georges Bonnet, informed the Czechoslovakian ambassador in Paris that the international situation had changed and that France could no longer pursue her former policy of territorial containment against Germany, and that Czechoslovakia should acknowledge German power and accede to her territorial demands.<sup>30</sup>

An authoritative admission of the collapse of collective security was made by Prime Minister Chamberlain to the House of Commons, on February 22, 1938, when he warned such countries as Austria and Czechoslovakia not to be deceived into believing that the League of Nations would defend them against attack. Thus, on the eve of her crisis with Hitler, Czechoslovakia witnessed the collapse of another of the pillars of her foreign policy.<sup>31</sup> Although the head of French delegation at Geneva, Paul Boncour,

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<sup>30</sup> Edward Benes, The Days of Munich (London, 1955), p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> In a lecture which he delivered on July 10, 1939, in the United States, Benes recalled: "And so, after the long and successful fight for the building of the system of collective security since 1922, we see since 1931 the progressive downfall of the same system and of the League. . . . All that has happened since 1931 could, of course, have been avoided. I very definitely contest the idea that there have not been honest attempts for the peaceful settlement of European problems, very great concessions for Germany, real, honest ideas and programs for the maintenance of peace, and honest representatives of different states who wished to save peace on the basis of justice--justice which never can be perfect and always must be realized step by step in an evolutionary way, without violence. But I do admit that in the critical moments of the last years there have not been governments sufficiently conscious of their real duties, seeing the real substance of events, and understanding the whole European problem. It was simply impossible to settle the most serious European problems by abandoning certain principles or certain nations and through the defense only of the limited national interest of certain states as they conceived them narrowly and selfishly. That is the whole tragedy of Europe. The present failure and tragedy came, and in my opinion a greater tragedy will come inevitably, because of these great and tragic mistakes and failures. The whole moral, political, and economic crisis of Europe is just now at the culmination point. The final clash will come sooner or later." Edward Benes, International Security (Chicago, 1939), pp. 73-74.

unofficially advised President Benes to appeal for protection against Germany to the League at the height of the crisis in September 1938, the British and French governments convinced him that it would be useless.<sup>32</sup>

The Soviet government supported Czechoslovakia energetically during the mounting crisis opened by Hitler in the summer of 1938. Foreign Minister Litvinov, in August 1938, warned the German ambassador in reference to the Czechs to:

"Leave them alone. Czechoslovakia would fight to her last soldier, France is obliged to come to her immediate assistance. England, even the Chamberlains, would be forced to intervene, and Soviet Russia is determined to fulfill her obligations to the last letter of the Soviet-Czechoslovakian treaty of alliance."<sup>33</sup>

The Czechoslovak government posed two direct questions to the Russian government in September: (1) Would the Soviets come to the assistance of Czechoslovakia if France did so, and (2) Would the Soviets fulfill the obligations as a member of the League of Nations. Both questions were immediately and unreservedly answered affirmatively. Litvinov thereupon summoned a meeting of French, Czechoslovak, and Russian military representatives and, speaking in Geneva, condemned the inadequacy of Western resistance to Hitler and re-affirmed Russia's determination to fulfill her obligations under the mutual assistance pact and the League Covenant. Even after Czechoslovakia had been forced to acquiesce to the English-French plan, which actually abrogated the Soviet-Czechoslovak treaty, Litvinov again, at Geneva, expressed a willingness to assist Czechoslovakia.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Karel Lisicky, The Czechoslovak Road to Munich (London, 1955), p. 22.

<sup>33</sup>Edward Benes, The Days of Munich (London, 1955), pp. 79-96.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

Russia warned Poland, who was massing her armed forces on the Czechoslovak border, that Soviet forces would intervene to oppose any Polish invasion of Czechoslovakia. After he realized that the French had no intention of fulfilling their commitments, Benes asked the Soviets whether they would assist Czechoslovakia without France. Benes was informed that if Czechoslovakia would submit her case to the League of Nations, the USSR would support her militarily. President Benes did not invoke this last offer, for fear lest the Western powers be duped into acceptance of the Nazi propaganda that Czechoslovakia was a hotbed of communism, and thereby condone and encourage Hitler to undertake the total conquest of his country.<sup>35</sup>

Czechoslovakia did not have any bilateral security agreements with Great Britain. The British government stated its position on the Czechoslovak crisis clearly just a few days before the Austrian Anschluss. In answer to a question raised in the House of Commons in March 1938 as to what treaty commitments had been given to Czechoslovakia for the defence of her independence, the spokesman of the Cabinet replied that His Majesty's government had only the general obligation of the League of Nations Covenant to support Czechoslovakia's security through collective measures. The Chamberlain Cabinet did not reveal its policy on the questions of German threats against Czechoslovakia. It was well known, however, that the Prime Minister was zealous for peace and fearful that

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid. For the explanation of the Soviet attitude the preparatory notes of Dr. Benes have been consulted. These notes were intended for the elaboration of a definitive explanation of the Munich crisis. These notes were published by the Benes Institute in London in 1955. The chapter about the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia may be found on pp. 79-96.

no one would gain from a new war except Soviet Russia, and that he was eager for a rapprochement with Germany.<sup>36</sup>

Late in May 1938, Chamberlain's opinions concerning Czechoslovakia were revealed in an article appearing in The Montreal Star. It reported the Prime Minister as having said in an interview that:

" . . .the British think there is little danger of immediate war in Europe. . .the British do not expect to fight for Czechoslovakia and do not anticipate that France or Russia will either. That being so, then the Czechs must accede to the German demands, if reasonable. . .Britain would like to swing Germany and Italy into a working agreement with Britain and France to keep the peace in Europe. Soviet Russia is excluded on the ground that it does not work well in harness. . ." <sup>37</sup>

Direct involvement of the British government in the Czechoslovak-German dispute over the secessionist demands of the Sudeten German majority took place in July 1938, with the dispatch of the Runciman mission to Prague. Chamberlain, on July 26, declared to the House of Commons that "in response to a request by the government of Czechoslovakia, we have proposed a person with the necessary experience and qualities to investigate on the spot and endeavor to suggest means to bring negotiations to success."<sup>38</sup> Lord Runciman was present at the final breakdown of the negotiations between the Cabinet and the Czech Nazi party and reported to Chamberlain that "the responsibility for the break must rest upon Henlein and Frank," the leaders of the German minority, but added, "the Czechoslovak rule for twenty years, though

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<sup>36</sup>G. E. B. Gedyes, Betrayal in Central Europe (New York, 1939), p. 365-366.

<sup>37</sup>Joan and Jonathan Griffin, Lost Liberty (London, 1939), p. 137.

<sup>38</sup>Frederick Schuman, Europe on the Eve (New York, 1939), p. 380.

not oppressive and 'terroristic', has been marked by tactlessness. . . petty intolerance and discrimination."<sup>39</sup> He recommended that the last compromise proposal of the Prague Government, "Plan Four", be supported by the British government, but in his final report Lord Runciman concluded that, because of the real danger and imminence of an outbreak of warfare between Czechs and Germans, the frontier districts should be ceded by Czechoslovakia to Germany.

Meanwhile, Hitler in his speech to the Nuernberg Convention on September 13, 1938, resolved to assume charge over the fate of the German minority of Czechoslovakia, a decision that prompted the French premier, Daladier, to suggest to Chamberlain a meeting with Hitler to head off an international conflict. Following the prime minister's return from Berchtesgaden on September 14, an Anglo-French conference was held in London to which President Benes dispatched a message that his government would refuse to accept any mediation without prior consultation of its content. Nevertheless, the British and French leaders informed the Czech government that it should cede the frontier areas to Germany. Benes' Cabinet voted unanimously to reject the mediation, as it would destroy the economic and strategic stability of Czechoslovakia and leave her subject to further dismemberment and subjugation by Germany. Besides, the European balance of power, which rested upon containment of Germany, would be undermined and the security of all Europe would be endangered.

Instead of heeding Benes' advice, the French and British governments admonished Czechoslovakia for imperiling the peace and withdrew their diplomatic support from the beleaguered nation on September 20, 1938.

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 387-388.



The French note stated that: "If the Czechoslovak Government does not accept unconditionally the Anglo-French plan, it will be held solely responsible for any war which may ensue, and France will take no part in it."<sup>40</sup> President Benes immediately convened a joint meeting of the Cabinet and representatives of the political parties which, following prolonged deliberations and another Anglo-French ultimatum to capitulate, decided that isolated resistance against Germany was futile. It therefore submitted to the Anglo-French demand to surrender the frontier territories to Germany.

On September 22, Chamberlain conveyed the Czechoslovak acceptance of the London proposals to Hitler at Godesberg, but even before his departure the German press already indicated that "the settlement which had been possible a week ago was no longer suitable," and that Germany had additional demands which must be met. Hitler demanded fresh concessions from Chamberlain at the Godesberg encounter, with great arrogance, truculence and a display of bad manners. The Godesberg memorandum demanded the surrender to Germany of the entire fortified zone of Czechoslovakia, a condition which revealed Hitler's plan to leave the country totally defenseless. Chamberlain found it impossible to recommend submission by Czechoslovakia to these conditions, so, seconded by Daladier, he advised the Prague Government to mobilize. Within a few days over one and one-half million men were mobilized and placed on a war footing with precision and dispatch. It was apparent that Hitler was only seeking an excuse to attack Czechoslovakia, and that his goal was not that of

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<sup>40</sup>Hubert Ripka, Munich Before and After (London, 1939), p. 81.

satisfying the demands of the Sudeten Germans, but that of total subjugation of Czechoslovakia. The Godesberg memorandum, which even Chamberlain branded as unacceptable, was rejected by the Czechoslovak government, not only because of the inordinate demands, but principally because they would have left the country defenseless. Benes' government informed the British Prime Minister: "We rely upon the two great Western democracies, whose wishes we have followed much against our own judgment, to stand by us in our hour of trial", in a note that was handed to Chamberlain on September 25.<sup>41</sup>

The failure of the Godesberg discussions, Chamberlain's return to London, and the Czechoslovakian mobilization, impassioned Hitler to deliver a speech in the Berlin Sport Palast on September 26, in which he described Czechoslovakia's mobilization as a provocation instigated by Soviet Russia, calumniated President Benes and threatened war unless his demands were met.

Chamberlain, however, had not given up all hope for an accomodation. His personal envoy delivered a letter to Hitler prior to the latter's Berlin speech in which Chamberlain again expressed his belief that "a settlement by negotiation remains possible."<sup>42</sup> Hitler replied that he was willing to guarantee that independence and territorial integrity of the remainder of Czechoslovakia and requested Chamberlain to bring his government to reason at the very last hour. Chamberlain replied that Germany "may get all essentials without war and delay" and proposed a Four Power conference, an offer which Hitler accepted. On September 28,

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

1938, during a debate in the House of Commons, Chamberlain received Hitler's invitation for a Four Power meeting to decide the disposition of the "Sudetenland".

The Big Four meeting between Chamberlain, Deladier, Hitler and Mussolini, opened in Munich on September 28, 1938. Unknown to the Western leaders, the German General Staff had informed Hitler in a memorandum just two days previously that a Germany military defeat must be expected in any but a strictly localized conflict.<sup>43</sup> The Czechoslovakian government was not invited to send any delegation to the conference which was deliberating its fate. The meeting between the Big Four lasted six hours, and the agreement which was reached granted to Germany the right to annex the Sudetenland in return for a quadripartite guarantee to respect the independence and sovereignty of Czechoslovakia. To compensate Czechoslovakia for the economic dislocation which would result from the expulsion of Czechs from the Sudetenland, the British Prime Minister unilaterally offered to advance a credit of £ 30,000,000. The Czechoslovakian government was given two hours in which to accept the terms of the agreement or face the prospect of a full-scale German military attack.

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 212-213.

## CHAPTER II

### RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

#### The Plight of the Nation

Outside of Czechoslovakia the Munich agreement was received with comforting relief. Chamberlain and Daladier were welcomed by their respective Parliaments, which approved their policy of peace by overwhelming majorities. Chamberlain believed that Munich was the prelude to a larger settlement that would bring lasting peace to all of Europe.<sup>1</sup> Only a few people realized that the Munich Accord had actually shaken the traditional balance of power and increased immensely the preponderance of Hitler's Germany. A Czechoslovak newspaper drew the following conclusions from the Munich Pact:

"What might have been achieved in Pre-Munich days by enlightened and vigorous diplomacy was now impossible to regain. As in the case of Serbia, 1914, the question at issue was not so much the independence of a little country but who was going to dominate Europe. The crippling of Czechoslovakia could not avert the clash between the Reich and the western powers, but brought it nearer."<sup>2</sup>

The Czechoslovakian foreign minister received the decision taken at Munich--"without us and against us"--from the hands of the English, French, and Italian Ambassadors in Prague.

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<sup>1</sup>R. G. D. Laffan, Survey of International Affairs 1938 (London, 1952), p. 415. Hereinafter referred to as Survey, 1938.

<sup>2</sup>E. B. "The Disaster," Lidove Noviny (Brno, October 3, 1938), p. 1.

Shortly afterwards, German troops occupied the Sudeten territory, which was immediately annexed to the Reich. The Polish and Hungarian demands for Czechoslovakian territory were to be accommodated by means of bilateral negotiations which, if not met within three months, were to be resolved by another meeting of the four powers. The Poles made no effort to negotiate their claims with the Czechoslovak government, but simply issued an ultimatum to the government of their unfortunate neighbor and annexed the Teschen region. Czechoslovakian territories in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia were then awarded to Hungary by decision of the German and Italian foreign ministers meeting in Vienna. This act was in violation of the Munich agreement, for, instead of four signatories, only two decided the matter; but the British and French quietly and supinely acquiesced.

President Benes realized that his position as President was untenable now that Hitler sought to reduce his country to the status of a protectorate. Upon receiving Hitler's demand to resign and leave Czechoslovakia from his ambassador in Berlin, Benes submitted his resignation and departed for London.<sup>3</sup> Czechoslovakia was at the mercy of Hitler, whose price for the country's continued truncated existence was to re-orient her foreign policy in line with German requirements. The promised guarantees of security made at Munich were repudiated within months by the Germans, who dismantled the helpless nation into fragments.

Combined pressures of the Slovak autonomists and the Nazis forced the Czechoslovakian government to grant Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia autonomous status late in 1938, which enabled the Catholic

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<sup>3</sup>Edward Benes, Memoirs (London, 1954), p. 50.

Party of National Unity to inaugurate an authoritarian regime without majority backing among the electorate.<sup>4</sup> The ideology of the Monsignor Tiso regime stressed "one God, one Nation, one Leader." On February, 1939, the Slovak Vice-Premier addressed Hitler as "Mein Fuehrer" and told him: "I entrust the fate of my people to your hands."<sup>5</sup>

In Prague a new central government was formed by a Naziphile Agrarian party leader, and the democratic constitution of the Republic was replaced by an authoritarian legal order similar to the Nazi system. Existing political parties were dissolved and replaced by the Party of National Unity, comprising Naziphile Agrarians, Clericals and Small Traders, and by the Party of Labour, comprising collaborationist Socialists. The Communist Party was outlawed and political activity outside the recognized parties was prohibited.<sup>6</sup> Elections were abolished and newspapers were either suppressed or regimented by censorship, and opposition against the regime was made a crime.

The economic plight of what remained of Czechoslovakia was equally tragic, for a horde of refugees had to be re-settled as a result of the mass expulsion of Czechs from the German-occupied territories. Employment was provided for these people by impressing many into compulsory labor battalions, by removing married women from the public services, and by retiring other public employees. The public payroll was overburdened at a time when revenues had dropped by forty per cent and taxable

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<sup>4</sup>Hubert Ripka, Munich Before and After (London, 1939), p. 256.

<sup>5</sup>S. Harrison Thompson, Czechoslovakia in European History (Princeton, 1953), p. 403.

<sup>6</sup>Survey, 1938, p. 605.

income by over thirty-five per cent. The economic disequilibrium could not be resolved without external loans, yet although the British and French governments had offered to provide loans and trade credits at Munich, the extent of western aid amounted to "a reduction of Czechoslovakian export quotas to France by half and the six million pounds British loan."<sup>7</sup>

The most damaging effect of the Munich agreement was upon the morale of the Czechoslovak people, whose spirit of resistance against Hitler and of solidarity with Britain and France had been stirred following Hitler's Godesberg ultimatum. Mobilization had been effected in record time amid a resounding display of national unity and patriotism. The surrender by England and France to Germany's demands and the order to demobilize spread bitter disillusionment throughout Czechoslovakia. There was such a sense of frustration, disgrace and dishonor at having to surrender without a display of courage in battle among the mobilized citizen army that military discipline was severely shaken. The feeling of betrayed trust towards France and Britain shattered the hopes and ideals of the Czech nation and its trust in the West. "We are crying because of the behavior of the France we loved," wrote a Czech political leader to the French general, Faucher, the head of the French military mission in Prague.<sup>8</sup>

Anguished curses and insults were hurled against the western democracies by the citizens of the betrayed nation as the feeling of hatred for Hitler was surpassed by resentment and animosity against the former allies. In this state of anomie and cynicism, some Czechs gave vent to anti-Semitism

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<sup>7</sup>Cato, "The International Loans," Pritomnost (Prague, February 15, 1939), p. 74.

<sup>8</sup>Hubert Ripka, Munich Before and After (London, 1939), p. 159.

while others heaped abuse upon the exiled President Benes for his "catastrophic policy of cooperation with the Western democracies." The native fascists, however, failed to win any positive response among the people, and even the government took measures against their excesses and tried to preserve at least some of the past traditions of democracy and humanitarianism.<sup>9</sup>

The government had great difficulty in maintaining any confidence or consensus in its policies, for the people suspected it of being a tool of the Nazis and distrusted its motives and its spokesmen. It was not understood or appreciated that the many cruel and brutal decrees which purged the bureaucracy, army and press of Benes' supporters, and applied Hitler's racial laws against the Jews, as well as other distasteful measures against the Legionnaires and Sokols, were the result of direct orders from Berlin.

No amount of subservience by the Czechoslovakian Government to Berlin was able to satisfy Hitler, however, so preparations were made by the Nazis to establish direct German rule over the country. Sudeten Germans, now citizens of the Reich, had to be allowed to continue their studies at the German university in Prague, which became a hot-bed of Nazism. Extraordinary demands were made for privileges by these and other German groups which remained with Czechoslovakia, as a pretext for Hitler to destroy the remnant of what remained of the once independent republic.<sup>10</sup>

On March 14, 1939, under the pretext that the German minority had been attacked, the President of Czechoslovakia was summoned by Hitler to

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>10</sup>R. W. Seton-Watson, From Munich to Danzig (London, 1939), p. 376-378.



sign away "the destiny of the Czech people and of their lands" to the Fuehrer, who threatened to unleash the German army and air force against the hapless nation if the demand were refused.<sup>11</sup> On the same day the Slovak Diet, under orders from Hitler, proclaimed Slovakia's separation and independence from Czechoslovak. A few days later the Slovaks were forced to grant Germany the right to establish military bases in Slovakia on the southern borders of Poland, and to secure German approval of all foreign commitments, which made Slovakia a protectorate of the Reich. This was followed by the entrance of the German Army into Prague, and the establishment of the additional protectorates of Bohemia and Moravia in place of the Republic of Czechoslovakia, whose existence as an independent state was thus temporarily ended.

Western reaction against Hitler's total subjugation of Czechoslovakia only six months after Munich's solemn engagements to respect the new status quo was sharp and critical. Chamberlain's first statement, that he had "no wish to be associated with any indictment that Hitler was guilty of a breach of faith", produced such a revolt in the Conservative party that two days later, in a speech delivered at Birmingham, he was "unsparing in vigorous protest" against the Nazi attack.<sup>12</sup> In the House of Lords, Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax remonstrated that:

"the position is entirely changed when we are confronted with the arbitrary suppression of an independent sovereign state by armed force and by the violation of what I must regard as the elementary rules of international conduct. It is natural enough that in the light of these events the Government should be told that the policy of Munich was a tragic mistake."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Kenneth Ingram, Years of Crisis (New York, 1947), p. 185.

<sup>13</sup>Hubert Ripka, Munich Before and After (London, 1939), p. 398.

Daladier explained to the French Senate that the Munich Agreement and the policy of Franco-German cooperation were no longer binding as a result of Germany's flagrant violation of Czechoslovakia's independence and sovereignty, "in spite of the most solemn commitments."<sup>14</sup>

Soviet Russia branded Germany's action as arbitrary, violent and aggressive, and indicated that France and England would be menaced in their own security now that the ring of alliance around Germany no longer existed.<sup>15</sup>

The United States also condemned Germany for acts "which have resulted in the temporary extinguishment of a free and independent people with whom, from the day when the Republic of Czechoslovakia attained its independence, the people of the United States have maintained especially close and friendly relations. . . ."<sup>16</sup>

To President Benes, at that time in the United States, Germany's subjugation of Czechoslovakia and Western and Soviet condemnation of it, now offered the opportunity to organize a new national liberation government in exile. He immediately sent telegrams to the heads of the governments of France, Great Britain, the United States, the Soviet Union and to the League of Nations, urging them to refuse to recognize the "great international crime, and to assume the consequences which today's tragic situation in Europe and in the world urgently requires".<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 399-400.

<sup>15</sup>Samuel H. Cuff, The Face of the War (New York, 1942), pp. 61-62.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Edward Benes, Memoirs, p. 65.

Dr. Benes' plan of action was to transform the widespread sympathy for Czechoslovakia into recognition by the western powers and the Soviet Union of the government-in-exile which he was about to establish, and to enlist Western aid in organizing a Czechoslovakian liberation army.

Western refusal to recognize the illegal German occupation of Czechoslovakia permitted the Western governments to establish diplomatic relations with Benes' projected government-in-exile, and to assist it economically and militarily. From the standpoint of international law, Czechoslovakia could exist de jure in relation to the Western powers, so long as they did not recognize the validity of the de facto condition of debellatio, which had been inflicted illegally by Germany. The heads of the Czechoslovak diplomatic and consular missions in the western countries refused to surrender their properties to the German diplomatic agents, and they were allowed to exercise their diplomatic and consular rights and privileges, and to perform such functions as the issuance of passports and visas, and the protection of Czechoslovak nationals and their interests. Such action was no infringement of Germany's legal rights, since the extinction of Czechoslovakia was in violation of objective international law. Official Western recognition of the Czech government-in-exile was not accorded for more than a year after the seizure of the country by Hitler. During this period Czechoslovakia existed in a legal vacuum in relation to the Western powers, for the Republic had no recognized government to represent it internationally. Benes and other Czechoslovaks who joined him in exile formed a Czechoslovak National Committee, with branches in Paris and London, in the spring of 1939. The Committee was not accorded any degree of legal recognition, however, until October, 1939, when the French and British

Governments authorized it to recruit and staff a number of military units in France and England for service with the Allied forces. Czechoslovakian refugees who escaped to the West were enlisted into this Czechoslovak Brigade, which fought on the western front and was evacuated at Dunkirk to England with the British and a few French forces. Up to the conclusion of the Russo-German pact of August, 1939, Czechoslovak Communists had taken part in the patriotic movement against the Germans at home and had cooperated with the Czechoslovak National Committee abroad. Thereafter they sabotaged the domestic resistance movement, launched a campaign against Dr. Benes and the National Committee, which they accused of being a tool of Franco-British imperialism, and a great number of them deserted the newly organized Czechoslovak voluntary brigade. The Soviet government ceased to give refuge to Czechoslovak refugees, interned those who were in Soviet territory, recognized the fascist Slovak State, and terminated the diplomatic status of the Czechoslovak ambassador in Moscow. Not until the German invasion of Russia were diplomatic relations re-established between the USSR and the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, after which the Czechoslovak Communists resumed the policy of patriotic unity in cooperation with the National Committee.<sup>18</sup>

Dr. Benes made another attempt to secure diplomatic recognition of the Czechoslovak National Committee as the de facto government of the Republic, following the Dunkirk evacuation and the collapse of France in June 1940. He sought from the British government recognition of the legal continuity of Czechoslovakia and of his committee as the legitimate successor to the sovereignty of the state in its international relations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Josef Josten, Oh, My Country (Chicago, 1950), pp. 22-27.

<sup>19</sup>Edward Benes, Memoirs, p. 106.

The evacuation to British soil of the Czechoslovak brigade, its allegiance to the National Committee, and its eagerness to fight the Germans, contributed to British recognition of Benes as the responsible head of the provisional government of Czechoslovakia on July 21, 1940, with full capacity to negotiate international agreements and conduct diplomatic relations for the Republic, dispose of Czechoslovak properties and assets in the British Empire, and borrow money on the credit of the Republic. De jure recognition of the Benes government was granted by the British in July, 1941, after the Soviet Ambassador in London had re-established diplomatic relations with the Czechoslovak government-in-exile.<sup>20</sup> The United States extended its recognition immediately afterwards, so that restoration of the status quo ante Munich awaited only the military defeat of Nazi Germany.

The Benes government turned its attention next to the formal abrogation by England and France of the Munich agreement, so that Czechoslovakia could re-assert a legal right to her pre-Munich boundaries upon the expulsion of the German occupation forces. The United States, under the Stimson Doctrine, had never recognized the alienation of Czechoslovakian territory made under duress in 1938, so its support of Czechoslovakia's claim to the restoration of her pre-Munich frontiers was assured. The Russians agreed to recognize the Czechoslovak boundary claims in the exchange of diplomatic notes by which they recognized the Benes government. In 1942 the Churchill government finally agreed to formally denounce the Munich agreement after repeated insistence by Benes, an act which General De Gaulle performed in the name of the Free French Committee.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 232.

## President Benes' Trip to Moscow

Diplomatic recognition and formal annulment of the Munich Agreement provided strong international support for the restoration of an independent, sovereign and democratic Republic in Czechoslovakia. Benes, however, wished to lay the foundation for a more viable nation, so that his country's future security would not be menaced again by the irredentist claims of neighboring states. His solution was to secure diplomatic support from the allies for the expulsion of the pro-Nazi elements of the German and Hungarian minorities, upon the re-establishment of his government in the territory of Czechoslovakia. This request was granted by the allied powers.<sup>22</sup>

Another objective of the Benes government-in-exile during the course of the war against the Axis was to re-establish friendly relations with the Polish government-in-exile, with which there had been friction from the period of the Munich crisis arising from the Polish annexation of the Teschen district of Czechoslovakia. The absence of an alliance between the two countries had weakened each and had facilitated German expansionist policy. It appeared to Benes that the national security of Czechoslovakia would be strengthened by the conclusion of a political and military alliance or confederation with Poland. Churchill gave the plan his blessing, because he foresaw the necessity of re-building a balance of power on the continent as the basis for British security and peace. A Slavonic confederation would serve to contain the penetration of Russian power and influence into central Europe, and also act as

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<sup>22</sup>S. Harrison Thompson, Czechoslovakia in European History (Princeton, 1953), p. 427.

a counterweight to the Soviet colossus--such was the opinion of the British leader.<sup>23</sup>

The projected union with Poland did not materialize for a number of reasons. Neither government would compromise on the disposition of the Teschen district, which both claimed. But the main reason was that while the Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation presupposed "a common foreign policy",<sup>24</sup> Polish relations with the Soviet Union were hostile, due to the Russian annexation of eastern Poland in 1939, and repeated claims to the region, while the Czechoslovakians regarded Russia their natural ally, and were on good terms with the Soviet regime. A common policy towards the Soviet was impossible for Czechs and Poles to agree upon, as Benes insisted that an alliance with the Soviet Union must form the keystone of the future common foreign policy. Soviet opposition to the scheme doomed its prospects completely, and the Moscow and Teheran conferences placed the Western stamp of approval to the Soviet objection.<sup>25</sup>

The friendly attitude of President Benes towards the Soviet Union stemmed from his interpretation of Czechoslovakia's security requirements. As the architect of Czechoslovak foreign policy, Benes had devoted his lifetime to the solution of the problem of national security. In the power vacuum of post-Versailles Europe, he had realized that, if Czechoslovakia was to survive, she would need to supplement her national power and the collective security guarantees of the League of Nations by a series of alliances with France, Yugoslavia, Rumania and the Soviet Union. He had always deemed the absence of Soviet participation in the defense of

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<sup>23</sup>Survey, 1941-1946, pp. 322-323.

<sup>24</sup>Art. 2 of Czechoslovak-Polish Protocol of January 19, 1942.

<sup>25</sup>Survey, 1941-1946, pp. 322-323.

the status quo as an impairment of the balance of power. Without a Russian alliance there would be no assurance against the repetition of the German "Drang nach Osten". These were the reasons why, despite his opposition to Communism, Benes had actively promoted Soviet membership in the League of Nations, and had concluded the mutual assistance treaty with Litvinov.<sup>26</sup>

President Benes foresaw the dis-integration of German power in 1942 after the landing of American and British troops in North Africa and the impressive Russian victory at Stalingrad. The Casablanca Conference of January, 1943, which offered the Axis peace only upon unconditional surrender, led Benes to conclude that the end of the war would result in a power vacuum in Central Europe which would be filled by the three Great Powers. To insure Czechoslovak security by means of a British or an American alliance seemed unrealistic, since the Anglo-Americans had no tradition for making long-term political and military commitments. The only power that might assume a commitment to defend Czechoslovakia against a future German threat appeared to be Soviet Russia, who was destined to emerge from the war as the greatest power in Europe, and would have an equal national interest in containing Germany. The apparent fact that Czechoslovakia and Russia would be immediate neighbors did not alarm Benes unduly, as he was confident that he could reach a modus vivendi with Moscow to respect Czechoslovakia's institutions and territorial integrity, and desist from assisting the Czechoslovak Communists, who were bent upon Soviet annexation of Slovakia and establishing a Communist-dominated government in Prague.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Eduard Taborsky, "Benes and the Soviets," Foreign Affairs, XXVII (1949), p. 302.

<sup>27</sup>Hubert Ripka, Czechoslovakia Enslaved (London, 1950), pp. 22-23.



Since the days of the Munich conference, Benes had respected the Soviet Union for its offer to support Czechoslovakia to resist Hitler's demands, even after Britain and France had broken their pledges. In 1942 Benes wrote: "I was extremely grateful to the Soviet Union, for it was the only one who supported us and offered assistance beyond its obligation."<sup>28</sup>

The contrast between the resolute diplomacy of the Russians, who extended full recognition to Benes' regime-in-exile and agreed to the restoration of the pre-war borders of Czechoslovakia shortly after they were attacked by Germany, and the procrastination of the British in making any commitments to Benes, alienated the trust of the Czechoslovak leader in the reliability of British intentions respecting Central Europe.<sup>29</sup>

Finally President Benes believed that the Soviet Union would develop into a form of social democracy, which encouraged him in his effort to believe in the sincerity of Soviet intentions, despite the lingering distrust which disturbed his mind. He also felt that the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union would maintain their concert of power and collaborate in the establishment and maintenance of a viable peace in Europe.<sup>30</sup>

Benes' journey to Moscow was given advance encouragement by President Roosevelt, but met with British objections, since Foreign Secretary Eden was of the opinion that "it would impair the settlement of the Polish-Soviet dispute." The real reason, however, was that Great Britain and

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<sup>28</sup>Edward Benes, The Days of Munich (London, 1955), p. 88.

<sup>29</sup>Ferdinand Peroutka, Was Dr. Benes Guilty (Paris, 1949), p. 14.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

the Soviet Union had a treaty obligation not to conclude any bilateral pacts with other European governments during the war. After the British agreed to waive this provision in October 1943, approval of the Benes mission to Moscow was granted by Whitehall.<sup>31</sup>

At the end of November 1943, President Benes left London for Moscow to conclude his projected treaty with the Soviet Union and to discuss matters relating to post-war cooperation. By chance, Benes reached Moscow shortly after the Teheran Conference, where his prospective treaty with the Soviet Union had been discussed and recommended by the Big Three.

The carefully prepared and magnificent welcome which he received in Moscow impressed Benes, where, in contrast to his last visit in 1935, he noticed the tremendous progress which the Soviet Union had made. His discussions with Stalin, Molotov and other Russian representatives were cordial and he had no difficulty in securing Soviet consent to his requests. Stalin and Molotov promised to restrain from interfering in the internal affairs of Czechoslovakia and denied any intention to use the Czechoslovak Communist group in Moscow for purposes of subverting Czechoslovakia in the future. The Russians agreed to allow Czechoslovak military units attached to the Red army to enter Czechoslovakia simultaneously with the Soviet forces, and to transfer civil administrative powers immediately to the Benes government throughout the liberated areas, including Ruthenia, to which the Soviet Union laid no claims.<sup>32</sup>

Benes and Stalin discussed the projected Czechoslovak-Polish confederation, to which the Soviet leader made no objection. Stalin assured Benes

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<sup>31</sup>Eduard Taborsky, "Benes' Trips to Moscow," Svedectvi, I (1957), p. 171.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 198.

that he had no personal objection to the Polish premier, Mikolajczyk. The Czech President sought to restore mutual confidence and cooperation between Poland and Russia because he "wanted to secure a Soviet-Polish alliance in order to ensure that the stormy past of Eastern Europe would be stabilized in the future, and because his effort to bring it about would increase Czech prestige in the eyes of Moscow, London, and Washington."<sup>33</sup>

Benes even met with the Czechoslovak Communists who were residing in Moscow in order to lay the basis for cooperation with them in a coalition government, for he was aware that post-war political loyalties would be extremely radical, and that the Communists could not be safely excluded from the government. The Communists demanded that the Coalition cabinet be formed in advance of the liberation of the homeland, and that a Marxian Socialist be appointed Premier. They also insisted that the task of civil administration in the liberated areas of Czechoslovakia should be assigned to locally constituted committees of national liberation instead of to centrally appointed officials.

The Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-war Cooperation was concluded and signed on December 12, 1943, and became effective immediately. It provided for mutual assistance in the current war against Germany and in any future war against the same enemy. The two signatories promised to expand their economic relationship and to adhere to "mutual respect for each other's independence and sovereignty, and to non-interference in the internal affairs of the other."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Edward K. Rozek, *Allied Wartime Diplomacy* (London, 1957), p. 171.

<sup>34</sup>Art. 4.

Benes was confident upon his return to London at the end of 1943 that he had re-established the premises for the external security and internal stability of his country. He considered his journey to Moscow as the culmination of nearly thirty years of ceaseless effort by himself and Thomas Masaryk to establish "harmonious cooperation among the free, independent and democratic Slavic States."<sup>35</sup>

#### Benes' Return to Czechoslovakia

President Benes' optimism over the prospects of friendship with the Soviet Union and cooperation with the Czechoslovak Communists was shaken late in the summer of 1944 by the visit to Moscow of a delegation representing General Catlos of the fascist Slovak Army. The Slovak military leader was prepared to place his forces under the general command of the Red Army when the latter's units reached Slovakia, and to administer the territory on behalf of the Soviet occupation forces. Benes protested to the Soviet ambassador against this violation of the recent Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty, and was assured by the envoy that the discussions were conducted by party officials and not by government officials. Subsequently the Slovak underground resistance groups who were engaged in guerrilla combat against the Germans, and who were in desperate need of Red Army assistance, were exposed to the full brunt of German fury and reprisals by the sudden halt of the Soviet advance, for which there was no satisfactory explanation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Edward Benes, Memoirs, p. 239.

<sup>36</sup>Edward Taborsky, "Benes' Trips to Moscow," Svedectvi, I (1957), p. 203.

The Red Army resumed its advance during the fall of 1944 and crossed into Ruthenia, the eastern-most region of Czechoslovakia. Pursuant to the provisions of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of May 8, 1944, that all Czechoslovak territories which were occupied by the Red Army would be immediately turned over the Czechoslovak administrators, a Czechoslovak delegation was sent to Ruthenia from London to take charge of the local civil administration. The Red Army command refused to support the London Czechoslovaks and allowed the local Communists partisans instead to assume direction of the local administration.<sup>37</sup> The Communist partisans went so far as to seize the funds which the London delegation had brought, and to petition Stalin in the name of the localities which they were administering that the Soviet government annex Ruthenia. The local population was subjected to military conscription by the Red Army instead of being allowed to form units of the Czechoslovak national army.

When Benes sent a diplomatic protest to Stalin over the interference by the local Communists and the connivance of the Red Army with them in preventing the re-establishment of Czechoslovak authority in Ruthenia, Stalin replied that the Red Army was not permitted to interfere in internal political rivalries between the various Czechoslovak parties, or repress the people from expressing their wishes. He added that since the local inhabitants had raised the question of the admission of Ruthenia to the Soviet Ukraine, the Soviet Union felt obliged to protect the interests of the local residents and had a right to insist upon negotiation of this internal question.<sup>38</sup> This Soviet interference in the internal matters of

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<sup>37</sup>J. W. Bruegel, The Case of Ruthenia (London, 1954), p. 31.

<sup>38</sup>Josef Josten, Oh, My Country (Chicago, 1950), p. 34.

Czechoslovakia was a painful reminder of the Nazi subversion of the Republic, by which an active minority had invoked the intervention of a foreign power to dismember its territory. Cession of this territory would give the Red Army control of important passes through the Carpathians and a common frontier with Hungary, which would help to increase Soviet influence and control over all of Eastern Europe.

When Benes turned to his British and American allies with a request that Western forces carry out the military occupation of Czechoslovakia, he was informed that the task of liberating his country had been assigned to the Red Army, which was tantamount to placing Czechoslovakia under the Soviet sphere of interest and giving discretionary authority to the Russian occupation authorities over internal political matters.<sup>39</sup> Benes realized that the independence and sovereignty of his nation depended entirely upon cultivating good relations with Moscow. Therefore, Benes decided to settle affairs with the Soviets as quickly as possible directly in Moscow, and then proceed in the wake of the Red Army into Czechoslovakia. In bidding farewell to Prime Minister Churchill, Benes indicated his concern over Soviet intentions and his determination to protect his country's interests.

Benes arrived in Moscow on March 17, 1945, and was received with great ostentation. However, Stalin, this time, did not take part in the political discussions, but limited himself to words of praise for Pan-Slavism, which he defined as the alliance of all the Slavic nations in defense of their individuality, their institutions and their sovereignty. Stalin declared to Benes on that occasion: "I know that there are some

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<sup>39</sup>Edward Taborsky, "Benes' Trips to Moscow," Svedectvi, I (1957), p. 204.

who do not believe it, perhaps even you have these doubts, but I assure you that we will never interfere in the internal affairs of our allies."<sup>40</sup>

The question of Ruthenia was left for settlement between Molotov and Benes, with the latter agreeing to the Soviet foreign minister's request that the Czechoslovak Parliament be urged by the President to voluntarily cede the territory to the Soviet Union.

President Benes' main concern in Moscow was to reach some agreement with the Czechoslovak Communists on the formation of a new government for the liberated country. He planned to include in the provisional cabinet representatives of the anti-fascist parties from the internal resistance movement and from the London exile regime. Within six months after internal order was re-established, he planned to hold parliamentary elections. Since the political support of the Soviet Union was necessary because of the liberating role of the Red Army, Benes was forced to deal with the Czechoslovak Communist leaders in Moscow and to accept their demands to be included in the provisional cabinet and to administer eight key ministries. The governmental program of the coalition had to be agreed upon also, and the Communists were able to insert into it many of their concepts. During these inter-party negotiations both Benes and the Social Democrat Fierlinger were under pressure to reach a compromise at all cost with the Communists, who might otherwise be tempted to seize total power in Czechoslovakia with the backing of the Red Army.<sup>41</sup> On April 5, 1945, President Benes, Premier Fierlinger and the new cabinet took up residence on Czechoslovakian territory in the city of Kosice,

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<sup>40</sup>Joroslav Stransky, The Causes and Tasks of Exile (London, 1950), p. 14.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

located in eastern Slovakia, and were formally installed as the provisional government of the country.

Meanwhile, desperate German resistance had slowed the advance of the Soviet forces, while the American Fifth Army, commanded by General Patton, was occupying Bohemia and had reached the outskirts of Prague. The resistance movement in the capital ordered a mass uprising to expel the Germans forces to symbolize the nation's contribution to the war against Nazi Germany. The poorly equipped citizens of Prague were not prepared to dislodge the Germans without military assistance from the American Army, whose presence was expected imminently. Instead of pressing his forces into Prague at this critical moment, General Patton was instructed to withdraw his forces behind a line fifty miles west of Prague, in order to comply with a political agreement reached at the Teheran Conference by the Big Three to recognize Russian primacy in Czechoslovakia, and a military agreement between the American Supreme Command and the Soviet General Staff which had demarcated the line of maximum advance. The liberation of Prague was planned by the Soviets to be a Red Army achievement in order to reap the symbolic propaganda value of the event.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Dana Adam Schmidt, Anatomy of a Satellite (Boston, 1952), p. 79.



## CHAPTER III

### BACKGROUND OF THE COMMUNIST COUP D'ETAT

#### The Key Positions

The program which the coalition government adopted at Kosice at Communist insistence was designed by the Czechoslovak Communist party to give it complete control over the country by undermining the socio-economic and political power of the non-Communist parties. The program was devised in terms that would appeal to the disoriented, insecure and morally anguished nation. The Communists exploited the psychological state of mind of the people and made skillful use of propaganda to identify themselves with the success and achievements of the Red Army. While under the heel of the German occupation, the Czechoslovaks found hope largely in following the military victories of the Red Army. Every Soviet advance brought liberation closer. The Red Army gained ever increasing prestige among the Czechoslovaks as it inflicted defeat after defeat on the German armies. From the time of defeat of the Wehrmacht at Stalingrad in 1942, the Czechoslovaks looked to the Soviets for their liberation. When the Soviet Troops entered Prague, they were greeted with great joy and enthusiasm as liberators by the populace. The failure of the American forces to liberate Prague served to confirm the widespread conviction that Czechoslovakia had been placed

within the Soviet sphere of power and influence by the Big Three leaders.<sup>1</sup>

The Communists exploited the sentiment of pan-Slavic solidarity to build up internal prestige for themselves as the votaries of a pan-Slavic alliance led by the Soviet Union. The tragic experience of the Munich betrayal by the Western democracies undermined the prestige of the democratic parties, as they were identified ideologically with the West. Their violent hatred of the Germans and their sense of utter dependence upon Russian power, coupled with their lack of trust in the Western powers, convinced the majority of Czechoslovaks during the liberation period that their ethnic survival hinged upon the establishment of durable ties of trust with the Soviet Union. The Czechoslovak Communist party reaped great prestige from the eulogized conception of Soviet Russia as the liberator and protector of the Republic, since it could claim ideological affinities with the Russian leaders.<sup>2</sup>

The coalition cabinet which the Communists induced President Benes to accept in Moscow, and which was proclaimed as the provisional government in the city of Kosice, consisted of the so-called National Front of Anti-Fascist Parties. The leaders of the resistance groups within the country were not given separate representation outside the six recognized political parties, each of which was allotted three ministerial positions in the cabinet. The Communists demanded and received separate recognition for their Czech and Slovak organizations, while none of the other parties were accorded double representation. Of the

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<sup>1</sup>Ivo Duchacek, "The Strategy of Communist Infiltration," World Politics, II (1950), p. 345.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 347.

six non-party portfolios that were reserved for technicians, the Communists were able to claim two for their nominees. From the outset, the Communists controlled one-third of the Cabinet posts directly, and were able to utilize the influence and support of the Prime Minister, Zdenek Fierlinger, who was a fellow-travelling Social Democrat.

The foreign policy of the National Front government was dedicated to the pursuit of common aims with the Soviet Union within the terms of the Czechoslovak-Soviet treaty of alliance. Its program was pledged "to carry out vigorously a pan-Slavic policy in Eastern Europe."<sup>3</sup> The internal program of the coalition was pledged to devolve complete autonomy to Slovakia, which would be governed by a separate legislative body to be known as the Slovak National Council, and a responsible executive, to be known as the Council of Commissioners. In perpetuating Slovak individuality, the Communists hoped to win popular support in Slovakia, by flattering local nationalism, and to turn the Slovaks against the Czechs, "if the latter were not disposed to accept domination by the extreme left."<sup>4</sup> The sizeable German and Magyar minorities were to be expelled from the country unless they could individually prove that they had participated in the resistance movement. Special People's Courts were to be established to judge and punish collaborators and war criminals. The properties of those who were convicted and punished were to be confiscated as an additional punitive sanction.

This provision for forced confiscation set the example for wholesale nationalization of land, industry, insurance, and banking. The National Front program promised economic democracy through a social

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<sup>3</sup>Hubert Ripka, Czechoslovakia Enslaved (London, 1950), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

welfare policy and self-governing workers' councils in industry, and provided guarantees of political freedom. It also advocated the simplification of the former political party system, the unification of the trade unions and other institutions, and the establishment of National (People's) Committees as local organs of public administration.

Not only did the National Front program of action contain goals towards which the Communists were striving in order to win popular consensus, but even more significantly, the key positions in the cabinet and bureaucracy became party instruments of the Communists. The Ministry of Information which was established in 1945, became a key instrument of the Communist party in its effort to mobilize public zeal and channel it into revolutionary action. The ministry provided employment for thousands of intellectuals of Communist persuasion and financed the party's propaganda. During the postwar period of economic dislocation, control of the information services constituted a near monopoly of the organs of public opinion.<sup>5</sup> The Communist party directed the Ministry of Education and the teachers towards the objective of imparting a "people's culture" to the pupils, which meant indoctrination in Marxism and preparation for revolutionary action. Control of the Ministry of Social Welfare gave the Communists vast funds to distribute among the "victims of Nazi persecution." Persons who wanted compensation from the State for suffering and losses at the hands of the Nazis had to qualify in the eyes of the Communist employees of the Ministry, which came to mean serving the Communist Party.

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<sup>5</sup>Vratislav Busek, A Lesson of the February Coup d'Etat (New York, 1954), p. 49-50.

The Ministries of Agriculture and Interior were perhaps the most important vehicles of Communist ascension to power in Czechoslovakia.<sup>6</sup> The former was placed in charge of land confiscations in connection with the dispossession of German and Magyar inhabitants, and also in control of the division of large holdings and re-distribution of farms to tenants and laborers. In the border areas alone, 110,000 Czechoslovak families were re-settled and 80,000 administrative posts were created to assume custody over the urban properties that were vacated by the expelled. Permanent titles of ownership were not immediately granted, and the officials of the Ministry let it be understood that evictions might result in the event of an electoral defeat by the Communist party.<sup>7</sup>

Major attention was concentrated upon the Interior Ministry by the Communists, who insisted that they should direct the national police agencies and forces, and the numerous administrative organs which handled the investigation and the formulation of criminal charges, or the granting of immunity, pardon or parole in matters of political collaboration with the Nazis. A presidential decree of 1945 had unwittingly established the jurisdiction of special People's Courts for cases of collaborationism, and vested the powers of police investigation and formulation of criminal charges with the Interior Ministry's police. The local police officials and the non-professional judges of the People's Courts, who were appointed by the local People's Committees, themselves appendages of the Communist Party, exercised despotic power throughout the country by holding over everyone the threat of prosecution for collaboration with the Nazis.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Paul E. Zimmer, "Marxism in Action," Foreign Affairs, XXVIII (1950), p. 652.

Opposition against the Communist Party was regarded in practice as punishable by the local police and People's Courts which acted independently of the Ministry of Justice and the regular courts.

As a result of the personal insecurity that existed locally throughout Czechoslovakia, there was little expression of overt opposition by the anti-Communists. The Communists used this purge power to intimidate and silence those who opposed their efforts to dominate local public opinion, and to stimulate demagogic consensus by arousing the anti-Nazi hatreds of the masses. The Communists were able thus to combine punitive powers, rewards and demagogy, under the guise of serving as organs of the state, in expanding their power and influence as a party. Their uninterrupted monopolization of the police apparatus gave them the opportunity to build up an independent bureaucracy and military force with which to subvert the State.

In their anxiety to pose as nationalists and win popular esteem, Communist officials of the Interior Ministry conducted the mass expulsion of Germans and Magyars with unnecessary ruthlessness, inciting the Czechs and Slovaks to unrestrained acts of violence against the persons and properties of the minorities. It was part of their policy of activating the masses and bringing them under Communist direction for an eventual seizure of power by the party.<sup>8</sup>

The Communists also employed the nationalization policy of the Government as a means to destroy their political opponents, to build up their influence among the masses, and to place direct local control over the productive system of industry and agriculture in the hands of party

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<sup>8</sup>Jan Stransky, East Wind Over Prague (New York, 1951), p. 169.

cells. The decrees which nationalized the mines and major industries, and provided for the confiscation of large agricultural holdings and lands which were not farmed directly by the owners, were adopted hurriedly by the coalition cabinet, before the democratic parties had time to reflect on the consequences of the acts. The decrees were supposed to be submitted for approval to the Parliament after general elections, which were delayed for a year, during which time the Communists gave legal effect to the provisional decrees so as to present the Parliament with a fait accompli.<sup>9</sup> The managerial staff of the nationalized enterprises was purged and replaced by Communists or persons subservient to them. The workers were regimented by a closed shop system, which recognized only the Communist-directed labor union as the bargaining agent of the workers within the plant. Communist cells were quickly organized within the factories to impart political indoctrination and guidance to the working force of the factories and mines. A similar process of regimentation occurred in the rural areas, where the administrators of the land redistribution policy used their power to consign land as a means to impose conformity to party wishes among the farmers.

In place of the centralized bureaucratic administration that had governed the localities before 1945, the coalition cabinet decreed the devolution of administrative competence to locally constituted National People's Committees. The democratic parties were induced to accept decentralization of the public administration as a democratic reform measure, in the belief that the local committees would be representative

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<sup>9</sup>Hubert Ripka, Czechoslovakia Enslaved (London, 1950), p. 26.

of the voters and responsible to the central government.<sup>10</sup> The Communists, however, set out to transform these organs of the resistance movement into soviets. Broad authority over legislative, executive, administrative and judicial matters was delegated by the central government to the National People's Committees at provincial, town and village levels. "They were in fact not organs of State administration, but replicas of the much exalted communes of Marx, and they embodied a fundamental tenet of Marx's revolutionary theory that the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes, but has to smash the bureaucratic-military state machinery."<sup>11</sup> The committees were to represent the five political parties equally in Bohemia and Moravia, and two in Slovakia, according to the agreement that had been reached nationally. The local communists profited from their compact organization and political ties with the Red Army occupation authorities to secure control of the committees everywhere. The key posts of chairman, police administration and agriculture were invariably occupied by Communists. Elections were never held to determine the appropriate distribution of posts. Through their local control of the administrative and judicial organs that were charged with the execution of the far-reaching reform policies of the central government, the Communists entrenched themselves in power and mobilized great numbers of activists to do their bidding by means of demagogy. This

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<sup>10</sup> Anonymous, "The Political Basis of the People Democracy," New Yorkske Listy (New York, May 19, 1951).

<sup>11</sup> Paul E. Zimmer, "Marxism in Action," Foreign Affairs, XXVIII (1950), p. 647.

<sup>12</sup> Ivo Duchacek, "The Strategy of Communist Infiltration," World Politics, II (1950), p. 360.



mobilization of an activist minority, combined with the acquiescence of the masses of intimidated groups, constituted the new form of "people's democratic rule," and made elections unnecessary before the spontaneous expression of the people's will by the activists.

The clever tactic of the "united front" of the working class was applied to the labor movement as a means to create unitary organization which could be dominated by the Communist trade unionists. The Nazis had conveniently destroyed the free labor unions and created an authoritarian labor front, which remained intact organizationally in 1945. Many of its officers were given political haven from the operation of the purge law by enrolling in the party and transforming the union into a Communist organization. The pre-Munich labor leaders of democratic persuasion were delayed for many weeks before obtaining their release from Nazi concentration camps, thus permitting the Communists and fellow travelers to capture almost complete control of the Labor Front Central Committee.<sup>12</sup> Of its forty members only four were opponents of the Communists. Control of the labor movement gave the Communists the power to order general strikes as a means to obtain their political demands, and the power to take over direct control of all productive facilities and services. The workers were organized within the factories into militia brigades and armed by the Ministry of Interior under the pretext of protecting nationalized property on behalf of the State. Efforts by the Democratic parties in the coalition government to disarm the factory militias were not successful during the intervening years that preceded the February 1948 coup d'etat. The initially strong

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<sup>12</sup>Ivo Duchacek, "The Strategy of Communist Infiltration," World Politics, II (1950), p. 360.

position of the Communists within the cabinet, and the protective role which the Red Army played during 1945, impeded all efforts by the democratic parties to re-constitute the pre-war constitutional order or to prevent the creation of de facto revolutionary organs.<sup>13</sup>

The National Front of anti-fascist parties was created in order to provide an orderly restoration of constitutionalism and democracy in Czechoslovakia. The common program constituted the area of agreement and established the immediate goals of the coalition. After internal order and calm had been restored, and the people had become re-accustomed to democratic methods, it was planned to return to the pre-war parliamentary traditions of majority and opposition roles between the parties. The Communists took advantage of the political truce to undermine the popularity of the other parties and extend their own influence among the mass of voters, on the one hand, while simultaneously they sought to form a united electoral bloc with the Social Democrats and National Socialists in order to capture a majority of seats in the Parliamentary elections. In their peculiar terminology, the Communists combined the tactics of the united front from below with those of the united front from above.<sup>14</sup>

The Communists used the truce period of the National Front to fashion their organization into a dedicated and disciplined instrument of political conquest. In contrast, the democratic parties appeared to be amateurish and naive. The Communist party disposed of vast sums of money which were derived from the sale of war booty that the Russians

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<sup>13</sup>Josef Josten, Oh, My Country (Chicago, 1950), pp. 56-57.

<sup>14</sup>Bohumil Lausman, Who Was Guilty (Vienna, 1953), p. 97.

released, from contributions that were made by the managers of the nationalized industries and by capitalists who preferred to pay political blackmail in return for assurances that they would not be prosecuted for collaboration with the Nazis, and from funds which the Ministries of Agriculture and Interior raised through their administration of confiscated properties. In an effort to recruit members into the party, the Communists welcomed opportunists and former collaborators of the Nazis. Fully one-third of the qualified electorate was enrolled in the party. The new members gained protection, material rewards, such as confiscated properties and jobs, and the illusion of security, status and power.<sup>15</sup> The Communists hoped to convert this snowballing popularity into an electoral triumph and, if that failed, to bully the Social Democrats and National Socialists into cooperating with them on their terms. The Social Democrats were assiduously cultivated by the Communists through the pliable Zdenek Fierlinger, who became the prime minister of the coalition cabinet and a willing tool of the Communist party within the Social Democratic party and the cabinet. His main task was to hold the Social Democrats to the policy of united action with the Communists, so the latter could dominate the coalition cabinet and win over the votes of the working class.<sup>16</sup> The Social Democrats were fooled and cajoled into supporting a policy that led to the shift of working class votes to the Communists. By playing second fiddle to the Communist party, the Social Democrats lost prestige. The other parties managed to resist overt domination by the Communists, but were unable to display the

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<sup>15</sup>Paul E. Zinner, "Problems of Communist Rule in Czechoslovakia," World Politics, IV (1951), p. 119.

<sup>16</sup>Jan Stransky, Fast Wind Over Prague (New York, 1951), pp. 198-200.

aggressiveness and vigor of the Marxists, who were riding the crest of the postwar infatuation.

#### The Elections and After

The propaganda theme of the Czechoslovak Communists in the electoral campaign of 1946 stressed the importance of cementing friendly ties with the Soviet Union, and sought to convince the voters that the Communists were better prepared to guarantee this foreign policy objective than the other parties. To vote against the Communists was shown to constitute a rejection of Soviet friendship in favor of dependence upon the Western democracies, which were now less able to offer Czechoslovakia effective security commitments than they were prepared to in 1938. By stressing the need to build a viable security policy by means of a Soviet alliance, the Communists were able to exploit the mistakes of the democrats to their own advantage and pose as realistic nationalists.<sup>17</sup> Through their leadership Czechoslovakia, they claimed, would be assured of continued national survival, as the Soviet Union could be relied upon to make common cause with a nation that placed its confidence in a Communist elite, particularly in view of the geographical location and economic importance of Czechoslovakia. After seven years of national degradation one could expect such an appeal to meet with a favorable response. The Communists also sought to reassure the Czechoslovak electorate that their internal policy was dedicated to the goals of socialism and democracy and the preservation of constitutional government.<sup>18</sup> They posed as

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<sup>17</sup>Dana Adam Schmidt, Anatomy of a Satellite (Boston, 1952), p. 96.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

a legitimate and reformist party instead of one of revolutionary violence. In an effort to win the sympathy of the youth of the nation, the Communist party sponsored an electoral reform that lowered the voting age to eighteen, and established compulsory voting, in the hope that the "youth vote" and the "mass vote" would favor its candidates. The Communists attempted to utilize the Red Army as a symbolic instrument with which to awe the voters, by having Soviet military forces pass through the country enroute to Austria just before the election day; but the protest of President Benes to Stalin succeeded in cancelling the manifestation.

The outcome of the parliamentary election was surprising, in that it revealed how effectively the Marxists, and Communists in particular, had scored in their efforts to curry popular favor. A majority voted for the Marxist candidates, of which thirty-eight per cent voted outright Communist in a free election. The organized workers and a high percentage of peasants<sup>19</sup> supported the Communist party, which represented a significant shift of political loyalty away from the constitutional parties. Another factor that contributed to the relative loss of the moderate party candidates was the convocation early in 1946 by the Ministry of Interior of the People's Courts, for the purpose of trying persons accused

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<sup>19</sup>Ivo Duchacek, "The Strategy of Communist Infiltration," World Politics, II (1950), p. 364. The peasants before the war habitually voted for the Agrarian Party. This political party had been the largest in the time of the First Republic. Its chief ideological tenets had always been narrowly materialistic, seeking the protection of agrarian interests through price controls, farmers' subsidies, and strict protective measures to prevent the importation of agricultural products. After several decades of political education by the Agrarian party, the peasants became an easy prey to Communist propaganda, when their party had been outlawed because of its collaborationist record. "Peasants who did not vote for the Communists out of fear of the Ministry of Interior voted for them because of the Ministry of Agriculture's promises" despite their anti-collectivist persuasion and the systematical warning of other parties about the final aims of Communism.

of war crimes and collaboration with the Nazis. As a result of the arrests and filing of charges by the police, some 300,000 voters were struck off of the electoral rolls, thus depriving the democratic parties of at least ten seats.<sup>20</sup>

The Communists were nevertheless dissatisfied that they had failed to carry an absolute majority of the voters, despite their numerous advantages over the other parties. In Slovakia, particularly, they were annoyed that the Slovak Democrats had received twice as many votes as the Slovak Communist party, despite the latter's active support of regional autonomy. The relative setback in Slovakia may have convinced the Communists of the desultory prospects of gaining hegemony over the other parties by constitutional means.

The new Cabinet differed slightly from its predecessor, the principal changes being the substitution of Fierlinger by the Communist leader, Klement Gottwald, in the office of Premier, and the addition of the Finance and Internal Trade Ministries to those directed by Communists. No change was made in the Presidency, as Benes was elected to the supreme office of the Republic by the newly elected Constituent Assembly without opposition from the Communists. The attention of the parties was then shifted to the Constitutional Committee of the newly elected Constituent Assembly, where democrats and Marxists clashed over the scope and character that was to be given to the constitutional guarantees of freedom and property to the individual. The Communists refused to accept the democratic conception of making the constitutional guarantees legally binding, and of vesting authority to annul statutes, decrees and administrative acts, which might

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<sup>20</sup>Hubert Ripka, Czechoslovakia Enslaved (London, 1950), p. 47.

contravene the constitutional rights of individuals, in a Constitutional Court. They objected in particular to the democratic proposal to allow individuals the right to apply to the courts for procedural remedies, and to claim civil damages for infringements of their legal rights. Due to this fundamental disagreement no agreement was ever reached, and progress on the new Constitution was halted.

The political parties were able to agree on a common economic program which emphasized the development of heavy industry, power and transportation through a two year recovery plan. To carry out the plan, seventy billion Czechoslovak crowns were allocated for investment in both nationalized and private industries, while the government issued a formal pledge to respect the rights and interests of what remained of the private enterprise sector of the economy. The private sector, which included textile and footwear manufacturing, was left without adequate sources of credit, particularly due to the extreme shortage of foreign exchange. Due to the vitriolic propaganda of the Communists against American "dollar imperialism", the United States declined to advance dollar credit to the Czechoslovak government for investment purposes.<sup>21</sup> This situation made the task of private enterprise extremely difficult and added credence to the Communist proposals to strengthen commercial ties with Soviet Russia.

During the year after the 1946 elections, the influence of the Communists subsided slowly, while membership in the democratic parties increased. In order to command a parliamentary majority, the Communist-dominated cabinet was forced to rely upon the support of the Social Democrats, who held slightly more than twelve per cent of the representation.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

The Social Democrats became increasingly critical of the Communists after the may 1946 election, and increasing numbers of them sought to replace Fierlinger as party leader and disengage the party from its servile alliance with the Communists. The National Socialist and Christian Populist parties asserted greater independence and voiced greater opposition against the domineering role of the Communists during 1947. The rapid improvement of living conditions, which resulted from the restoration of trade with the western countries, reduced the appeal of the Communists and increased the prestige of the more liberal parties. Rallies and conventions of the democratic parties were well attended and supported enthusiastically. There were numerous indications that the Communists were losing their popularity.<sup>22</sup>

The peculiar set of circumstances which had held the disparate political coalition together began to break down within Czechoslovakia simultaneously with the deterioration of relations between the Soviets and the Western powers, as the aims of the Marxists conflicted with those of the democratic parties.<sup>23</sup> Opposition by the Marxist parties to Czechoslovak participation in the O.E.E.C. prevented the government from receiving the bountiful American economic assistance offered under the Marshall plan. The original decision of the Prague cabinet to accept the American invitation to the Paris economic conference in 1947 was

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<sup>22</sup>Petr Zenkl, "History of the Communist Coup d'Etat in Czechoslovakia," Ceske Slovo (February 2, 1958), pp. 1 and 3. At the beginning of 1947, foreign trade soared beyond all expectations so the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration rejected the Czechoslovak request for further aid on the ground that her people were the only ones in Europe whose diet was on a pre-war caloric level.

<sup>23</sup>Anonymous, "For Democracy--Against Stalin," Our Direction, III (No. 3, 1954), pp. 21-23.



reversed within two days in consequence of Stalin's remonstrance against the political objectives of the Marshall proposals "to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace."<sup>24</sup> The Communist-directed Information Ministry charged the United States with aiming to restore Germany to her position of power and influence in Europe, and projected the policy of tightening relations with the Soviet Union. The heated foreign policy debate that ensued within the cabinet resulted in a victory for the Communists. Fear of diplomatic isolation and of German revival, as well as uncertainty over the internal consequences of a cabinet crisis, forced the democratic parties to acquiesce in the decision to break with the West. Benes' hope of retaining a "window to the west" through an alliance with France was also vetoed by Stalin and the Czechoslovak Communist party, which now served as Stalin's instrument of control over the government of Czechoslovakia.<sup>25</sup> This foreign policy crisis proved to be the beginning of the end of the National coalition and of democracy in the Republic, as the democratic parties wavered and submitted before the obvious power of the entrenched Communist apparatus, behind which lay the possibility of overt Soviet military intervention.

The immediate consequences of the decision to reject the American offer of economic assistance through the O.E.E.C. were to place a severe strain on available foreign exchange and to divert trade towards the Soviet Union, as a severe drought had necessitated the importation of large quantities of grain and forage crops. Another effect was to spur the Communists in their efforts to destroy the economic power of the

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<sup>24</sup> Frederick L. Schuman, International Politics (New York, 1948), p. 819.

<sup>25</sup> Dana Adam Schmidt, Anatomy of a Satellite (Boston, 1952), p. 103.

bourgeois classes, and to undermine the political support of the democratic parties. The Communists proposed to levy an extraordinary tax on private holdings of over a million crowns to defray the projected subsidy to the farmers, whose income had been cut by the drought, and to protect the purchasing power of the mass of consumers by importing grain. Opposition by the democratic parties was denounced as an effort to protect the vested interests of the wealthy, and the Communists resorted to terrorism, for the first time, against the leaders of the democratic parties by dispatching time bombs in the mail to three of the National Socialist ministers.<sup>26</sup> In Slovakia, the Communist-controlled police arrested two leaders of the Democratic party on charges of malfeasance and treason in performance of their duties on the Executive Board of Commissioners--the Slovak cabinet. Communists were appointed to the Board without serious objections from the Democrats, which merely increased the confidence of the Communist party in the substitution of violence for legitimacy as a technique to monopolize political power.<sup>27</sup>

The obvious contempt for constitutional democracy, and the calculated campaign of the Communists to destroy the independence of the democratic parties, caused the Social Democratic party to rebel against the leadership of the Communist stooge, Fierlinger, who was removed as party chairman in favor of Bohumil Lausman. Lausman proclaimed his intention to end his party's servility towards the Communists and to join with the democratic parties in the defense of legality and freedom.<sup>28</sup> By breaking

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<sup>26</sup>Petr Zenkl, "History of the Communist Coup d'Etat in Czechoslovakia," Ceske Slovo (February 2, 1958), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup>Josef Josten, Oh, My Country (Chicago, 1950), p. 145.

<sup>28</sup>Paul E. Zinner, "Marxism in Action," Foreign Affairs, XXVIII (1950), p. 657.

their alliance with the Communists, the Social Democrats would deprive them of their narrow majority in the government, and threaten to divide the unity of the working class, which was then under Communist control through the unified labor organization. The example of France and Italy, where the Communists were neatly dislodged from the cabinet coalition in April and May 1947, created anxiety among the Communists in Czechoslovakia and in the Kremlin, lest a similar attempt be made in Prague. The Communists were also distraught over the rapid decline in prestige that their party was undergoing, and did not welcome the prospect of new elections, which were due in the spring of 1948. The growing cleavage with the Social Democrats was isolating the Communists, and threatened to reduce them to the status of a minority opposition. It was evident that they could not consolidate their power by democratic means, so preparations to mobilize the activists for the establishment of a dictatorship were made. A national convention of workers and peasants delegates was summoned to meet in Prague in February 1948, and the workers' militia was alerted.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DEMISE OF DEMOCRACY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

#### Czechoslovakia Between the Power Blocs

President Benes and Foreign Minister Masaryk were cognizant of the deterministic role that geography had upon their efforts to fashion an independent foreign policy. Surrounded by Soviet power on three sides, Czechoslovakia could aspire to an independent foreign policy only if the Western allies and the Soviet Union should maintain their concert of power. The dissolution of the wartime coalition would result in the creation of a new equilibrium of power in Europe that would make an independent Czechoslovakia a geographic impossibility, imbedded as she was deeply within the Soviet sphere of influence. President Benes had returned to Prague with hopes that he could "persuade the West to turn 'left' and the Russians to turn 'right' until they all reached the political symbiosis of Communism and western liberalism."<sup>1</sup>

Although Benes' hope in continued postwar cooperation between the Western allies and the Soviet Union showed some promise during 1945 in the approval of the United Nations Charter, and in the organization of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, the signs of East-West tension began soon after the Potsdam Conference. In place

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<sup>1</sup>Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, What Happened to the Czechs (London, 1953), p. 33.

of a joint, cooperative policy of European re-habilitation, the Western allies and the Soviet Union embarked upon competitive policies aiming at the re-division of the world into exclusive spheres of influence. The resulting bipolarization of power made it impossible for the political parties of postwar Czechoslovakia to co-exist within a democratic constitutional order. The Czechoslovak Communists were no longer competing solely for political primacy within Czechoslovakia, but were ideologically required to advance the interests of the Soviet Union by reducing their country to the status of a Soviet satellite. The establishment of the Cominform in 1947 by the Communist parties of the Soviet Union, the east-central European countries and of France and Italy signaled the end of the era of collaboration between Marxists and non-Marxists. The Communists in eastern Europe were instructed to establish dictatorial regimes and to strengthen their ties with the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup>

In one eastern European country after the other the Communist parties used their bureaucratic powers and their para-military mass organizations to impose their exclusive rule by dissolving the non-Marxist parties and assimilating the Marxian Socialists, and by wholesale arrests and executions of political opponents. The Sovietization of Bulgaria and Rumania took place in the autumn of 1947, while Hungary and Poland succumbed to Communist dictatorships by the end of the year. The more fortunate democratic leaders, like Ferenc Nagy and Mikolajczyk, escaped to the West, while many others suffered martyrdom.<sup>3</sup> The diplomatic

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<sup>2</sup>Vratislav Busek, "From Atomic Monopoly to the Atomic Balance," New Yorkske Listy (March 4, 1958).

<sup>3</sup>Hugh Seton-Watson, The East European Revolution (New York, 1956), pp. 178 and 199.

protests of the United States and Great Britain against these violations of the Yalta agreements were contemptuously rejected by the Soviet bloc, which was bent upon integrating the eastern European zone into the Soviet industrial and security set-up.

The geographic position of Czechoslovakia and the economic importance of the country were valuable assets in terms of Soviet security and power requirements. Despite the close ties, which even the democratic parties had consented to with the Russians, the Soviet leaders could not risk the possibility of having Czechoslovakia defect to the West, or of having her pursue an independent policy. The Soviets have sought to integrate the countries within their sphere of influence, not only economically and militarily, but also ideologically and politically through the Cominform. This policy has led to the total subjugation of the political elites to the status of satraps of the Kremlin.<sup>4</sup>

#### The Coup d'Etat

The decision to overthrow the constitutional order of Czechoslovakia was probably made between September and December 1947. The Cominform was established in October 1947 as an ideological and political organ to direct the policies of the Communist parties of eastern Europe, France, and Italy. Delegates met in November in Milan, Italy, to discuss the political situation in Czechoslovakia, and the Czechoslovak Communists were apparently instructed to overthrow the constituted democratic legal order.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Max Beloff, "No Peace, No War," Foreign Affairs, XXVII (1949), pp. 222-223.

<sup>5</sup>Vladimir Krajina, "How Did It Happen," Svobodny Zitrek (February 15, 1949).

The democratic parties of Czechoslovakia failed to perceive the motives and objectives of the Communists during nearly three years of coalition government. Democratic opinion interpreted Communist monopolization of key administrative positions within the government as simply political zeal to direct the policies of land reform, punishment of traitors and collaborators, and defense of working class interests in industry and commerce.<sup>6</sup> It was felt that, had the Communists wished to impose one-party rule over the country, they could have done so initially in 1945 with Red Army support. The Communists, however, had several valid reasons for acting conscientiously within the National Front from 1945 to February 1948. The Soviet Union could not risk a breakdown in its relations with the Western allies in 1945, at a time when Russia was exhausted and Western armies were poised for action in Central Europe. Later, the possession of the atom bomb by the United States restrained the Soviets from precipitating a break with the West until 1947, when the Soviet foreign minister announced that Russia had exploded an atomic device and was capable of producing atomic bombs. Another reason for delaying the coup d'etat in Czechoslovakia was the necessity to train Communist administrators for the tasks of managing the bureaucratic apparatus.<sup>7</sup>

The Czechoslovak democratic parties failed similarly to interpret the determinants of Soviet foreign policy properly. They continued to believe in the "hands off" policy of Stalin after the objective conditions of inter-allied cooperation had ended the utility to the Soviet

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<sup>6</sup>Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart, What Happened to the Czechs (London, 1953), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>Klement Gottwald, Forward, Not a Step Back (Prague, 1948), p. 122.

Union of such a policy, and they foolishly misinterpreted the wartime tactics of Stalin to signify the abandonment by the USSR of its ideological imperialism.<sup>8</sup> Had they realized the purely expedient nature of Soviet tactics and the constancy of Marxist determinants, the Czechoslovak democratic parties might have been better prepared to meet the revolutionary actions of the Communists in February 1948. Benes' hope that the Communists would support his effort to make Czechoslovakia an ideological and political "bridge between East and West" and a laboratory to synthesize liberalism and socialism proved to be utopian. Equally unrealistic was Benes' opinion that the democratic heritage of the pre-war period and the revulsion against Nazism would forestall acceptance of authoritarian rule by the people. The idea that the Communists might attempt a putsch against the democratic state appeared to be sheer fantasy to the leaders of the democratic parties. They were so accustomed to parliamentary and electoral competition that they failed to conceive of the possibility that the Communists would resort to illegal violence to impose their fiat upon the nation. They misinterpreted Marxist expediency in the employment of parliamentarism as a tactic to signify Communist conversion to the rules of democratic fair play.<sup>9</sup>

The Political Bureau of the Czechoslovak Communist party met on January 20, 1948, to fix the date for the revolutionary putsch. It was decided that preparations would be complete by the end of February. From mid-January, 1948 on, the Communist newspaper Rude Pravo enclosed its dateline in a series of alternately colored squares, which served as

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<sup>8</sup>Ivo Duchacek, "The February Coup in Czechoslovakia," World Politics, II (1950), p. 531.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



a code to its readers.<sup>10</sup> Within the cabinet the Communists found themselves increasingly isolated on controversial policy decisions, as the Social Democratic ministers joined the non-Marxist ministers. Among the controversial questions which were deliberated in February, 1948, was the civil service bill. The Communists were defeated in their effort to purge the civil service of "politically unreliable" officials, and to use discriminatory salary scales to reward the politically reliable civil servants. The Communist secretary of the Central Labor Council, Zapotocky, acting under instructions formulated by the Communist party secretariat, convened a congress of workers' delegates, who represented the action committees of the laboring classes. The cabinet rejection of the Communist proposals for the civil service bill served as a pretext for the mobilization of the workers' soviet.<sup>11</sup>

The controversy which shook the cabinet and led to the collapse of the National Front was precipitated by the Minister of Justice, Prokop Drtina, a member of the National Socialist party. At a cabinet meeting of February 13, 1948, Drtina presented a formal list of charges against the Communist minister of interior, which accused him of having transformed the police into a brutal and illegal instrument of the Communist party.<sup>12</sup> In particular, the list of charges accused the interior minister of having enlisted into the police forces a large number of Communist activists, of having arrested and tortured political opponents, of having compiled a blacklist of all non-Communist civil and military personnel,

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<sup>10</sup>Vratislav Busek, The Lesson of the February Coup d'Etat (New York, 1954), p. 71.

<sup>11</sup>Hubert Ripka, Czechoslovakia Enslaved (London, 1950), p. 189.

<sup>12</sup>Josef Josten, Oh, My Country (Chicago, 1950), p. 174.

and of extorting false evidence from numerous victims of arrest for the purpose of incriminating the leaders of the National Socialist party.<sup>13</sup> During the meeting of the cabinet, a report was received by the justice minister that the interior ministry had discharged eight key police officials in the capital, entrusted with the care of arms and ammunition, and replaced them with Communists. The ensuing discussion became so heated that a censure motion against the interior minister was carried and a majority of the ministers approved a cabinet order instructing the interior minister to reinstate the regular police officials.<sup>14</sup>

The non-Communist ministers perceived the conspiracy which the Communists were plotting against the legal order and drew together to prevent the illegal seizure of power. They protested publicly in the press and before the constituent assembly and attempted to arouse public resistance against the impending coup. The democratic ministers were awaiting compliance by the interior minister with the cabinet resolution to restore the key police officials. If the order was not enforced, the prime minister, Klement Gottwald, would be responsible, both as chairman of the cabinet and chairman of the Communist party, and the majority groups could introduce a censure motion before the constituent assembly, acting as provisional parliament, to force the prime minister's resignation. Parliamentary censure would authorize the president, Dr. Benes, to dismiss the entire cabinet and appoint a new one.

The Communists were aware that the crisis was at hand before they were prepared to act in accordance with their revolutionary schedule, so they unleashed a violent propaganda attack against the democratic parties,

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>14</sup>Survey 1947-1948, p. 154.

accusing them of plotting to seize control of the government in the interest of the Western powers and the reactionary classes. The epithets "enemy of the people" and "enemy of the working class" were hurled at the defenders of constitutional government by the Communist press. Communist speakers, addressing mass meetings of organized workers, threatened the democratic parties that "the time has come to learn that the patience of the working class has its limits," and Zapotocky, the trade union leader, was quoted in Rude Pravo as having proclaimed to the working class: "Away with the Parliament which does not fulfill the program of the Trade Unions."<sup>15</sup>

The crescendo of Communist propaganda was accompanied by stepped-up preparations for the putsch. Two regiments of Communist security police, secretly trained in the Soviet Union, were alerted by the Communists for co-ordinated action with the workers' militias. The Communist political bureau was convened permanently for two meetings each day at the residence of the party chairman and prime minister, Gottwald, who remained in constant telephone communication with the Soviet embassy, the Cominform secretariat, and the Kremlin, as well as the security police.<sup>16</sup>

The Soviet deputy foreign minister, Valerian Zorin, was invited by Gottwald to Prague, ostensibly to be present at the inauguration of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Society, scheduled on February 22, 1948,

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<sup>15</sup>Vratislav Busek, The Lesson of the February Coup d'Etat (New York, 1954), p. 71.

<sup>16</sup>Bohumil Lausman, Who Was Guilty (Vienna, 1953), p. 106. At the first emergency meeting of the Politbyro the Communist Minister of Information quoted Lenin's statement: "If we want to make an omelet, we must break eggs."

but in reality to supervise the seizure of power.<sup>17</sup> Action committees were suddenly formed by the Communist cells within every factory, office, school, and bureau, with instructions to seize the premises in which they were employed at the appointed hour. The preparations for the coup were accelerated, so as to counter the threat of parliamentary censure and presidential dismissal by the seizure of total power.

In order to insure execution of the Cabinet resolution against the interior minister, the non-Communist ministers informed President Benes of their determination to resign unless the prime minister conformed to the wishes of the cabinet majority to reinstate the police officials and prevent the communization of the police forces. Prime Minister Gottwald also called upon the president to protest against what he regarded as an attempt by the non-Communist ministers to force the cabinet to resign and in order to form a new cabinet without Communist participation. Benes assured Gottwald that he would not appoint a cabinet which excluded the participation of Communist ministers, but he also insisted that the prime minister enforce the will of the cabinet majority on all policy matters.<sup>18</sup> Gottwald was adamant in his opposition to the demands of the cabinet majority that the non-political police administrators be reinstated, and that the security police be kept free of political ties with the Communist party. He sought to evade the demand of the president that he conform to the wishes of the cabinet majority by winning over the Social Democrats.<sup>19</sup> As an inducement to the latter for their support

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<sup>17</sup>Vladimir Krajina, "How Did It Happen ", Svobodny Zitrek (February 6, 1949), pp. 103.

<sup>18</sup>Jaromir Smutny, The February Coup d'Etat, I (London, 1957), pp. 15-16.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

on the controversial police question, Gottwald proposed that Communists and Socialists form a new cabinet which would exclude the other parties. He offered two-fifths of the cabinet positions to the Social Democrats in such a two-party government, but the latter refused to be divided from the democratic parties, and demanded that the former police administrators be restored to their commands. Gottwald became so incensed at the refusal of the Social Democrats to become accessories to his dictatorial scheme that he threatened dire reprisals against them for placing bourgeois democratic ideals ahead of the class interest of the proletariat.<sup>20</sup>

The deadlock continued until February 20, 1948, when the twelve ministers representing the National Socialist, Christian Populist, and Slovak Democrat parties submitted their resignations from the cabinet to President Benes, and demanded that he dismiss the prime minister and the other ministers, and appoint an interim cabinet of civil servants to administer parliamentary elections. They hoped to improve their representation sufficiently so that they might form a democratic cabinet, with the exclusion of the Communists and Social Democrats, or offer to include the Social Democrats in a broader coalition that would insure democracy and be able to reach some agreement on the text of a new constitution. The democratic parties erred in not securing the participation of the Social Democrats, for without the Social Democrats they constituted only one-half of the cabinet, and therefore, could not legally bring about the parliamentary censure or presidential dismissal of the cabinet.<sup>21</sup>

Prime Minister Gottwald took advantage of the voluntary resignations of the democratic ministers, and of the fact that these constituted only

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> "Five Years Ago," Skutecnost, V (1953), p. 7.

one-half of the cabinet to demand presidential acceptance of the resignations, and the appointment of additional Communists to the posts. President Benes refused to accept the resignations, which were legitimate protests against the illegal conduct of the interior minister and the prime minister. The protesting ministers continued to direct their ministries during the crisis, as their tenure was valid legally until the presidential appointment of successors.

The impasse which resulted from Gottwald's refusal to enforce the cabinet resolution and Benes' insistence upon compliance infuriated the Communist leader and prime minister. Gottwald thereupon delivered a public address to a mass meeting of Communist supporters in Prague, in which he demanded presidential acceptance of the resignations and appointment of Communists to the cabinet. He warned the president that the national security police was prepared to execute his order, if need be, "against the reactionary and subversive elements," which was taken to mean anyone who dared to oppose the Communist party.<sup>22</sup> The following day, February 22, Gottwald addressed the opening meeting of the delegates to the Congress of Workers' Committees in Prague, the hastily convoked and extra-legal soviet, and he again appealed to the President to accept the resignations of the twelve democratic ministers who had precipitated the cabinet crisis. He warned Benes that the "agents of domestic and foreign reaction must no longer be admitted into the government" and that dismissal of the democratic ministers was now "the only way to avoid disorder and chaos."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Josef Josten, Oh, My Country (Chicago, 1950), p. 193.

<sup>23</sup>Hubert Ripka, Czechoslovakia Enslaved (London, 1950), p. 238-239.

The pressures upon President Benes were now very great, for he was being asked to either surrender absolute control over the government to the Communists or take the risk of dismissing the entire cabinet and thus oust the Communists from the government. The workers' congress was serving the Communists as a public forum for revolutionary demands--total nationalization of industry, further re-distribution of farmland, and suspension of all decrees issued by the supreme administrative court which interfered with the arbitrary orders of the Communist administrative officials.<sup>24</sup> The soviet thundered approval of these demagogic demands in the noisy sessions which were broadcast to the nation. The president was disturbed, but he refused to be intimidated by the Communist party and its extra-legal soviet, and again insisted that the cabinet conform to the will of its majority, and work together until a new parliament could be elected. He made a plea that the parties respect the democratic order and the rule of law.

Benes hesitated to employ his extraordinary powers of dismissal and re-appointment of the cabinet, and parliamentary dissolution, until he could appraise the positions of the major foreign powers--the Soviet Union and the United States. The Soviet government stood squarely behind Gottwald in the crisis. Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin was sent to Prague to inform the Czechoslovak government that the Kremlin intended to back the prime minister, with force if necessary, in order to prevent the government from falling into the hands of "reactionary elements" which would be "hostile to the Soviet Union."<sup>25</sup> The Soviet newspapers, Pravda

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Josef Josten, Oh, My Country (Chicago, 1950), p. 193.

and Izvestije, were quoted by the Czech Communist paper, Rude Pravo, as having declared the complete support of the Soviet Union for the "heroic fight of the Communist party of Czechoslovakia for freedom and independence." Radio Moscow broadcast its solidarity with the "people" against the "reactionaries."<sup>26</sup> To clinch the matter of where the Kremlin stood, Soviet armed forces from Germany and Austria were summoned to position on the borders of Czechoslovakia for what appeared to be a general invasion and occupation of the country should Gottwald request Russian intervention. Benes was convinced of the determination of the Soviets to intervene should he act against Gottwald.<sup>27</sup> He sought advice from the American ambassador, Steinhardt, who had been ordered back from Washington to Prague with an offer of a loan of twenty million dollars for the purchase of cotton. Ambassador Steinhardt could offer no assurances of American military support against a Communist putsch or Soviet intervention. He explained that "the non-Communists or democrats could not expect direct or indirect aid from the United States in case of a showdown between Communists and non-Communists",<sup>28</sup> as the United States was not prepared to risk the possibility of hostilities with the Soviet Union. Benes' hands were thus tied. Czechoslovakia was again isolated diplomatically and helpless militarily in the face of the vast array of internal and external Communist armed forces, which now presented him with an ultimatum to surrender the democratic State or be crushed--the same terms he had received from Hitler in 1938.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 127-129.

<sup>27</sup> Bohumil Lausman, Who Was Guilty (Vienna, 1953), p. 216.

<sup>28</sup> Dana Adam Schmidt, Anatomy of a Satellite (Boston, 1952), p. 110.



The streets of Prague were transformed into a permanent encampment of Communists, who mobilized their police regiments and workers' militia battalions. The latter were issued weapons by the illegally appointed district police commandants, and all public buildings, key points and essential services were quickly occupied by armed men, acting under orders of the minister of interior. The minister of information seized control of all the media of communications, and prevented the president from addressing the nation by radio, which was allowed to broadcast only Communist propaganda.<sup>29</sup> The telephone and telegraph services were placed under strict censorship, and non-Communist newspapers were forced to cease publication by the general strike of workers, who continued to print and distribute the Communist press only. Throughout Prague, only the Communists had knowledge of what was transpiring and the means to prepare for coordinated political action. The action committees, which had been formed by the Communist cells within every office, factory and bureau, suddenly seized control of the reins of management, within every business enterprise, public service and government office and ousted the legal management. The members of the action committees were armed and were supported by detachments of the workers' militia.<sup>30</sup> The capital was under the occupation of armed Communists, and resembled a city under a state of seige, while Soviet troops were massed at the frontiers in readiness to crush any resistance that might be offered by the Czechoslovak army. The regular army was ordered to remain in its barracks by

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<sup>29</sup>Vladimir Krajina, "How Did It Happen," Svobodny Zitrek (February 6, 1949).

<sup>30</sup>Ivo Duchacek, "The February Coup in Czechoslovakia," World Politics, II (1950), p. 525.

the defense minister, General Svoboda, who was a Communist stooge. Two additional high ranking officers who had served the Benes government-in-exile were stripped of their commands. The officer corps of the army was therefore neutralized by the Communists, while the ranks were uninformed of what was transpiring. The president was therefore deprived of his command over the armed forces and left alone and helpless to face the prime minister's demands.

The police then began to carry out a pre-arranged campaign of terror by arresting all persons whose names appeared on Communist purge lists. An effort by university students to stage a march against Communist terrorism and arouse mass public opposition in defense of legality and democracy was quickly dispersed by the security police. The city was gripped with fear by the methodical terrorism of the Communist police apparatus, which began the manhunt for its hapless opponents.<sup>31</sup>

Gottwald held the capital in the grip of his armed followers, and the president became his prisoner in the presidential palace; yet the Communist leader was determined to impose his will upon the president by legitimate means. Since Benes had refused categorically to accept the resignation of the twelve ministers, or to authorize the appointment of new ministers without the consent of the parliamentary majority, Gottwald was forced to secure the collaboration of the Social Democrats, whose added representation in parliament assured the Communists of a bare majority. A mob was directed to invade the premises of the Social Democratic headquarters, where the members of the executive committee were deposed and replaced by an action committee composed of left-wing

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

Social Democrats headed by Fierlinger, who again assumed leadership of the party.<sup>32</sup> The action committee then expelled the right-wing Social Democratic minister, Majer, for having opposed Gottwald and re-constituted its representation in the Cabinet. A number of opportunists were found among the deputies of the democratic parties to accept appointment to the re-organized Gottwald cabinet, which now was dominated by the Communists. Rank and file members of parliament were intimidated into passive support of the Gottwald cabinet, which required formal appointment for the new ministers by the president. The minister of interior is reputed to have warned Benes that refusal on his part to sign the new appointments would result in the liquidation of a long list of victims, many of whom could be presumed to be in the hands of the security police.<sup>33</sup> The justice minister, Drtina, long-time friend and former secretary of the President, had already leaped to his death to escape Communist vengeance, while the President's brother had been savagely beaten by a mob. The nation was even more helpless than it had been in 1938, for the enemy of the state now held absolute power over the government, the police, the army, and over the mobs which controlled the cities, and it held in reserve across the border the hordes of mechanized Red Army men.<sup>34</sup>

President Benes submitted to the ultimatum of the prime minister on February 25, 1948, as he had submitted ten years before to the demands of Hitler. The enfeebled statesman had been stricken twice recently by heart attacks, and he realized the futility of resistance to the array

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<sup>32</sup>Dana Adam Schmidt, Anatomy of a Satellite (Boston, 1952), p. 117.

<sup>33</sup>Survey 1947-1948, p. 155.

<sup>34</sup>Paul W. Blackstock, "Indirect Aggression," Soviet Total War I (Washington, 1956), pp. 35-36.

of force which held total power before him. What saddened him most, however, was the sight of the regimented and bloodthirsty masses, behaving as the Nazis, submitting blindly to the leadership of unprincipalled demagogues, and destroying the democratic edifice on which he had labored for a lifetime.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The demise of democracy in Czechoslovakia in February 1948 was the result of a gradual process of disintegration of the diplomatic bases of Czechoslovak security. Although the coup d'etat which interred constitutional democracy in central Europe's model republic was executed by internal revolutionary action under the direction of the Communist party, the preponderance of the Communists in 1948 was the product of a decade of Western diplomatic failures and defeats.

The succession states of east-central Europe were created by fiat of the victorious Allied and Associated powers in 1919 ostensibly to satisfy the local yearnings of the region for independence and Wilson's principle of self determination. French and British support of this policy, however, was motivated by the objective of creating a viable power equilibrium for the purpose of containing Germany and Soviet Russia and of insuring Anglo-French preponderance in Europe. The new states of east-central Europe were thus conceived of by the French, in particular, as devices to buttress French security and the new status quo that emanated from the Versailles settlement. The new states were far too feeble to defend themselves against a resurgent Germany or Russia without the military protection of the French and British, who formed the concert of power which was to function through the League of Nations.

From the beginning of her existence almost, Czechoslovakia looked to France and Great Britain for guarantees of protection against her

revisionist neighbors, in return for which she was ready to perform her obligations in defense of the status quo and balance of power which exalted Anglo-French hegemony over Europe. The security of Czechoslovakia and of the other east European succession states was indivisible with that of France and Great Britain. The national interest of all was designed by the peace settlement to coincide in the defense of the status quo and the power preponderance of the Versailles powers.

The breakdown of the Versailles settlement upon which the security and independence of Czechoslovakia depended began with the rise to power of Hitler in Germany and the alienation of Italy and Soviet Russia by France and Great Britain. Hitler's successful defiance of France in the Rhineland crisis led to the re-armament of Germany, her alliance with Italy, and to a rapid reversal of power relations in Europe. Anglo-French preponderance was transformed into Italo-German preponderance by 1938. The power equilibrium upon which the defense of the territorial status quo depended could be restored only by the conclusion of an Anglo-French-Soviet alliance, the tightening of ties by these powers with the east-central European countries which supported the Versailles peace, and an accelerated program of military re-armament. If these measures proved to be inadequate to restrain the Axis powers a preventive war alone could have preserved the national security of the status quo bloc.

The conservative leaders of Great Britain and France chose the policy of accommodating the territorial demands of Germany and Italy through a series of compensations which sacrificed the existence of such states as Ethiopia, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Albania and allowed such states as Spain and Rumania to be drawn into the Axis sphere of influence. They hoped to re-create a new concert of power consisting of the Big Four,

excluding Soviet Russia from any voice in European political decisions. The motivation behind this anti-Soviet policy was in part to isolate the Soviets and contain their power, and in part to avoid the necessity of submitting to the social demands of the working class that would be made in consequence of a policy of military re-armament and preparation for war. The appeasement policy was conceived of by Western conservatives as a means to avoid internal accommodations in favor of the working class, and as a means to prevent the expansion of Soviet power and influence.

The price to Czechoslovakia of the Anglo-French policy of appeasement was national extinction. Czechoslovak patriots never fully recovered from the Munich betrayal, for which they blamed the Western democracies. In search of defenders of their national interest they turned to the Soviet Union, whose wartime exploits against the Germans and pan-Slavism created the illusion among patriotic Czechoslovaks that Russia could be trusted to respect their independence and institutions. Stalin's dissolution of the Comintern convinced Benes that the Soviet Union had abandoned its ideological goal of exporting communism, and that her interests were no longer incompatible with the national survival of an independent Czechoslovakia.

During the course of the war against Hitler Germany it became evident that the expulsion of the Nazis from Czechoslovakia would be accomplished by the Red Army, particularly after allied strategy had decided to leave east-central Europe a sphere for Soviet military operations. Czechoslovakia was destined, by allied agreements, to come under Russian military occupation. This decision by the Western powers forced Benes and other east-European leaders to collaborate on

Moscow's terms in the restoration of national governments to their countries. The Western allies were reluctant during the war to engage the Russians in controversial political discussions concerning east-central Europe, for fear that the Soviet government might negotiate a separate peace with Nazi Germany. Such understandings as were worked out between the Big Three leaders at the Teheran and Yalta conferences conceded to the Soviet Union the substance of hegemony over all of east-central Europe. This recognized power status gave the Russians a legitimate claim to interfere in the political composition of the east-central European governments during the postwar period.

The inclusion of Communists in the key positions of the Czechoslovak government was the price which Benes was forced to pay for Russia's contribution to the war against Hitler Germany. This opening wedge transformed the Czechoslovak Communist party into a state within a state. The psychological attitude of the Czechoslovak working class, which provided the Communists with the mass support to carry out their coup d'etat successfully in February 1948, can be traced to the moral disillusionment which swept Czechoslovakia after Munich and left the mass of people bitterly resentful against Western democracy and its Czechoslovak votaries. Finally, the failure on the part of the United States and Great Britain to provide President Benes and Foreign Minister Masaryk with tangible assurances of military assistance during the February crisis allowed the Communists to use the protective cover of the Red Army as a shield behind which they neutralized the internal role of the Czechoslovak army.

The demise of democracy in Czechoslovakia was thus the product of the diplomatic blunders and naivete of Western statesmen as much, if not more, than of the shortcomings of Dr. Benes and the Czechoslovak democrats.



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