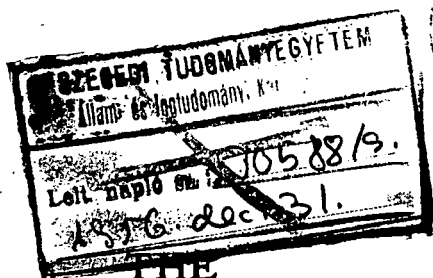


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EAST-EUROPEAN PROBLEMS

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HUNGARIAN-POLISH FRONTIER QUESTION

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The Hungarian-Polish Frontier Question.*

The Polish press frequently comments on the danger of a Czech-Russian corridor implied by Czechia's possession of North-Hungary and on the necessity of a direct Polish-Hungarian frontierline.

The communications published on this question in the Polish papers from 1 st February 1919 to the end of January 1920 were gathered in a separate volume by the publishers E. Wende & Comp. of Warsaw, which book has just left the press.

Besides the introduction, the volume contains 38 communications which consider the problem in its political, economic and military aspects and throw some interesting lights on Czech-German relations. At the end of the volume the author gives a summary of the motives that induced him to publish his communications and the conclusions to be drawn from them.

In the following we reproduce the author's summary according to the original text.

* Niebezpieczeństwo Korytarza Czesko-Rosyjskiego. Konieczność granicy polsko-węgierskiej. Co mówi o tem prasa polska? Warszawa, Skład główny w księgarni E. Wende i S-ka, 1920. (The Danger of the Czech-Russian Corridor. The Necessity of the Polish-Hungarian Frontier. Comments of the Polish Press. E. Wende & Comp., Warsaw 1920.)

I. The Disadvantages of the Czech-Russian Corridor.

The summary of the above publications proves undubitably that firstly the Czech-Russian corridor is a menace to Poland, and furthermore that a Hungarian-Polish frontier were not only most advantageous to Poland, but, what is more, of vital interest for her future.

To render the survey of the publications easier, we shall consider the contents in their following aspects:

The Czech-Russian corridor is detrimental to Polish interests for three kinds of reasons, military, political and economic ones.

1. The objections from the military point of view are these:

This corridor would menace the Teschen Silesia which Poland cannot give up in consideration of its population belonging to the Polish nation of old, and would at the same time threaten the many interests of paramount importance that bind Poland to this territory.

The Czech possession of North-Hungary could render possible the simultaneous attack of Silesia by the Czechs on two-sides, from the west and south (the district of Jablunkau), which would severely impede its defence.

Along the southern frontierline, to the extent of about 500 kms., Poland would continually be held in check, and in consequence would be compelled to constantly employ a part of its military forces as guard to this frontier and would have to watch anxiously each movement on the part of the Czechs.

This passage is a menace to the whole of Podhaljet* which the Czechs regard as their future property. This conclusion is easily reached when reading Czech newspaper articles, each of them proving the necessity of its annexation.

* The Polish territory near to Zakopane, wedgelike driven between the counties of Árva and Szepes.

No less it threatens East-Galicia since Czech-Russian policy aims at direct contact with Russia across the Ruthenian counties of Hungary and Slovakia. As long as the Ruthenian counties of Slovakia and Hungary will remain in possession of the Czechs, Czech-Russian policy will be bent on playing East-Galicia into Ukrainian or Russian hands to realise the Czech-Russian plan of a passage. It is most probable that the Czechs and Russians want their transversal railway lines to cross this corridor, and since the construction of such lines across the passage would meet with great technical difficulties owing to the Carpathians, it is quite natural that the Czechs will come to reckon on the two lines east of the Carpathians leading from west to east.

This is the more likely to happen since such a passage would not answer its purpose without any large transversal railway line, could not form the desired link between Prague and Moscow. It may suffice to point at the fact that not only Kramarz observed that policy, but so did Kłofacz, otherwise friendly inclined towards Poland, as testified by his article in the *Czesko Slovo*: "We cannot consent to Poland subjecting East-Galicia under her rule since this would mean a renewed check to our evolution. In face of the present situation there is nothing left to us but to crush the rock that bars our way. Above all, the intervention of *Ucrainia* is of deciding importance; the possession of East-Galicia is of the same vital interest to *Ucrainia* as to ourselves."

This policy of the Czechs is a menace to East-Galicia, and though perhaps they will not succeed in severing it from Poland, their rule in the Ruthenian counties of Hungary would also in that case imperil the situation of the East-Galician army as it were rendered very easy for the Czechs to encircle it from the rear at any time they chose.

They would also be enabled to cut off the ammunition supply from the southwest and south as it actually happened in the beginning of 1919 when the situation

in Lemberg became most critical and the Czechs did not want to let the munitions pass that Hungary had sent there.

2. From the political point of view the Czechs' rule in North-Hungary were dangerous for the following reasons:

The Czechs aim at the Czechisation of the Slovaks as evident from each of their actions and all their declarations. Thus Stefanik, in the Czech-Polish Council held at Cracow in 1919, made the statement to one of the reporters that Slovak topographical denomination will completely cease in the next ten or twenty years to come. What else does this signify but the Czechs' intent on the Slovaks' Czechisation by every means available?

Now they will either succeed in realising this their determination or not.

If they succeed, there will be seven millions of Czechs instead of the present five, which hostile element will cover the whole of our southern frontier, and the Hungarians, amicably disposed towards us, as well as the good-natured Slovaks will rise against these restless adversaries who spare no means to achieve their end, make light of everything and are the persistent foes of Poland: the Czechs, who never miss a chance to exert their evil influence.

If the comparatively few Czechs could cause Poland such mischief in the Middle Ages, were able to subject Cracow to their rule for some time, what sanguinary fights have we to expect should they succeed in obtaining such a long, common frontier.

It is of vital importance to Poland to render the frontier to Czechia as short as possible.

Besides, the conditions affording the Poles of Árva and Szepes county in Hungary the cultivation of their national life would be equally imperilled by Czech rule.

In the measure in which the latter will extend over the Ruthenian counties in Hungary, it will propagate Muscovitism or Ucrainism in conjunction with the Pravoslav



creed, not only as hitherto practised among the Ruthenians merely, but it will support the anti-Polish movement among the Ukrainians and the "Lems", and for this reason will constantly give rise to gravest troubles.

Whenever it strikes them as appropriate, the Czechs will be at leisure to cut Poland off the rest of the world, from the west and south, as it happened in 1919 already when they barred the way of the Poles travelling to the Paris Conference, which delegates were enabled to continue their route only after intervention on the part of the English. At the same time the Polish foreign representatives at Vienna, Budapest, Bucharest, Belgrade and Sofia were unable to obtain communication with Poland, which we also owe to the Czechs who had set their mind on cutting off our representatives for the time being

Also our telegraph and telephon communication is at their mercy and frequently it occurs that operation is interrupted by them.

The Czech-Russian passage would serve German interests as way to Russia, for the hate fed in Polish hearts constitutes the common tie between German and Czech aspirations, as well as their sympathy with Russia and the fact that both of them are in search of a route to Russia that would shun Polish territory.

The close contact between Prague and Berlin is daily more clearly revealed by the comments of the papers.

The design of a Czech-Russian passage is forcibly supported by Ukrainians and Russians as proved by Petrushevics' and Denikin's writings which but lately reached publicity. No doubt, as soon as they will have gathered sufficient strength they will rouse each other to action against Poland. This is what the words of the Czech Slavik point at: "When once great and powerful Russia will attack, Poland will find herself between two grindstones". Surely, then, it is one of Poland's paramount interests to defeat the realisation of the Czech-Russian corridor.

The extension of Czech rule over the Ruthenian counties of Hungary is but the preliminary to place these districts, together with East-Galicia, under Ukrainian or Russian sovereignty. What significance this step would bear on Poland is worth while to explain in a few words.

The Czech-Russian passage would bar Poland from the direct communication with Roumania and also from the roads leading to the Black Sea, which are of no minor importance to her.

On the basis of this argumentation we must admit that the Czech-Russian passage would involve the gravest dangers to Poland. The primary interests of the nation demand the frustration of this design.

3. No less disadvantageous to Poland is this passage from its economic side since it cuts its route to the south, i. e. bars it from Austria, Hungary, the Adriatic Sea, the Balkans, and, if Czech designs were to succeed to their full extent, from Roumania and the Black Sea as well. Yet it is an essential condition for Poland's economic prosperity to have free access to these routes, to freely avail of them for export and import purposes from Danzig to Fiume and the Black Sea. Poland would be thwarted in her economic life by the Czech obstacle extending as far as Russia.

The attitude of the Czechs, their manifestly adverse economic interests above all, indicate that, as soon as there is any possibility afforded them, they will spare no effort to check Polish export and import trade. Even now already it has repeatedly happened that the Czechs have not admitted transit-goods directed to Poland. Thus Poland is delivered to Czechia's mercy.

Now, as against the arguments contained in the above passages, we have to examine what advantages would be afforded by a common Polish-Hungarian frontier.

II. The Political and Military Advantages of a Common Polish-Hungarian Frontier.

If North-Hungary were no part of Czechia, the maintenance of Silesia's ownership were much easier for Poland, for her frontierline to Czechia would run but along the north and no attack could threaten her from the south; on the other hand, the main cause of the Czechs' persisting claim on Silesia is their need of the railway line running from Oderberg across North-Hungary. According to the opinion of the Czech deputy Zika they cannot cede an inch of Teschen's territory which is the economic and strategic key to the Slovak districts.

Between Czechia and Slovakia the Carpathians are extending, crossed by two railway lines only, and for this reason the Czechs make every possible effort to get into possession of the section Oderburg-Jablunkau.

If Slovakia were not in the hands of the Czechs, there would be no need for the "key", nor for that section of the line either.

Poland's possession of Silesia lies also in the interest of Hungary, for it would yield her considerable economic and political advantages. *Hungary requires coals and could supply this her need much easier from the Poles than from the Czechs.* Thus the Hungarians ought to support Poland's claim on Silesia.

It is one of Hungary's essential needs that East-Galicia remains in the hands of the Poles. Her economic and political interests categorically command it with regard to her supply of petroleum; hence it is to be expected that Hungary will come to Poland's aid in the hour of need.

As to the question of Arva and Szepes counties — according to the state of affairs as reported till the present — *the Poles have to expect a more conciliatory spirit by far on the part of the Hungarians than on that of the Czechs.* While the Czechs now already assume an unapproachable attitude on this question, the Hungarians have proved their sense of justice and

insight on the occasion of the compilation for the 1910 census, when the Hungarian press expressed great sympathy for the Árva and Szepes Poles and publicly recognised them as Poles and non-Slovaks.

From all this it is to be concluded that also from the standpoint of the Árva and Szepes Poles it were more advantageous for Poland to be in direct contact with Hungary instead of Czechia.

The direct Polish-Hungarian frontier were of greatest importance from the military point of view in so far as facilities in ammunition supply are concerned. Hungary has quite a number of factories capable of meeting an increased demand for arms, and thus Poland would be enabled to fit her army with all kinds of weapons within the shortest space of time whenever rendered necessary.

In point of fact we may be assured that the common Hungarian-Polish frontier extending over 500 kms. were perfectly quiet and safe; hence a considerable part of the Polish military forces could be freely disposed of.

Economic Advantages.

In the same measure in which North-Hungary's occupation by the Czechs proves detrimental to Polish interests, the direct contact between Hungary and Poland were propitious to the latter country.

Poland urgently needs immediate connection with the Hungarian railway lines, in such manner as to render Czech interference and dependence on Czech dispositions impossible.

There are seven important lines running from Poland into Hungary and Poland's commerce were to profit by them as soon as Slovakia, and the Ruthenian countries were again incorporated into Hungary.

Poland would be rendered quite independent from Czechia in this regard, and in case some Czech-Polish collision were threatening and the Czechs would desire to cut off, let us say the Oderberg—Lundenburg line leading to Vienna, Poland might avail of the Csacza—

Trencsén—Pozsony line or any other and might continue her unhampered communication with the south and southwest. *But the Hungarian lines were more advantageous also in view of the fact that they would not cross so many small countries and consequently were not subject to the payment of so many kinds of tariff. Proceeding in the direction of the Adriatic via Oderberg and Vienna, 4 kinds of tariff have to be paid (Czech, Austrian, Yugoslav and Italian), while there were but two different kinds of tariff when crossing Hungary on the way to the same destination. (Hungarian and Yugoslav.)*

Furthermore there is to be remembered that in case of amicable sentiments towards Poland on the part of Russia, we should be bereft of our second line. The Czechs would be forever unreliable since even now already they alternately strike bargains with Germans or Austrians as their interests afford it. If the Czech-Austrian alliance — at which many indications seem to point — will be realised indeed, Poland will more than ever depend on a route that enables her to reach the Adriatic or Italy without touching the hostile Czech-Austrian bloc.

As it is Poland's desire to continue on good terms with Hungary, it is evident that she would grant the latter free access to her lines and arrange her tariff-rates with the Hungarians on the basis of an amicable agreement.

If Slovakia and the Ruthenian counties had not been delivered to the Czechs, it is to be assumed that the surplus of Polish industries, textile industry above all, would find a ready market in Hungary since just this branch of industry is but little developed in that country.

The commercial relations between Hungary and Poland which once had been so lively and considerably added to the enrichment of Cracow and Novy Szandecz, are vigorously resumed now. *The natural and industrial*

products of the two countries are complimentary to each other in a most fortunate way. Poland could supply Hungary with coal, salt, petroleum, furs, wollen cloths and other industrial products. Hungary again might give first rate wheat, maize, different kinds of flour and cereals, excellent vegetables, cheap and good wine, first class breeds of cattle, full-bred horses and every description of seed-grain, the production of which has reached a high degree in Hungary.

There is but a slight difference in the exchange of the two countries, which would equally contribute to their lively commercial intercourse.

The causes stated above bear ample testimony that Poland would considerably profit by a common frontier with the Hungarian State.

III. Conclusion.

Can Poland quietly look on her neighbours trying to encircle her? Can she agree to being fenced in all round, shut off from communication with the rest of the world? The Czech-Russian corridor, by no means a necessity to any of the states concerned, is a menace to Poland or rather the trap laid for her by her ill-disposed neighbours in the hope of succeeding in strangling her. In the west the Germans, in the east the Russians account for a most dangerous neighbourhood, and that danger is aggravated by the Czechs who have resorted to the ruse of the corridor to ensure the cooperation of Poland's most powerful two enemies.

What is there to be done?

It is universally known that the nationalities suppressed by the Czechs, like Slovaks and Ruthenians — not considering the more than a million of Hungarians — are filled with burning hatred against them and want to free themselves from their yoke at any price.

Some American Czechophile Slovak agitators have plainly sold the Slovak nation to the Czechs in the

agreement formed in May 1918 and known by the name of Pittsburg Convention. They have had no authorisation to do so in the name of the Slovak nation, the latter had no idea of being betrayed in such manner, sold without their knowledge or intervention. The Czechs however did not take the trouble to observe the points of the agreement they had entered.

In the meeting held in December 1918 at Kassa the East-Slovakians declared they would not acknowledge this arbitrary act on the part of the Czechs and fight it. The memorandum addressed to the head and government of the Polish State and the Polish papers (*Gazeta Warszawszka* for instance) stated the results of this meeting. It is a well known fact that Hlinka, the popular Slovakian leader and former follower of the Czechs, has made the same declaration against the Czech Cabinet and travelled to Paris to defend the rights of the Slovak nation.

The dissension between the two Slovakian groups has been adjusted and their common representative has handed Bandholz, the American General, a memorandum containing their protest against Czech rule and the demand for the plebiscite in Slovak territories. There is no better illustration of Czech-Slovakian relations than the declaration of Mr. Jehlicska, the great Czechophile, who announces his conviction that Czechs and Slovaks are brothers indeed in the sense of Cain and Abel.

For this reason the Slovaks, with the exception of the small group having been bribed by the Czechs, demand the plebiscite that would put an end to Czech rule in Slovakia. The Czech policy of brute force has led to such a result within the course of a year, which the Hungarians could not reach for a thousand years. It succeeded in bringing about such peaceable disposition and such friendly understanding as existed never before between Hungarians and Slovaks a thousand years back. There never existed between them such amicable relations as now when common sufferings unite them.

The Slovaks are convinced by now that Czech rule means hell and death to them, the Hungarians again have already long come to recognise that no nation can derive advantage from the suppression of other nationalities.

There are many reasons to assure the peaceful accord of Hungarians and Slovaks in future. The same relations prevail between Hungarians and Ruthenians who equally hate the Czechs and were subjected to their rule in the same arbitrary fashion against their will.

The Ruthenians, like the Slovaks, have assumed a hostile attitude against the Czechs and have forwarded their plea to the Western Powers for the plebiscite, pointing at the disastrous consequences of Czech governmental activity.

As these nationalities do not wish to be subjected to Czech rule, the manifestation of their will must be rendered possible in compliance with the principles announced by President Wilson. And if this will result in the expression of the nationalities' wish to return to Hungary, there is no justification in preventing them from it.

If these nationalities will not be satisfied with the Czechs' government, these territories will be the centre of constant unrest that will make itself felt in the neighbouring countries also.

The Western Powers have to be enlightened as to the errors committed by the Czechs and must be persuaded to modify some of the Peace-Treaty's stipulations.

The present status is not to be maintained and will give rise to renewed collisions.

A strong and powerful Poland lies in the interest of the maintenance of Europe's balance of power, is indispensable for it.

The frontier with Hungary is one of the essential conditions not only of Poland's power, but of her existence, a pillar on which to rest; this guiding principle is to be traced through the whole of Poland's history and has frequently been announced by prominent Polish statesmen.

Here we must still quote the statement of one of the most distinguished members of the Polish emigration group in 1849.

"The nations' politics are always mutually formed. What is a vital condition to the one, assures the existence of the other. This solidarity is evident in Hungary's and Poland's history.

Hungary and Poland have a common geographical base in the Carpathians. That principle or aspiration realised on the one side of the Carpathians is not ensured or stable until the other side has not equally succeeded. It is the destiny and duty of the two nations to join in common efforts. The one is rendered capable of life by the vitality of the other. Perhaps the partition of Poland would not have taken place with an independent Hungary as neighbour — and Hungary may not have been bereft of her liberty, neighbouring to a Poland in proper state of affairs. The good or bad luck of one of these two nations will always imply good or ill fortune for both of them.

Poland, in the first time of her evolution, could not have resisted the double pressure from the west and east if she had not had a broad and safe shoulder to lean on. The Hungarian alliance was that shoulder, the ultimate object of brave Boleslav's policy".