

Persons and Personages

MILAN HODŽA: PROFESSOR AND MAN OF ACTION

By HUBERT BEUVE-MÉRY

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ALWAYS kindly disposed toward professors, the Czechoslovak Republic now sees one at the head of its government. It is true that Mr. Hodža's capacities as a journalist, an organizer, and a politician surpass those of a professor. This taste for action and for organization, which seems to be the dominant trait of the Czechoslovakian President of the Council, has been developed under a triple influence: Protestant, Slovak, and Hungarian. Son of an Evangelical pastor, young Milan belonged to the Protestant Slovakian bourgeoisie—a class which represented the intellectual elements of the country and exerted some political influence. Being a Slovak, he loved his small country passionately, and as a good Slovak, combined an innate eloquence with a fiery spirit which the passing years have not completely extinguished. In a Magyar school he learned good manners, social resourcefulness, and generosity.

Mr. Hodža showed his talent for organization as early as 1897. He was no more than nineteen years old when he succeeded in uniting the Slovak, Rumanian and Serbian students of the University of Budapest in a close association—an early prelude to the Little Entente. The outcome of this venture was not long in coming: he was soon invited to pursue his studies elsewhere; and accordingly he went to Vienna. Upon getting his doctorate he returned to Budapest, where in 1900 he founded a magazine called *Slovenský Deník*. Soon compelled to suspend this publication, he launched in 1903 the *Slovenský Tydeník*, a weekly which rapidly became the intellectual and political sustenance of the Slovak masses. In 1905 he was elected to the Budapest Parliament by the Slovaks of the Bák, a region which today belongs to Yugoslavia.

The young deputy felt that he possessed the spirit of a leader, and he did not try to hide his ambitions. But he was too profoundly Slovak at heart to associate himself with the powers of the day. The question of destroying Austria-Hungary did not arise until much later, when the old empire had dug its own grave. For the time being his plans were much more modest. It was a question above all of securing autonomy for the non-Magyar population. The plan of action was based on two cardinal points: to struggle against the Austro-Hungarian dualism, which left the field free for oppression and to obtain the right of suffrage for the minorities.

Mr. Hodža carried on this double struggle ceaselessly, with all the vigor of his temperament, but also with all the mastery which his rapidly growing experience was developing in him. Was he an extremist or a moderate? A radical or an opportunist? Mr. Hodža was neither one nor the other; or, to be more exact, he was, and doubtless still is, both. Never, perhaps, had a citizen of the Dual Monarchy dared to speak about the Emperor as he did. In 1905, some time after his election, he wrote: 'The paternal heart of Your Majesty rejoices to see us supplying you faithfully with money and soldiers; its tranquillity is not at all disturbed by our sufferings. . . . We are sure that Your Majesty's heart is nothing but a base calculating machine, only fit to determine the order in which you can juggle the nationalities'. . . .

WHEN the Dual Monarchy was overthrown and the Czechoslovakian Republic proclaimed, Mr. Hodža, following his political instinct, continued to alternate open attacks with subtle alliances. The first representative of the Czechoslovakian Republic in the Budapest government, he showed by his independent attitude that he had his own policy and that it did not behoove him to be treated as a mere functionary—not even as one of the highest degree. Elected a deputy to the new Parliament, he founded the Agrarian Party of Slovakia, where he at the same time organized the trade unions and agricultural coöperatives. At the end of two years, assured of his comparative independence, and not having any reason to fear that his personality would be overshadowed by the vast party machine, he allied himself with the Czechoslovakian Agrarians. Later he was to lead a bourgeois bloc in an attack upon the Socialists,—an attack that he continued until the reprisals of the Left in their turn checked him and forced him for some time to adopt a humbler attitude.

As a matter of fact, although accused of demagoguery and of Agrarian Socialism, Mr. Hodža had often seemed a reactionary to the Czechoslovakian Socialists. He was one of the most effective opponents of the separation of Church and State. Against those in favor of centralization he asserted the necessity for decentralization, which the history of centuries imposed. Finally the fact that he was a partisan of the League of Nations did not make him fight any less vigorously against pacifism, which seemed to him at once empty and weakening, and likely to make the future of his country a dark one.

If, to make sure, one asks him about his true political beliefs, Mr. Hodža answers willingly: 'I am a conservative, but in the larger sense of the word. That is, I want to create before I conserve.'

What does he mean by 'create'? Perhaps a vast central party where Agrarian predominance will be expressed even more decisively than it is

today. Perhaps, also, a new form of democracy, which will deserve the name of economic democracy. In spite of oneself, one thinks of certain of Mr. Beneš's declarations . . . The Socialists and Agrarians might have been in violent opposition in the past; today they agree on more than one point. Their reconciliation is more than just a tactical move or a simple reflex of a lucid and generous patriotism.

As Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Hodža succeeded in organizing and directing a cereal monopoly by appealing to a federation of producers and consumers and by demanding no more than a strictly limited guarantee from the State. The experience up to now has not been unfavorable. Mr. Hodža now dreams of extending the organization to the other branches of agricultural production. He is exerting pressure on the industrialists to induce them to enter upon a similar road. He is transforming the agricultural chambers; he intends to reorganize the National Economic Council; he is attempting to simplify and organize the administrative machine so as to achieve the greatest clarity and efficiency possible. In terms of such an evolution one foresees a Republic which some would call conservative and bourgeois, others Socialist and perhaps also Corporative, although that word has never passed the lips of the President of the Council.

But Czechoslovakia has more than economic problems to solve. It is also necessary to integrate the Slovaks into a national community, and Mr. Hodža is perhaps the only one who could achieve this task. It is also necessary to make more than three million Germans feel happy and free in their Czechoslovakian homeland—a delicate problem which in 1926 the future President of the Council had believed in great measure solved, but which the changes in Hitler Germany have since revived. In resuming this interrupted work, in performing the projected economic reorganization, in helping the realization of the idea, which is so close to his heart, of an association between the agricultural and industrial States of Europe—in doing these things Mr. Hodža can count upon the confidence of the immense majority of his countrymen. Naturally there is no lack of obstacles. He will have to contend with the resistance, the routine, and the jealousies of his own party, with the incomprehension and the suspicion of a good number of the Socialists. He will also have to resist the temptation to expand indefinitely the field of action of his own party at the expense of the other political organizations. But the gravest danger threatening him is perhaps the very greatness of the hopes placed in him,—hopes which it is perhaps not in the power of any man to realize completely.

One must hope for the good of Czechoslovakia and the success of democratic ideas that the parties of the Left and of the Right will have in this difficult hour as clear a comprehension of their duties as that which

Messrs. Hodža and Beneš have. If it is so, make no mistake: this lettered bourgeois, who knows how to speak to the simple folk, whose warm greetings quickly correct the first impression of austerity he gives, who speaks slowly, with his eyes half closed, as though he were pursuing some inner thought behind his glasses—this man is not only the chief of an honorable Protestant family. Nor is he only a party member whom a political movement has unexpectedly carried to the top. Tomorrow he may very well be one of the new men of the new Europe.

ALBERT SARRAUT

By ODETTE PANNETIER

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HE MAKES one think of a Buddhist monk in an educational film, or a provincial notary who has come incognito to Paris to perform a marriage. He has the flat nose and the slanting eyes of the one, and of the other, the pompous air, the solemn bearing, and the passionate attachment to a bowler hat and a cane with a silver knob.

He speaks slowly, weighing and reweighing his words, savoring them as he utters them. He has not yet exhausted the pride he experiences at feeling himself so discreet, so sensible, so intelligent.

His great power lies in having a brother whom no one ever sees. You have to have a radical convention, rife with threats and hidden traps, before you finally see him appear, tall, slender, round-shouldered, with cheeks that are too hollow, cheekbones that are too pink, a moustache like a lightning-rod. Clemenceau used to say:—

‘Albert Sarraut? Oh, yes, that’s the one with the intelligent brother.’

It is true that Maurice Sarraut is intelligent. Intelligent like all those who advise much and never act. Albert Sarraut is not particularly stupid either. And he is brave enough, too. He has proved this by fighting several duels. That was a long time ago. He has doubtless become more discreet since then. But in the trade of the musketeer one does not wait until sixty to retire.

By a strange phenomenon this man, so brave in life, is in politics submissive and vacillating. His brother, who guesses all his sentiments with an almost feminine intuition, has become for this weakling in search of support a sort of tender, intellectual Nanny. Whatever Maurice advises him to do, Albert does. One has the power and the other exercises it.

The two of them are great feudal lords, Radical and anti-clerical, whose domain comprises the entire countryside of Carcassonne and Toulouse. They rule their lands amiably but firmly.