



22.01.1922

First proposal for Slovak autonomy

Slovak autonomy was an issue before, during, and after its origin. It was an expression of the struggle for the preservation of the original cultural and religious character of Slovakia, and activities aimed at respecting its interests in the new Czechoslovak Republic. The state was characterised by centralism – all key decisions were taken in Prague, and Slovak specifics were not considered. Autonomism offered a solution, but governmental garnitures of the Republic did not have the courage to accept it. While the opinions of Slovak autonomists were based on the creation of a special Slovak nation – for which they required territorial autonomy – governmental political parties were decisive in asserting the wishes of the Czechoslovak nation, represented by a unified Czechoslovak state. The Catholic priest Ferdiš Juriga wrote the first known proposal for Slovak autonomy within the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic. Juriga wrote this proposal when travelling by train to Prague on 13 November 1918, where the first session of the revolutionary National Assembly was held. The Slovak People’s Party led the autonomist movement in Slovakia under the leadership of Andrej Hlinka, who defended Slovak rights in Hungarian Lands. The first official proposal for Slovak autonomy was filed by the Slovak People’s Party in parliament on 25 January 1922. The proposal stated that the 1920 constitution did not satisfactorily resolve the relationship of Slovakia to other parts of the Czechoslovak Republic. The latter should remain a united, indivisible state, while Slovakia and Ruthenia should be granted ‘the widest self-government compatible with the unity of the Czechoslovak Republic.’ In its internal matters, Slovakia should be given its own provincial self-government with legislative and executive power. It is interesting that parliament did not deal with the proposal for Slovak autonomy, despite such a proposal having been officially filed. Other proposals for Slovak autonomy were filed in 1930 and 1938.



This political party won democratic parliamentary elections in 1925, 1929 and 1935, but was part of the government for only a short time: 1927 to 1929. Governmental political parties, which inclined to centralism, considered the autonomist movement as seditious, and aligned it with separatism. Andrej Hlinka said in parliament in 1921: ‘Although our party fights for autonomy, it does not fight for the breaking of the Republic. For us autonomy is an issue of bread, existence, cultural, social and political issues. Autonomy in our programme is not a phantom, as it is written in magazines stating that we do not know what autonomy is, and we do not know what we want. We précised our programme particularly, and we said what we require and what we want.’ The Slovak



autonomist movement was not eliminated, despite the efforts of centralistic governmental parties. On the contrary, dissatisfaction in Slovakia was growing. Slovak intelligentsia graduates inclined mostly to Slovak separation and refused Czechoslovak national unity. Deteriorating economic and social conditions necessitated an effective solution. The Slovak issue as a range of problems was not satisfactory resolved and dissatisfaction manifested itself in such protests as the one against rules of Slovak orthography in 1931, which saw the Slovak language merged with the Czech language. The congress of the young Slovak generation in Trenčianske Teplice in 1932 also reflected this feeling. It took some time before the Slovak People's Party agreed with the Slovak National Party on joint action, although both had had the same programme for Slovak autonomy. While the Slovak Catholics inclined more to the Slovak People's Party, the Slovak Evangelicals inclined to the Slovak National Party. Their representative, evangelical priests and the writer Martin Rázus asserted cooperation with Hlinka. According to his statement of 1929: 'The autonomist movement is not a Slovak specialty. This is a European phenomenon. Englishmen and Frenchmen, Germans and Russians, Serbians, Croatians and Slovenians, who are closest to us, know it. Autonomism is based on the fact that one nation - I will strongly underline it - does not want to die, neither mentally nor materially, and become artificial fertilizer for another nation. This fight - it is seen clearly - will end with victory even in our country, in Slovakia.' Hlinka and Rázus - the chairmen of the two Slovak political parties - agreed on joint action in 1932 at a meeting in Zvolen. An autonomist block was created, which was joined by one Polish and one Ruthenian political party. Slovak autonomism demonstrated its power in Nitra in 1933 on the 1,100th anniversary of the first Christian church's sanctification in Slovakia. The misunderstanding by governmental circles of the Slovak autonomy programme led to more radical opposition and partners being sought, which represented a risk both for democracy and the Czechoslovak Republic.



Translated from Slovak to English by Darren Chastney, proofread by Dr Ian Copestake



Prof. Mária Tonková, Prof. Róbert Letz, Prof. Anna Bocková

References: