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*Great Britain's New Allies—
The Czecho-Slovaks.*

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(RECAP)

THE CZECHO-SLOVAKS.

“ Since the beginning of the war the Czecho-Slovak Nation has resisted the common enemy by every means in its power. The Czecho-Slovaks have constituted a considerable Army fighting on three different battle-fields and attempting in Russia and Siberia, to arrest the Germanic invasion.

“ In consideration of its efforts to achieve independence *Great Britain regards the Czecho-Slovaks as an Allied nation*, and recognises the unity of the three Czecho-Slovak Armies as an Allied and belligerent Army waging regular warfare against Austria-Hungary and Germany

“ Great Britain also recognises the right of the Czecho-Slovak National Council, as the supreme organ of the Czecho-Slovak national interests, and as the present trustee of the future Czecho-Slovak Government, to exercise supreme authority over this Allied and belligerent Army.”

*Official British Declaration
of August 9th, 1918.*

By making the above declaration, Great Britain took a momentous step for which the Czecho-Slovaks will for ever remain grateful to her. By this declaration Great Britain has not only proclaimed the actual national sovereignty of the Czecho-Slovaks but has also definitely decided to follow a policy aiming at a radical reconstruction of Central Europe, based on the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy. This break-up of Austria, which to-day is as certain as the Allied victory, means the destruction of the worst tyranny in

Europe. It is not, of course, the dismemberment of a nation, for Austria is not a nation, but a conglomeration of nations, or, as the Czech deputy Stransky put it in the Austrian Reichsrat in June 1918, "a century old crime against the liberties of mankind, a hideous dream, a load of tyranny, a nightmare and nothing else; it is a State without patriots and without patriotism, a constitutional Monarchy without a Constitution and without a throne." The British declaration means an end to this hideous dream. It is the death warrant of the Dual Monarchy. Austria-Hungary does not exist any more, except by name. Her collapse is merely a matter of time.

Who are the Czecho-Slovaks?

The term Czecho-Slovaks comprises two branches of the same nation: the seven million Czechs (pronounced Tchecks) of Bohemia, Moravia and Austrian Silesia, and the three million Slovaks of Slovensko in Upper Hungary, who speak a dialect of Czech. On the North West, West and South-West, they are surrounded by the Germans of Prussian Silesia, Saxony, Bavaria and Austria. On the South-East they border on the Magyars, who are the descendants of the Huns, and who invaded the present Hungary in the 10th century, thereby separating the Northern Slavs (Poles and Czecho-Slovaks) from the Southern Slavs (Serbo-Croats and Slovenes). Only on the Eastern half of their Northern frontier do the Czecho-Slovaks border on a friendly race, the Poles, who speak a

language closely related to their own. Nevertheless the Czecho-Slovaks are in a strong strategic position, being surrounded with high mountains like a fortress deeply wedged in between Vienna and Berlin, on the road from Berlin to Bagdad. They form the most Western outpost of the Slavs right in the heart of Europe, in the centre between the Baltic and the Adriatic sea.

Czecho-Slovak History.

Since the fifth century the Czecho-Slovaks inhabited as an independent nation the territories of the ancient Kingdom of Bohemia, which boasts of a glorious history. Christianity was introduced very early in Slovakia and Bohemia by the Slav apostles, Cyril and Methodius, and it was the Czecho-Slovaks' lot to repulse the onslaught of the Teutons, Tartars, Huns and Magyars in their early history. An interesting episode is connected with the life of the Bohemian King John of Luxemburg, the famous European Knight errant, who fought with the French against the English at Cressy in 1346. His plumes, taken by the Black Prince during this battle, form the coat-of-arms of the Prince of Wales. Of greater importance for Bohemia, however, was his son, Charles IV., who founded the University in Prague, in 1348, which is the oldest in the whole of Central Europe, and which played an important part in Bohemian history.

The most glorious times of Czecho-Slovak history were the Hussite wars, which were both

religious and national in character. John Hus, a man of great moral strength and a true Czech patriot, who, under the impression of Wycliffe's writings, stood up for the regeneration of the Church of those days, was burnt as a heretic in Constance in 1415. This provoked consternation in Bohemia, and the whole Czech nation rose up to revenge his death. The Hussite armies, led by Zizka, repeatedly defeated vastly superior forces which the German Emperor brought against them.

In 1526 the Czechs elected the Habsburgs to the throne of Bohemia. Thus for the first time Bohemia, as a fully independent State, became united through a common dynasty with Austria and Hungary in view of the Turkish peril. But legally she remained independent even to this day. Soon after their accession to the throne, the Habsburgs began to violate Bohemia's religious and national liberties, which finally led to the Czech revolution of 1618, and to the thirty years' war. The Czech revolution was crushed at the White Mountain, near Prague, and the nation cruelly punished. The leaders were executed, all educated classes exiled, their property confiscated and the population decimated. The poor peasant alone remained.

Czech regeneration.

For over two hundred years the Czech nation was believed to be dead. As the result of the ideas of the French revolution, proclaiming liberty, equality and fraternity, people in Bohemia began again to study their country's history, and the

Czech language, at that time spoken only by the peasants, began to be employed again as a literary language.

This revival of the Czecho-Slovak nation was at first only literary and scientific. The movement became political in the 'forties, when Metternich's era of absolutism was already on the decline. Since 1848 the Czecho-Slovaks claimed with renewed vigour the restitution of their ancient rights of an independent nation. And in less than seventy years they became a nation without any illiterates, with a well-developed art and literature, and with a strong and independent agriculture, trade and industries.

The Czecho-Slovak nation to-day.

The Czecho-Slovak territories, which are four times the size of Belgium, are rich and well-developed economically. Expeditions came to Bohemia and Moravia from Russia and elsewhere to become acquainted with the efficient methods of Czech agriculture. We need not dwell on the importance of Bohemian glass, sugar and beer industries, for which the Czechs are famous all over the world. The largest part of sugar and fine glass imported to England came from Bohemia. Bohemia is also rich in coal, iron, silver, copper and other metals.

In business, the Czechs boycotted German goods long before the war. Czech banks had branches in Galicia, Rumania and all over the Balkans, which fought successfully German economic penetration.

The Czechs had even had their national army, although without rifles and ammunition. We mean the "Sokol" Gymnastic Association which had some 200,000 members with branches also in other Slav countries. It was chiefly through this movement that the Czecho-Slovaks acquired the splendid physique, discipline and daring spirit which are so characteristic of the Czecho-Slovak soldiers of to-day.

Through their own efforts and notwithstanding all obstacles on the part of the Austrian Government, the Czecho-Slovaks have, before the war, become an advanced and wealthy nation, possessing everything, in fact, except their actual State sovereignty.

The Czecho-Slovak national spirit and character.

By their continuous struggle with the Germans and by their sufferings, the Czechs acquired many excellent qualities of character. They are a stubborn race, always ready to face danger, although on the other hand there is also the Slav meekness and kindness in them. They are also very efficient in science and organisation, and like all Slavs the Czecho-Slovaks are extremely fond of art and especially of music. Indeed in this respect they are considered to be one of the most musical races of the world. Their composers like Dvorak, Smetana, Novak or Suk enjoy a world reputation

just like their artists and singers (Kubelik, Emmy Destinn).

Their spirit is thoroughly anti-German, since throughout their history they had to defend themselves against the Germans. In this respect their attitude always was and always will be clear. They may be fully relied upon by the Allies as the pioneers and leaders of the anti-German barrier in Central Europe, both in the political and in the economic sphere. Being sincere friends of their Slav and Latin neighbours, the Czecho-Slovaks will always work for stability and co-operation among the non-German nations of Central Europe.

The Czecho-Slovaks and the War.

The significance of the British declaration may be gauged from the fact that at the outbreak of the war the Czecho-Slovaks have not only had no Army and no Government of their own, but even no united organisation and no leaders abroad. Their soldiers were conscripted in the Austrian Army, their journals were suppressed, their leaders (like Kramar, Rasin, Klofac, Burival and many others) were imprisoned and even sentenced to death. Thousands of Czech soldiers and civilians were shot for manifesting their sympathies with the Allies, and thousands of others have been interned like subjects of an enemy State. Austria-Hungary in which the German-Magyar minority rules the Slavs and Latins (Czecho-Slovaks, Poles, Ruthenes, Yugoslavs, Rumanians and Italians)

declared war not only on her external, but also on her internal enemies, the non-German and non-Magyar races who form the bulk of her population. No wonder that Czecho-Slovak soldiers, compelled to fight against their brother Slavs, the Serbs and Russians, for a cause which they detested from the bottom of their hearts, revolted. Over 300,000 Czecho-Slovak soldiers surrendered voluntarily to Russia alone, 30,000 to Serbia and 20,000 to Italy. These surrenders contributed greatly to the Austro-German military defeats.

The Czecho-Slovak Army and Government.

The organisation of the Czecho-Slovaks who voluntarily went over to the Allies, into a regular Army fighting on the side of the Entente, fell to the Czecho-Slovak National Council, who have now been recognised as practically the Provisional Government of the future independent Czecho-Slovak State. In consequence of the generous British declaration, the National Council has been able to organise as a real governmental institution and to exercise all the rights and powers of a real Government, representing a fully independent State. The National Council has its headquarters in Paris, and it has representatives and legations in all the Allied capitals.

The Czecho-Slovak National Council consists of three members:—Professor T. G. Masaryk, an eminent Czech leader and deputy to the Austrian

Reichsrat, and at present Professor at King's College, who escaped to the Allied countries soon after the outbreak of the war; Dr. Edward Benes, an able politician and author of various political and social studies, who escaped from Austria in 1915. The third member is General Stefanik, a famous Slovak airman and scientist, whose diplomatic and military career is one of the wonders of this War.

All Czecho-Slovaks in France and Great Britain volunteered to fight in the Allied ranks on the outbreak of the War.

In Russia there has been a Czech legion fighting with the Russian Armies since the very beginning of the War, composed of Czechs resident in Russia. Unfortunately the Tsarist Russian regime placed obstacles in the way of recruiting among our prisoners of war. There were also difficulties resulting from the fact that our prisoners were dispersed all over Russia and Siberia, and the National Council, not yet having the powers of a Government, was unable to proceed with its task with the desired success until after the revolution. It was only after Professor Masaryk came to Russia in May, 1917, that we succeeded in raising a whole brigade which took such a glorious part in the last Russian offensive in July, 1917. This brigade gradually developed into an Army Corps, and numbered some 60,000, when the Bolsheviks concluded the shameful peace of Brest-Litovsk. It was then decided that our Army should be transported via Siberia to France, but this became

impossible when the Bolsheviks, who at first granted the Czecho-Slovak Army free passage to Vladivostok, attempted to destroy it with the help of German and Magyar ex-prisoners. The Czecho-Slovaks defeated the Bolsheviks, with the result that now they are holding over 2,000 miles on the trans-Siberian railway. Their action induced Great Britain, France, Japan and America to intervene in Russia, and there is little doubt that their action, if carried out successfully, will bring about the salvation and restoration of Russia, and will shatter the German plans of Eastern penetration.

In the meantime France authorised the formation of an autonomous Czecho-Slovak Army on the Western Front in December, 1917, and Italy followed her example four months later, so that to-day Czecho-Slovak troops are fighting on all the battle-fields for the Allied cause, on whose victory alone the liberation of their country depends.

The future Czecho-Slovak State.

The international position of the Czecho-Slovak State will be of great importance. As we have already pointed out elsewhere, the Czecho-Slovaks are the most democratic, the most advanced and the most anti-German of all the Slavs. Bohemia will be a rich and self-supporting country of at least some 12 million inhabitants. In the North she will border on a united Poland with whom she may conclude a close alliance, assuring her an

outlet to the sea. The Danube will connect the Czecho-Slovaks with their friends the Yugoslavs and Rumanians in the South. Austria and Hungary, reduced to their proper racial boundaries will number about 8 million each, and will be in a hopeless strategic and economic position. This settlement will shatter for ever the German plans of Central Europe and Berlin-Bagdad.

The realisation of these Pan-German plans, based on the preservation of Austria-Hungary as Germany's bridge to the East, would give Germany the power to dominate over the whole of Central Europe, the Balkans and Turkey, and would directly threaten Egypt, India and the very existence of the British Empire. These plans cannot be frustrated unless the Czecho-Slovaks are fully liberated. With the cause of Bohemia, the cause of Great Britain will either fall or triumph. Without an independent Bohemia there also can be no truly independent Poland, Rumania or Yugoslavia, while if the Czecho-Slovaks are liberated, they will form the centre and the head of the anti-German barrier in Central Europe, which alone will arrest the German "Drang nach Osten," and secure the Slav and Latin nations a free national existence in mutual co-operation and for the benefit of peace, democracy and humanity.





