

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

F. Gregory Campbell's fascinating article "Empty Pedestals?" and the ensuing discussion by Gale Stokes, Roman Szporluk, and Campbell again (*Slavic Review*, Spring 1985, pp. 1–29) cry out for continuation. While in basic agreement with Campbell, I think much more clarification is necessary about the question whether "an independent small nation-state [can] be viable in a world of super-powers" (Stokes, p. 16). The question is far more complicated: Czechoslovakia between 1918 and 1938 was certainly small, certainly independent, but not a "nation-state" in the sense that, for example, Portugal is the nation-state of the Portuguese and Greece the nation-state of the Greeks.

Is it correct that "Beneš functioned as little more than Masaryk's private secretary during his early years as foreign minister" (Campbell, p. 2)? By chance I discussed this question some time ago with a retired official of the Prague Foreign Ministry who had been active there from the beginning, and my impression was that, notwithstanding Beneš's absolute loyalty to his master, as foreign minister he was very much his own man. On the other hand, Beneš could not have remained foreign minister from 1918 to 1935 (and then, for all practical purposes, acted even as head of state holding the same position) unless Masaryk had insisted against strong opposition, from a part of the Agrarians and from Kramář's party, that the Foreign Ministry belonged to Beneš and to nobody else. After having received a polite no from the Social Democrats, who disliked being used for such purposes, Beneš had formally joined the National Socialist party in 1923 in order to have some political backing. The formidable obstacle to his remaining in office when this party was in opposition between 1926 and 1929 was overcome only by Masaryk's either/or and by Beneš's resigning his parliamentary seat. Masaryk hardly ever interfered in the conduct of foreign policy, but the few cases when he did so caused his foreign minister considerable embarrassment.

Masaryk's strength and influence were unique and were not regulated by any constitutional provisions. In 1920, when he received both the newly elected first Czech mayor and the German deputy mayor of Znojmo (Znaim) in Moravia, Masaryk told them that he knew that the Czech majority in the town had been created at the borough elections only by a large detachment of the army, suddenly stationed there, and that he disliked this state of affairs. (The voting rights of conscripted soldiers were abolished in 1927.) In 1923 the usual congratulatory New Year visit of the presidents of the two chambers of parliament to Masaryk could not take place, because Masaryk had refused to shake hands with the president of the senate, Karel Prášek (an Agrarian), who had been involved in corruption and was then forced to resign his office. Beneš could have done nothing like this.

The examples seem to indicate only that the "first republic," the Czechoslovakia of the years 1918–1938, was not the 100 percent "Masaryk state," depicted in Campbell's article. In spite of Masaryk's extraordinary influence after 1918, the first republic was neither a presidential democracy nor—in Gale Stokes's term—a "Czech national democracy." Not necessarily to Masaryk's liking, the republic was a party democracy, formed by five political parties—Social Democrat, Agrarian, National Socialists, National Democrat, and (Catholic) People's—which were older than the state and, consequently, arrogated for themselves the untranslatable term of *statotvornost*, which roughly means "building and sustaining the state."

It is difficult to understand how Gregory Campbell could come to the conclusion that "Tomáš Masaryk and Edvard Beneš were among the most outspoken advocates of the nation-state system," since in reality they were among the most outspoken adversaries of this idea. Possibly what Campbell had in mind was a state embodying the aspirations of the Czechs and Slovaks or (as Masaryk and Beneš would have said) Czechoslovaks. What both men rejected was the idea of giving the Czechs and Slovaks as founders of the state some privileges that were denied to the rest of the population. To the chagrin of Kramář

and other Czech nationalists, the constitution of 1920 did not proclaim Czechoslovakia to be a national state. Beneš was opposed to such a statement for the, perhaps opportunistic, reason that it would have created insuperable difficulties for him in the League of Nations because the minority treaty signed by Czechoslovakia and incorporated into the constitution insisted on the equality of all citizens or inhabitants. In his message for the tenth anniversary of the founding of the state in 1928 Masaryk tried to stop further controversies about this point by stating that “we are a nationally and linguistically mixed state.”

Gregory Campbell’s statement that the “national minorities in Czechoslovakia fared better than those in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe” is correct, but the same cannot be said about his condemnation of the “mindless intransigence of the Sudeten Germans” (p. 29) many of whom remained faithful to Masaryk’s enlightened views of justice for everyone until the end of the first republic or even longer. Czechoslovakia between 1918 and 1938 was neither the hell on earth proclaimed by Joseph Goebbels’s propaganda nor the paradise on earth depicted in the nostalgic memories of the older Czech generation. It was an honest attempt to build up a modern, progressive, and democratic state, but it was a state for good weather only, flourishing as long as the system of Versailles prevailed in Europe. There was no national or other suppression but there were no systematic efforts to win over the loyalties of the German and Hungarian populations for the state or any government plans or ideas for settling existing grievances.

The question, however, is not whether it was right or wrong to set up the successor state to the Habsburg Monarchy, as had been done in 1918–1919, because nobody can know what other solution was then possible or feasible. Yes, “Czech democracy failed because Europe failed” (Stokes, p. 19), but this is no excuse for missing many opportunities.

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TO THE EDITOR:

Regarding *Diary of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union* by Vittorio Vidali, reviewed in *Slavic Review*, Summer 1985, pp. 331–32: What this diary does not tell is that “Vidali” was born *Enea Sormenti* and was a member of the United States Communist party in New York. He was recruited for the KGB by one of the KGB agents, a person called “Peter.” In New York City Carlo Tresca, an Italian anarchist, published an anarchist weekly called *Il Martello* [The hammer] and he kept attacking the Bolsheviks for what they were doing to the Russian people. He published the newspaper in the New York Socialists’ headquarters at the Rand School on West 15th Street, near 6th Avenue. When he walked out of this building one afternoon, Sormenti had arranged his murder. After the killing Sormenti left New York.

He surfaced again under the new name “Carlos” and became Stalin’s finger man during the Civil War in Spain. Anyone not in agreement with Stalin’s policy there ended with a bullet in the back of the brain. Working with “Carlos” in Spain was a young Italian photographer, Tina Modotti of Mexico City. When she discovered the kind of skullduggery “Carlos” was engaged in, she broke with him and returned to Mexico.

When the Civil War in Spain was over, he followed Tina to Mexico and told her he was giving a farewell party for her. He poisoned her at the party and my friend Martin Temple of Mexico City rushed her to the hospital. Tina died in the taxi on the way. The Mexican newspapers *El Excelsior* and *El Universal* carried the story on their front pages. After this, “Carlos” returned to Europe, went to Trieste, became active in the Communist