

"THOMAS GARRIGUE MASARYK - ARCHITECT OF FREE GOVERNMENT"

Address

by

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at

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There is no better measure of the understanding between two peoples than their knowledge and respect for each other's heroes. The tribute rendered this evening to the memory and teachings of Thomas Garrigue Masaryk is inspired by reverence for a majestic Czechoslovakian leader, but it also bespeaks a sympathy with the aspirations and afflictions of the people he led.

This good will is not one-sided. All of our national heroes strike a response among the Czech people, especially Woodrow Wilson, collaborator with Masaryk in bringing about Czechoslovakian independence. And I saw the Czechs demonstrate their love and veneration for our own wise and valiant war-time leader, President Roosevelt. On a memorable evening - just as you, Dr. Slavik, were to begin your Ambassadorship to the United States - we met at Representation House in Prague, where I had been invited to participate in your memorial service for President Roosevelt. Among your people who joined in the tribute were your learned and lamented President, Dr. Benes, and the genial and worldly-wise Jan Masaryk, martyr of the communist coup, and Lord-Mayor Petr Zenkl of Prague, delivered a short time before from the Nazi concentration camps, now, like a few other of his countrymen, a refugee among us. What a pity that more of our friends cannot reach this haven from the storms that are sweeping over their native land.

Anti-American demonstrations may be staged in Czechoslovakia, hostile words may be spoken or unfriendly gestures made by those in power, but I know that they do not represent the real sentiments or the free will of the friendly people who inhabit that land of sorrow. In every village, almost in every household of Czechoslovakia, live simple, God-fearing people, some of whose kinsmen

or friends have migrated to the United States and prospered and held responsible positions in our life. For years before the Iron Curtain closed down, these newly-made Americans were sending back disinterested, unpolitical and unsophisticated personal letters telling of life and progress here. Those intimate and artless messages have been the voice of America to which worker and peasant listened, and, at least for this generation, their impression cannot be blotted out.

Thomas Masaryk belongs to Czechs; he belongs to Americans; he belongs to all the world. His life was led, his work was done, and his influence was felt in many countries. Even the present regime is paying an unintended tribute to his world-importance by a campaign to belittle his achievements, to efface his memory, and to rub out his name from the lore of his country. Of course, without him the most glorious years of its modern history would be blank. Only primitive and rancorous minds, untaught in the ways of history, would seriously undertake this project, which is as droll and vain as that of the old lady who went out with her kitchen broom to sweep back the tide.

The magnitude of Masaryk's work must be appraised in the light of the perilous spot which Czechoslovakia occupies in Europe. Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia and its lesser components, as the world reckons size, are little states, but they are by no means trivial ones. Where they lie the East and the West abut, though they can hardly be said to join. Czechoslovakia constitutes a strategic frontier for two Worlds that in many ways always were fundamentally incompatible and often, as today, openly hostile. Bismarck is credited with the observation that "Who rules Bohemia controls Europe." Hence, an age-old struggle to possess this romantic country has made it a battlefield almost every generation. Conquest and rebellion have

desolated the land and lacerated its people. Czech men and women know how to live dangerously, usefully and heartily. They found Masaryk a leader, who in his person, exemplified their finest traits.

Masaryk's career appeals to the understanding and ambitions of Americans. He was born into a period and a society still agitated by the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary movements associated with the year 1848. From an humble Moravian home, he made his own way to preside in the castle built for kings. Between these extremes, his career touched life at all levels and in many lands. We find him, a blacksmith's apprentice, shoeing the work horses that pulled the plows of his peasant neighbors. We see him become a student and advance to a professorship of philosophy at the University of Vienna - at the center of the Austro-Hungarian Empire of Franz Josef at its zenith. It was in those days that the Hapsburgs were waltzing to destruction, for which the baton of Johann Strauss, the younger, led the gay and seductive three-quarter measures. There Masaryk acquired the arts of the gentleman while he attained the insights of the scholar. He saw that beneath the superficial pomp and enchantment of the ruling class, it was crumbling from stupidity, corruption and oppression.

He entered politics and won a seat in the Parliament which, from Vienna, ruled his native state. More than once he was put under arrest during an election campaign. He became the leader of the Slavic peoples in their aspirations for freedom and the recognized spearhead of the liberal forces that opposed the brittle and thick-headed regime of Franz Josef. But if he did not discourage, neither did he stake success upon underground methods or conspiracies. Masaryk was a profound believer in the ultimate triumph of moral and intellectual forces. Masaryk's tactics were those of a free and upright man. It

is said of him that "What others whispered he spoke out in open meeting."

Two of his bitter struggles were against miscarriage of justice in the Hapsburg courts. A poor Jewish tramp named Hilsner was accused of murdering a Bohemian girl. Anti-semites alarmed the populace with the story that it was a "ritual murder". Newspapers were full of it and even church leaders joined the general outcry. The court convicted and sentenced the friendless vagabond to death. Masaryk faced the bitterest racial and religious animosities as he exposed the lawless and savage proceeding to the listening world. His criticism was so powerful and so well-directed that the government called a new trial, which at least saved Hilsner's life and reduced the sentence to imprisonment.

On another occasion the Austrian secret police arrested over fifty native Serbs and Croates, unimportant people, and charged them with conspiracy to overthrow the Empire. A hurried trial pronounced them guilty of high treason. Masaryk threw the Empire into consternation by two parliamentary speeches in which he showed that the trial was engineered by the Austrian Foreign Office to alarm the people into support of its policy of aggressive annexations in the Balkans. A retrial was ordered and later the Emperor quashed the whole case, but too late to save his Foreign Minister and his foreign policy from discredit in the eyes of the world. Here then was Masaryk, with a little band of hunted and devoted followers, carrying on an almost hopeless struggle for liberalism, when to be an avowed liberal was to invite the attentions of His Majesty's jailor, if not the acquaintance of his hangman.

Masaryk was 65 years of age when he read of the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand. He knew it meant war. He prepared

to seize the opportunity to end the harsh Hapsburg rule of his native land. The Czechs within the Empire would be forced by conscription to fight for the Emperor. But they might desert or surrender, and once across the lines, they might join the fight against their Austrian masters.

With the help of Dr. Edvard Benes, he knit together a revolutionary group to work within the country and then made his way abroad to arouse the Czechs outside of their native land and to win support from the Allies. Again and again he risked his life, which was saved only by cool courage and quick judgment and rather miraculous luck. While abroad, he read that his wife had been condemned to death for treason. His home was ransacked by the secret police. His daughter and Benes' wife were thrown into prison. But at all costs, he went on with his work, won Allied approval of his cause, mobilized and led the Czech foreign legions, organized a National Council that soon was recognized as the Czechoslovakian Government in Exile. A gigantic task had culminated in triumph. He wrote the Czechoslovakian Declaration of Independence in his rooms at 2400 Sixteenth Street a few blocks from where we are, and it was promulgated from Independence Hall in Philadelphia with the blessing of free people everywhere. For seventeen years he headed the new government. When he resigned, at the age of 85, he was beloved of all the world. Perhaps fate was kindly to close his eyes in death before they were obliged to look upon the ravage of his country by gangsters, first from the Nazi West and then from the Communist East.

We can take the measure of this remarkable man as an international statesman when we cast about among contemporary figures for one that even approaches him in intellectual stature, moral force, or understanding of world-wide social and political forces. How many

men in high office today would make any impression upon their times except for more or less accidental political success? But Masaryk, independently of political achievements, was a commanding literary and philosophical figure, not only in Slavic scholarship and intellectual life, but in the whole intellectual world. He carried more equipment for world statesmanship in his head than most men can find in their libraries. He spoke and read a half-dozen languages - Czech, Russian, English, French, German and Polish. He had read the literature and histories of these peoples in their own tongues. He knew their geographies, their resources, their weaknesses and ideals, their social and nationalistic aspirations. For substantial periods, he had dwelt in Washington, Moscow, London, Berlin, Paris, Rome, Vienna and Petrograd. He was at home in every capital, even as he was at home in Prague.

The tragic lack of statesmen with comparable intellectual grasp and good will is emphasized by two distinguishing features of his career. First is that few foreign statesmen have better understood the United States and all that it stands for. Masaryk came to this country in 1878, almost penniless, to claim in marriage an American woman in whom he found life-long help and comfort. He returned later, an internationally known scholar, to lecture in Chicago, Cleveland, Boston and New York, where he established close relations not only with the Czech people but with leading intellectuals of all national origins. He made a profound study of our history, literature and institutions. During the war, he spent much time in Washington. In fact, Washington (where nearly everyone is but a bird of passage) may claim him as a citizen as much as it can claim most Americans. Here he made many friends, two of the most influential being Woodrow Wilson and Mr. Justice Brandeis.

Of equal significance was Masaryk's deep understanding of Russia. Early in life he mastered the language of the Russians and studied their literature in the original tongue. He made several visits to Russia and was the friend of Tolstoy. He wrote with authority about that country. Masaryk was in Petrograd when the revolution began. Fifty thousand Czech prisoners of war were held there and he sought to organize them to fight Germany. He witnessed the uprisings that overthrew the Czar and saw Russia later collapse in disorder and violence. He was under fire in Moscow and crossed through Siberia to Vladivostok in order to reach the United States by way of the Pacific. Thus he knew at first hand the causes, the courses, and the consequences of the Bolshevik revolution.

Masaryk, like most persons of liberal tradition, doubtless hoped that the initial Russian revolution would end reactionary, corrupt and cruel dictatorship, and clear the way for some type of free government. However, as early as 1898, in his book "The Social Question," he had examined the teachings of Marx and had criticized them, especially for their materialism. Masaryk believed that the destiny of men and of nations is shaped by higher considerations than mere materialism. And there is no doubt that he, like others of the liberal tradition, were deeply disappointed as time proved that power in Russia had been seized by those who only inverted the Czarism to bring a different class to the top and in its service perpetuated dictatorial government, suppression of opposition, a secret police, Siberian exile, and all that had made the old regime vicious and intolerable. It was not what had been hoped for - a dependable counterweight to the fascist tendencies in Western Europe, but instead became an ally. But whatever disappointment he may have felt as to their leaders, he never lost a keen sympathy with the Russian people.

What a pity that we scan the world today in vain for any world statesman who begins to have a comparable comprehension of the traditions and conditions that separate the East from the West and of the many common interests that might help to reconcile them.

It is not possible to review the tremendous task that faced Masaryk and his group in setting up a free government in Central Europe, where it was not in the tradition. Nor did that problem stand alone. Independence necessitated creation of a defense establishment of industries and foreign trade, and measures to provide a system of finance and currency. So successful was our philosopher in these practical matters that in the days following the first World War, Czechoslovakia was known as "an island in the sea of inflation" and it enjoyed its most stable and prosperous period.

But freedom was to Masaryk the great value, without which all values fail. In Central Europe he had courage to establish universal, equal and secret suffrage, equality of civil and political rights, full personal liberty, free speech, free press, free assembly, and freedom of conscience and religion. To all of these he gave the protection of a separate, independent, permanent and nonpolitical judiciary. Even many liberal statesmen feared that the Masaryk plan of liberation was too extravagant and too sudden to succeed among a people so long unused to freedom's ways. But he knew better. Before he died, he had led them to high place among the free and progressive peoples of the world.

Since his death, Czechoslovakia twice has been offered as a political oblation to the forces of dictatorship. In a sense she has been a sort of pilot society, first to experience aggression and thereby to warn the world. Czechoslovakia, after Munich, became the example of the hollowness of Hitler's promises, the brutality of his

regime and the aggressive nature of his designs. His oppression of this country broke the Hitler spell and caused the forces of resistance and retribution to awaken.

Then, with a confidence that we now know was sadly misplaced, the Western Allies withheld their victorious armies to let the Red armies "liberate" Czechoslovakia. Then we dissolved the only forces that could restrain the "liberators". I only hope the price of bringing our sons home early will not be to send our grandsons back. At all odds, once again Czechoslovakia was left exposed on the frontier, to be penetrated by the Soviet Fifth Column and manaced by Red armies mobilized within marching distance. Once more the Czechoslovakian people exemplify to the world what it means when a free and peaceful people are taken over by the dictatorship of the international communists. No longer can anyone be misled by communist pretences. Again the afflictions of Czechoslovakia tear the mask from dictatorship and do more than any previous event to arouse forces of resistance and retribution.

Dr. Benes, Jan Masaryk and their government were caught in the dilemma which all free peoples face today. The liberties they cherished were perverted to destroy liberty. Their tolerance of a communist minority allowed it to obtain possession of a few offices. With this leverage, it was able to threaten bloodshed unless control of the armies, the police and all forces of government were not also given over to it. Benes was confronted with a choice of resorting to bloodshed and suppression to put down threatened revolt, or of surrender. Those are terrible alternatives to put to scrupulous and peace-loving men.

The fate of Czechoslovakia teaches us that the communist movement is a counter-revolution to the Masaryk revolution, which was

in reality an extension of the American revolution. It would undo all that both Declarations of Independence stood for, and would turn back to a political absolutism compared to which the tyrannies of George III and Franz Josef were but feeble and halfhearted.

While we meet in freedom tonight, in Czechoslovakia any who would confess fellowship with us are being hunted and "liquidated." Like the Nazis before them, the Communists hope to extinguish the very knowledge and love of liberty by exterminating the intellectuals and leaving the subjugated masses leaderless. It is a dark picture. All who have friends, acquaintances or relatives within that shadow will be excused if they despair.

But this hour is not more hopeless than those in which Masaryk began his struggle for the freedom of his people. The power of Czechoslovakia's tyrants today is certainly no more invulnerable than the power of the Austro-Hungarian Hapsburgs then appeared to be. That conqueror was entrenched by generations of rule and was allied by blood relationship or policy to many other powerful governments. The Hapsburgs, too, cultivated the arts of terrorism, though methods were less scientific than today. But Masaryk was neither intimidated by the materialism of the Hapsburgs nor deceived by that of Marx. He put his faith in moral, spiritual and intellectual forces that dictators cannot vanquish. That is the faith that made both Czechoslovakia and America free. That is what each finds noble and inspiring in the national heroes of both countries. But one course will be considered as worthy of this occasion by men who know what liberty is and what it is worth. That is to rededicate ourselves to the daring faith of Thomas Garrigue Masaryk.