CZECHOSLOVAKIA ENSLAVED:

The Story of the Communist Coup d'État

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by

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TO
MY WIFE

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INTRODUCTION

FROM HITLER TO STALIN

TWICE IN TEN years Czechoslovakia has been the victim of a great neighbouring Power: in 1938 she succumbed to Nazi imperialism, in 1948 to Soviet imperialism. To justify their aggression, the Germans posed as defenders of the German minority, the Soviets as defenders of the Communist minority. In both cases the aggressor represented the Czechoslovak democracy as an instrument of Western imperialism, designated in 1938 as "demoplutocracy" and ten years later as "international reaction". In both cases the Czechoslovak democracy was left to defend itself alone against an enemy infinitely more powerful than itself.

The catastrophe which befell our country in 1948 was still more tragic than our defeat in 1938. Ten years ago Czechoslovakia fell under the sword of the hereditary enemy who had threatened her throughout the centuries. In 1948 she was subjected by Soviet Russia, her ally, from whom she had expected aid and protection against the German danger.

Czechoslovakia is not the only country which the Soviets have forced under their yoke; all the other States of Central Europe share her fate. But Czechoslovakia is the only one of these nations which has never had a serious conflict with Russia. In Poland, in Hungary, in Roumania, for different reasons, anti-Russian tendencies have always prevailed. Even in Bulgaria and Yugoslavia—countries whose populations are comparatively pro-Russian—political tendencies have at certain times been hostile to Moscow. But the Czechs and the Slovaks, for their part, have always maintained a friendly attitude towards their great neighbour. In spite of the ideological differences which opposed the democratic Czechoslovaks to the Czarist regime and, later, to the Soviet regime, the whole nation realized that for geographical as well as for ethnical reasons, Russia ought to be one of its natural defenders against German expansionism. This fact is all the more remarkable because the Czechs and the Slovaks, although they belong to the Slavic race, are by temperament and culture closer to the Western world than to the world of Russia. Planted at the cross-roads of civilizations, this

country has always been simultaneously Francophile, Anglophile, Americanophile, Russophile and violently Germanophobe. Since the Middle Ages it has always tried to find allies in the west as well as in the east of Europe.

It was therefore with unanimous joy that the population hailed the first treaty of alliance concluded between the Czechoslovak Republic and Soviet Russia in 1935, at the same time as the Franco-Russian treaty. It was with the same unanimity that it approved the new treaty of alliance concluded during the war, in 1943, between our Government in exile in London and the U.S.S.R. In one case, as in the other, we put our trust in the Government of Moscow, convinced that in return for our sincere and loyal friendship it would respect our national independence, in conformity with the formal engagements set down in the two treaties, in conformity, above all, with the special article on Russian non-interference in our internal affairs.

This trust was violated; in February 1948 the Kremlin intervened against the Czechoslovak democracy because it desired to have in Prague a totalitarian Communist government obedient to its orders. The fate of Czechoslovakia demonstrates that the Soviets will not be satisfied by co-operation among allies. What they ask of their partners is not co-operation, but absolute submission.

In the other countries of Central Europe the Soviets maintain that in establishing Communist regimes obedient to themselves they are simply taking precautions against a possible return of anti-Russian Fascist governments. In Prague they have not even this excuse. In the case of Czechoslovakia they subjugated a country in which all social classes evinced friendly feelings towards Russia and in which there was no reactionary minority hostile to social progress.

The communization of Czechoslovakia constitutes an act of indirect aggression which is only a stage on the road which is intended to lead to the ultimate Sovietization of Europe.

That is why the Communist *coup d'état* of February 1948 is a political event of international significance.

Two vital reasons justify the interest aroused by the Czechoslovak developments in political circles throughout the whole world. One belongs to the domain of foreign policy, the other to that of internal policy.

The test of Munich has demonstrated the strategic importance of this little country, situated in the centre of Europe, which,

through Bohemia, belongs to the western sphere of the Old Continent and, through Slovakia, to the eastern sphere. So long as land armies have not become completely useless as a result of the perfecting of mechanical weapons even more powerful than present-day bombing squadrons and the atomic bomb, the Great Powers cannot disinterest themselves in this country, which is at once the springboard towards the east and towards the west. When in 1938 Germany occupied Czechoslovakia, she opened the way towards the valley of the Danube and the Balkans and, because of this fact, she was able to proceed to the invasion of western Europe and Russia.

Today the danger which threatens Europe is still greater; the Soviets, masters of Czechoslovakia and of all Central Europe, have their hands free to move towards western Europe, and find themselves no more than 400 kilometres from the French frontier.

The strategic importance of Czechoslovakia is paralleled by a considerable economic potential. Before the war this small State was one of the six most highly industrialized countries in Europe, following immediately after Germany, England, France, Italy and Belgium in volume of production. Today the output of its heavy industries still exceeds the combined production of all the countries between the Baltic and the Ægean, including Poland. As a result of the invention of the atomic bomb, the deposits of pitchblende near Jachymov have taken on an importance they did not possess before the war.

If Czechoslovakia, because of its strategic position, is of interest to other countries from the point of view of their security from attack from without, the events which occurred there in 1948 are worth attention from the point of view of their security from attack from within; for, better than any other, the example of Czechoslovakia reveals the complicated and subtle methods to which the Communists have recourse to destroy a democracy. If the principles and the general directives worked out by the Cominform for the communization of the world are the same for all countries, their application is adapted to the political and social conditions of each of them. In Czechoslovakia the Communists had to deal with a country where the democratic tradition was deeply rooted. Knowing that they would come up against strong resistance on the part of a people whose regime had never been either Fascist or that of a police State, they concealed their ultimate aim with more care than elsewhere, representing Communism as a radical form of democracy.

It was in this fashion that they succeeded in deceiving many persons of good faith, who discovered the true nature of the new regime only when it had established itself securely in power, which is to say only when they had been deprived of any means of altering it. It is for this reason that I have thought it not without value to reveal in detail the events which preceded the February 1948 *coup d'état.* I was intimately involved in those events, and my account will contribute—or at least I hope it will—towards making the tactics followed by the Communists better understood in the other democracies whose foundations they are seeking to undermine.

Our pro-Russian attitude has often been regarded as the principal cause of the communization of Czechoslovakia. This opinion is not borne out by even a sketchy analysis of our policy towards Russia.

It was only our geographical situation or our traditional friendship for Russia which led us to see in Russia a defender against the German danger. After the Second World War this attitude was imposed upon us by still other reasons.

The U.S.S.R., emerging from the war victorious and stronger than ever, had pushed her frontiers westwards and penetrated deeply into Europe. For the first time in her history, Czechoslovakia had a common frontier with her. Russia dominated all Central and Balkanic Europe. How far the Anglo-Saxon Powers at the Teheran and Yalta conferences recognized that this part of Europe belonged to the Russian sphere of influence is unknown. However that may be, from the time of those conferences the Soviets have considered themselves the masters of this region of Europe and, at least during the first months following the armistice, this assumption of Moscow never evoked any dispute or protest on the part of the Western Powers.

In these circumstances, where could an unfriendly policy towards Russia have led us? Could we risk conflicts with our all-powerful neighbour when we could not count on support from the Western Powers?

It is enough to recall what happened in the other countries of Central Europe in which certain parties attempted to oppose Russia. These countries were communized long before us.

If the democrats of our country had allowed themselves to be drawn into an anti-Soviet policy they would not have prevented, but would have hastened, the communization of Czecho-

slovakia. Moreover, uld never have been approved by the p n the people did turn against Russia, it after t. d seen for themselves that Moscow, in spite of the friendship of which we had given her so many proofs, had decided to put an end to our independence.

It was therefore not because of our policy of friendship towards Moscow, but in spite of this policy, that we succumbed to the U.S.S.R. In the last resort it was two factors which we could not control which decided the fate of our country: the increasing tension between the U.S.S.R. and the Western Powers, and the dynamism of Soviet imperialism.

It was obvious that if the world became divided into two blocs, little Czechoslovakia, neighbour of immense Russia, could not escape her domination and would have to be integrated into her defensive dispositions. It is no less certain that if the Western Powers and the U.S.S.R. had been able to arrive at an understanding, or at least at a *modus vivendi*, the Czechoslovak democracy would have been able to hope that it might avoid the communization of the country on the condition of following a policy which would not oppose Russia.

We made no mistake in the line to be followed; it was the only one possible. But we did under-estimate the dynamism of Russian imperialism and we were mistaken about its true nature. Even before the war, Stalin, returning to the tradition of Czarist Russia, seemed anxious above all to defend the interests of Greater Russia in the world and to relegate to the second place the revolutionary aims of Bolshevism. If Russian policy had continued along those lines we should have witnessed normal competition among the Great Powers—that is to say that, without ruling out the possibility of armed conflicts, they would rather have sought to defend their national interests by the operations of a balance of power. We believed that the war, which had struck so heavily at the Soviet territory, would accentuate this evolution of Russian policy and would lead the Soviets to co-operation with other nations, all the more so since it had proved possible to check German expansionism only by a coalition of all the threatened countries.

In reality, victory not only gave new impetus to Russian imperialism, but it also increased to an equal extent the virulence of Communist dynamism. It is by combining nationalist and revolutionary expansionisms that Soviet imperialism

threatens the world [illegible] what they succeeded [illegible] erialism threatened it earlier. In spite of the [illegible] ho discovered the ti that exist between Nazi and Communist i [illegible] it h oviet imper[illegible]ism, quite as much as Nazi imperialism, re[illegible]ents a mortal danger to the civilized world as a whole, by reason of the fact that it is accompanied by a totalitarian doctrine. Now, internal totalitarianism leads inevitably to external totalitarianism. In other words, when a State arrives at the point where it no longer respects individuality or human dignity at home, it seeks, by a sort of obsession of power, to impose its domination on other nations which it respects no more than it does its own subjects.

The Soviets represent the conquests of their expansionist imperialism as so many defensive measures against the capitalistic imperialism of the West. Did not Hitler also, before he embarked on a war for the conquest of the globe, maintain that he was defending a Germany threatened by the whole world?

Czechoslovakia is the victim of a new great world conflict; she is the victim of that Soviet imperialism which is today the principal cause of the anxiety prevalent throughout the world and of the fear which possesses it.

The fate of Czechoslovakia after the Second World War is the story of a futile attempt to arrive at good relations with the Soviets, of the vain struggle of a little democracy against the active force of totalitarian Communism, of an abuse of trust and of a betrayed friendship. It is also, and above all, a story which can and should serve as a warning to all the democracies, large and small, which are carrying on the fight for freedom against the new totalitarian drive.

BOOK ONE

WEATHERING THE GREAT STORM

CHAPTER I

TWO PROTECTORATES IN TEN YEARS

CZECHOSLOVAKIA AFTER THE First World War was one of the most flourishing democracies in Europe. She enjoyed a remarkably well-balanced economic structure because of the fact that a highly developed industry had arisen to ally itself to a well-organized agricultural system. There were no very marked differences between the classes of society, so that the post-war evolution of the country was able to develop without the least trouble. Agrarian reform had considerably reinforced the class of small peasants, who represented a stable element, thanks to whom the productivity of the soil was increased. Progressive social legislation gave the lower-paid workers and Civil Servants a certain degree of security. Highly skilled craftsmen and a great number of small industries contributed in large measure to the prosperity of the country. Its financial position was sound. Favoured by its geographical situation, in the heart of Europe, Prague, open to all influences and to the flow of ideas of every kind, became a more and more lively intellectual and artistic centre.

The population, hard-working, simple and orderly, was imbued with a profoundly democratic spirit. For fifteen years this young republic had the good fortune to be directed by a statesman of great wisdom and high morality, T. G. Masaryk, who marked it with the brand of his personality and inspired it to rise to unanticipated heights. In the person of Eduard Benes, Masaryk found an eminent collaborator, a diplomat without a peer, who knew how to orient Czechoslovak foreign policy on a world-wide plane and who, by his prodigious activity, assured for his country an exceptional international position.

Everything therefore supported the belief that Czechoslovakia, by far the most powerful of all the Danubian countries, both from the economic and military points of view, might

readily become the [illegible] of a political system tending to bring together and to organize [illegible] the small countries of Central Europe.

This development, which justified the most optimistic hopes, was interrupted by the great international crisis provoked by the coming to power of Hitler in Germany.

Pan-Germanism, reborn, discovered where to find the chink in our armour. The stability and security of our country were threatened by national minorities of numerical importance—3,000,000 Germans and 600,000 Hungarians living in the same State as 10,000,000 Czechoslovaks. President Masaryk made an attempt to solve this delicate problem by a liberal policy which scrupulously respected the rights of minorities as proclaimed by the League of Nations. When a new wave of pan-Germanism swept over Europe, in its most virulent form—that of Nazism—that experiment ended in failure. The "Sudeten Germans", who since 1848 had never ceased to be openly pan-Germanic, and several of whose political leaders as early as 1921–23 had joined the Hitlerite movement, responded with enthusiasm to the Nazi slogan calling for the union of all Germans in a single Reich. It was with joy, to say the least, that they constituted the fifth column of Hitler in Czechoslovakia. It was thanks to them that Hitler was able to deceive international opinion and to achieve the Munich agreement. In the name of "the rights of peoples to self-determination", 3,000,000 Germans were re-attached to the Reich. Their "liberation" from the "Czechoslovak yoke" was paid for by the subjection of 10,000,000 Czechoslovaks. The new frontiers were established much more in accord with the strategic needs of the German General Staff than with the principle of nationalities; the economic unity of the country was shattered and the communications network completely disorganized, to such an extent that the State was no longer capable of enduring. Other portions of its territory were annexed by Poland and Hungary. In a single day the Czechoslovak State, thus mutilated, became nothing other than the vassal of Germany; less than six months later it disappeared from the map of Europe: Bohemia and Moravia became "protectorates" incorporated into the Reich; Slovakia was transformed into an artificial "independent State" completely subjected to German domination.

The Munich agreement, which marked the end of independent Czechoslovakia, resulted, as we know only too well

today, in consequences which were catastrophic for all Europe. There was no longer anything to bar the way of Germany; she was able thereafter to undertake the domination of the entire valley of the Danube and the Balkans, and to assure herself possession of the strategic positions which would be essential in any offensive directed either against Russia or the Western Powers.

If the war had broken out in 1938 the Soviet Union would have taken her place at the side of the Western Powers, so that Germany, from the beginning of hostilities, would have been obliged to fight on two fronts. Taking into account, in addition, the relative strength of the Czechoslovak army and of the armies of the other countries of Central Europe which would have joined the great European coalition, one arrives at the conclusion that Germany would perhaps have climbed down, and that the war, if it had broken out nevertheless at that moment, would have been of brief duration.

The situation had changed completely when, a year later, Germany launched the war in conditions much more favourable to her, after having enormously strengthened her military resources.

For my part, I was of the opinion that we should have rejected the ultimatum of the four Great Powers, even if Hitler should carry out his threats by attacking our country. Several of my friends shared my views. Convinced that we should be able to hold out against a German attack for several weeks alone, I hoped that public opinion in France and Great Britain would revolt against the policy of appeasement and compel the Governments of Paris and London to come to the aid of our small country. On a mission to Paris during the last days of September I saw Paul Reynaud make desperate efforts to persuade France to resist Hitler; and Georges Mandel, who defended the same point of view with the same energy as Reynaud, assured me that if we were attacked by Hitler, France and Great Britain could not abandon us. Winston Churchill and some of my English friends sent me a message to the same effect. Whether these hopes would have been realized will never be known; none the less I continue, today as then, to think that it is always better to lose a battle than to capitulate.

For the Czechoslovak people the ultimatum of Munich was the beginning of a slavery which was to last seven years, and which was marked by all the horrors of the German occupa-

tion. The Czechoslovak nation considers this epoch as the greatest catastrophe which has ever befallen it during a history which has, nevertheless, been sufficiently violent.

Communist propaganda thereafter showed itself admirably able to turn the Munich agreement to its advantage. "Munich must not be repeated": this slogan was reiterated unceasingly in the newspapers of the extreme Left, and today they use it more than ever in their battle against the Czechoslovak democrats, whom they accuse of having prepared a new Munich against the popular democracy "by allying themselves with foreign reaction".

Now, it is precisely the Communist policy which in 1948 brought a new "Munich" upon us. The Sudeten Germans claimed "only" the right of self-determination, the Communists demanded "only" the maintenance of popular democracy, thus camouflaging their real aims. Both indifferently acted against the interests of their own country in conformity with the desires and orders of a foreign Power of which they were the instruments. An independent Czechoslovak democracy hindered Stalin for the same reasons that it hindered Hitler; totalitarian Communism had the same interest as totalitarian Nazism in destroying the progressive democracy of the Czechoslovak Republic. If Hitler, by the conquest of Czechoslovakia, had opened up the way towards all Central Europe, Stalin, treading upon the debris Hitler had left behind him, used and consolidated his hold over this part of Europe.

After the Communist *coup d'état* of February 1948 there still exists in Prague a Czechoslovak Government recognized by the other Powers, but its "sovereignty" is no less illusory than was that of the Czechoslovak Government which was in power during the six months which preceded the occupation of the country by the Germans in March 1939. In one case, as in the other, it is not in Prague that the seat of genuine authority can be found; then it was in Berlin, today it is in Moscow. At the present time, as was the case ten years ago, the entire economic resources of the country are at the disposition of a foreign Power which is exploiting them above all else for strategic ends. The people who revolt against this foreign domination are subjected to the same regime of oppression and terror as was the case after the Munich agreement.

The analogy between the Nazi protectorate and the Soviet protectorate is striking. Perhaps the present regime offers even

greater dangers than did the German regime. While the Nazis were supported by the Sudeten Germans and a handful of Czech and Slovak traitors, the Soviets for their part have confided the management of affairs to a numerically important fraction of the Czech and Slovak population on which they are able to count. Thus they maintain a deliberate confusion which prevents many persons from comprehending the real situation.

Whether Czechoslovakia remains subject to a totalitarian regime administered by Czechoslovak Communists following the orders of Moscow, or whether she is incorporated into the U.S.S.R. under the form of an "autonomous republic", hardly alters the essence of the matter. The final decision on this point will depend solely on the tactics the Soviets choose to adopt.

Certain persons still refuse to recognize this fact. After Munich exactly the same thing happened; it was obvious that Czechoslovakia had already lost her independence, but there were still persons who refused to admit this. Among my closest friends were to be found some who did not agree with my decision—which I announced to them on September 30, 1938—to leave the country, since all was ended and it was necessary to prepare for the struggle for liberation.

Once more, after the *coup d'état* of February 1948, many persons cannot believe that Czechoslovakia has again ceased to be an independent country and that it is necessary to resume the struggle for her liberation.

The common people, very often, recognize the significance of events better than do the statesmen and intellectuals. The intervention of Stalin against our participation in the Marshall Plan in July 1947 was already regarded as a new "Munich" by the man in the street. Walking in the streets of Prague one day in March 1948, after the *coup d'état*, I met a workman whom I knew, who said to me: "Here we are once more under the regime of a protectorate, but this one will be worse than the first."

That was the voice of common sense.

CHAPTER II

AFTER MUNICH: THE RESTORATION

NOTHING IS MORE difficult than to overthrow a totalitarian regime once it has been installed in a country, to erase the traces of a "protectorate" and to create all the conditions indispensable to the restoration of an independent State. While the internal resistance, upon which fell the hardest and most glorious task, harassed the enemy and fed the flame of combat at the price of heroic efforts and indescribable sacrifices, we who had been able to reach foreign territory had the duty of acting as spokesmen for the gagged nation and of defending the interests of a free Czechoslovakia.

The catastrophe of Munich had crushed the nation. From free citizens, we had become slaves. The Czechoslovak State had disappeared from the map of Europe. All seemed lost. From the international point of view, only the fact that the Great Powers had not recognized the occupation of the country gave us a ray of hope.

Our task consisted in obliterating all the disastrous consequences of the Munich agreement and, in addition, in creating a solid basis for a liberated Czechoslovakia: it was indeed necessary that it should not be possible for this catastrophe to be repeated.

It was in these extremely difficult conditions that we prepared the formation of a new political organism destined to represent the nation throughout the world. Eduard Benes, thanks to the authority which he enjoyed both in his own country and in international circles, was recognized by all as the head of the movement. On October 22, 1938, he left Prague for London, where he was joined by Jan Masaryk, who had resigned from his post of Ambassador to the British Government on the very day of the Munich agreement. I myself left on October 10, first for France, and later for England; I was the first political *émigré* from Czechoslovakia. The news of the Munich agreement had surprised me three days after my arrival in Paris, where Benes had sent me on a political mission. On the following day I boarded the plane for Prague, to which I had been urgently recalled. But I was firmly resolved to stay there only as

long as would be necessary to reach understandings with my political friends, and to leave immediately for exile; I knew that it would be impossible for me to work for the liberation of Czechoslovakia from within the country. After the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Germans, I continued my political activity in Paris until June 1940, and then joined President Benes in London. After the occupation of the country by the Germans in March 1939, many soldiers, officers and statesmen left for abroad, and little by little the *émigrés* formed groups in Paris and London.

The first period was extremely difficult. After the declaration of war, the French and British Governments, who still included several "Munichites" in their councils, refused to hear any talk of a provisional Czechoslovak Government. It was with great difficulty that we were able to obtain the recognition of a National Committee which was accorded the right of organizing and directing the Czechoslovak military units which had been formed meanwhile in France and Great Britain. From the international point of view, we were still in such a bad position that M. Edouard Daladier, Premier of France, refused to receive President Benes when he passed through Paris in October 1938.

The activities of the Czechoslovak *émigrés* encountered obstacles of every description after the conclusion of the German-Soviet pact in August 1939; the Czechoslovak Communists, who before that date had taken part in the struggle against the occupying Germans, sought thereafter to sabotage resistance within the country, and launched a campaign against President Benes and his aides under the pretext that we were "in the pay of Franco-British imperialism". The Soviet Government, which up to that time had behaved towards us in a friendly manner, asked M. Zdenek Fierlinger to resign from his post as Ambassador to Moscow at the end of the year 1939 and formally recognized the "independent Slovak State" of Msgr. Tiso.

Without allowing ourselves to be discouraged by these obstacles, we sought by every means to improve our international position in order to render our struggle more effective.

We gained our first big success when, in July 1940, Great Britain, left to face Germany alone after the surrender of Pétain, recognized the enlarged National Committee as the provisional government of Czechoslovakia. It was only a year

later that our Government ceased to be considered as provisional, and that Benes, as President of the Republic, was recognized as chief of the Czechoslovak State.

At the same time we resumed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Government, which had been at war with Germany for several weeks. The Czechoslovak Communists began to cooperate with us again from this moment, the "imperialist" war having been metamorphosed in their eyes into a "patriotic war".

After three years of continuous effort and strenuous work, we had achieved this result—that Czechoslovakia, whose extinction had been desired by Hitler, was recognized by the other free countries as an existing State whose territory was occupied by the enemy. As a result of this fact Czechoslovakia became a fully-fledged member of the United Nations, which qualified her to take part in all international negotiations, and in particular in the peace conferences at which questions affecting her primarily would be debated.

Once the Czechoslovak State had been recognized, the next question was to guarantee the frontiers of 1937 to our country by obtaining the abrogation of the Munich agreement by France and Great Britain. After long negotiations through the Foreign Office, the British Government in August 1942 declared the Munich agreement null and void. In September 1942 a similar declaration was published by the French National Committee of Liberation, which we considered as already a *de facto* government; going farther than the British Cabinet, the French National Committee expressly recognized the frontiers of Czechoslovakia as they had been traced before the Munich agreement. The Soviet Government, for its part, informed us that in recognizing our government in exile, it recognized *ipso facto* our former frontiers. As for the Government of the United States, there was no reason for asking it for a declaration of this sort, since America had never taken official cognisance of the Munich agreement.

We judged nevertheless that though the Munich agreement had been annulled, our 1937 frontiers were still insufficiently guaranteed. We feared that the presence in our country of a numerically important German minority would cause new difficulties to arise when the question of our boundaries was put before the peace conference. Therefore we made an effort to convince our allies of the necessity of transporting the Sudeten

Germans to the German Reich. We pointed out, among other things, that this radical measure had become necessary; the reign of terror which the Germans had imposed upon our country through the intermediacy of the German minority was indeed such that Czechs and Germans would no longer be able to live together in the same State.

Our efforts were crowned with success: in 1942 the British Government informed us that it had no objection in principle to the deportation of the Sudeten Germans; the French National Committee, for its part, also pronounced itself in favour of this solution. On the occasion of the visit of Benes to the United States in May 1943, President Roosevelt declared himself in agreement, in his turn, and immediately afterwards M. Bogomolov, Soviet Ambassador to our Government, informed me that the Soviet Government had accepted our proposal.

The Great Powers kept the promise they had given us during the war: at the Potsdam Conference they approved the transfer of the Sudeten Germans, which was carried out in 1946.

As far as our frontiers with our other neighbours were concerned, we had always maintained, as consistently against the Poles of London as against those of Lublin, that we could not recognize the annexation of the Teschen region carried out by Colonel Beck with the approval of Hitler immediately after the conclusion of the Munich pact. We were sure that on this point the Great Powers would not support the Poles.

As far as Austria and Hungary were concerned, we had no territorial claims. Except for the region of Kladsko and certain minor adjustments of the frontiers, we did not want to annex any German territory, in order not to be dependent on Moscow to the same extent as Poland, who was unable to defend her frontier on the Oder and the Neisse except with the help of the Soviet army.

On the other hand, we were prepared to cede to Russia, in case she should become our immediate neighbour, Subcarpathian Russia, which possessed an autonomous status guaranteed by the League of Nations, and had never been an integral part of Czechoslovakia to the same extent as the border regions of Bohemia and Moravia peopled by the Sudeten Germans. We knew that by keeping this distant province we should risk constant friction and even grave conflicts with the Soviet Ukrainians, who were inspired by an extreme nationalism. But we were anxious that this question should not be

settled finally until after the war, after our frontiers with Germany had been fixed and our parliament was in a position to ratify such a cession. However, as soon as Subcarpathian Russia was occupied by the Red Army, it was Sovietized, contrary to the Soviet-Czechoslovak agreement on the administration of liberated territories, and on the pretext that this was "the will of the Subcarpathian people". The treaty on the incorporation of Subcarpathian Russia into the Soviet Ukraine, concluded on June 29, 1945, at Moscow, and approved thereafter by the National Assembly, simply confirmed a *fait accompli.*

It was thus, in short, that, even before the end of the war, we had the certitude that Czechoslovakia would be restored within her former frontiers. From this point of view there no longer remained any trace of Munich.

But, in addition, we were bent on reinforcing our security and our national independence by renewing and developing our system of alliances in the east and the west of Europe.

From the very first years of the war we endeavoured to establish a close co-operation between Poland and Czechoslovakia, which, according to a project published in November 1940, was to take the form of a confederation between our two States. In spite of the friendly relations which we maintained with General Sikorsky, with M. Mikolajczyk, Ambassador Raczynski and other Polish statesmen, the project failed, for one reason because it was premature, for another because we were unable to agree on the Teschen question; in addition, our relations with Soviet Russia were not the same. A Polish–Czechoslovak confederation presupposed a more or less parallel foreign policy on the part of both countries. But the Poles maintained a certain reserve towards the U.S.S.R., a certain hostility even while the Czechoslovaks were on good terms with the Soviets and saw in that Power their natural ally against the German danger.

In 1935 we had concluded a treaty of alliance with the U.S.S.R., a treaty which, legally, was still in effect, just as our treaty of alliance with France remained valid in spite of Munich; it is true that various clauses of this document had been outdated by events.

When, in the summer of 1942, Molotov concluded a treaty of alliance with Great Britain and, immediately afterwards, an accord with the United States, we judged the time had come to

renew and complete our alliance with Soviet Russia by a new treaty. We desired by this means to assure ourselves of the support of a great Power against Germany at the peace conference. We also counted on having one more guarantee of our national independence by securing a formal engagement from the Soviets not to interfere in our internal affairs. This point seemed all the more important since Russia, if she emerged from the war victorious, would almost certainly be our immediate neighbour. That is the reason why we began to negotiate a treaty of alliance with the Soviet Government at the beginning of the year 1943. We proposed at the same time that a similar treaty be concluded between Russia and Poland, or, at the very least, that a special protocol should be published declaring that Poland could adhere to this treaty of alliance; the latter would then take the form of a tripartite pact. A Soviet–Polish–Czechoslovak bloc, should, it seemed, constitute a strong enough barrier to bar the way to the *Drang nach Osten* of Pan-German imperialism.

We informed our Western allies of this project. President Roosevelt approved it. The British Government did not oppose it in principle, but it demanded that the conclusion of the treaty should be postponed until a later date, preferably after the signature of an armistice with Germany and after the settlement of the disputed questions which opposed Russia to Poland.

Thereupon we explained to the British Cabinet that we were intent on signing this treaty as soon as possible—in fact while the German armies were still occupying a large part of Soviet territory: so long as the U.S.S.R. had not yet gained the victory, we would be able to obtain the most favourable conditions; if we delayed the matter we risked seeing the Soviets oppose us by the formation of a Communist committee in Moscow on the model of the Polish Committee of Lublin. By this act our exiles would be divided; and our countrymen who had remained under the German heel would never accept a refusal to conclude the treaty of alliance against Germany which Russia was offering us.

In the end, at the conference of the three Foreign Ministers in Moscow, in October 1943, Mr. Eden and Mr. Cordell Hull approved the text and objectives of the Soviet–Czechoslovak treaty, and it was signed on December 12, 1943, on the occasion of President Benes' visit to Moscow.

We considered this treaty, which we had concluded first of all from concern for our national independence, as a great success. We were determined that it should in no way trouble the excellent relations which we maintained with our Western allies. In the summer of 1944, for that matter, we were to sign with France a declaration by which the Franco-Czechoslovak treaties of alliance already in force would be completed.

It was in this manner that we prevented the Czechoslovak exiles from being split into two camps, as was the case for the Poles and the Yugoslavs.

The policy which we carried on during the war eliminated all the consequences of the Munich agreement. The results obtained exceeded our highest hopes: not only were our frontiers to be guaranteed as they had been before the notorious pact, but we had prepared the deportation of the Sudeten Germans, thanks to which Czechoslovakia would become a more homogeneous state, so that the security and strength of the country would be increased. Our renewed alliance with Soviet Russia sheltered us from a new wave of German expansionism; from another angle, the engagement which the Soviets had taken to respect our independence was for us of capital importance. Our relations with Great Britain and the United States were friendlier than ever; with France, finally, we were prepared to renew our treaty of alliance, which we counted on signing immediately after the war.

Comparing the positions won during the war with the desperate situation in which we found ourselves after Munich, we had every right to be satisfied with what we had accomplished and to look to the future with confidence.

The political successes of President Benes and the Czechoslovak Government could not have been achieved without the desperate resistance of a country which demonstrated before the eyes of the world the unshakable will of its people to reconquer their liberty.

Unfortunately these results, obtained at the price of such great efforts, were to be put in question again even before the end of the war.

CHAPTER III

RETURN TO THE NATIONAL TERRITORY: FIRST DISAGREEMENTS

THE WORK WHICH we had accomplished during the war in London was seriously threatened by a plan elaborated at the same period in Moscow.

Two conceptions confronted one another, one defended by the refugees in London, the other by those in Moscow. The first was pre-occupied primarily with guaranteeing our national independence, leaving to the liberated country the charge of determining its political and economic status; the second sought before all else to impose upon the nation a Communist regime which would place Czechoslovakia under the tutelage of the Soviet Union. The whole post-war period up to February 1948 was marked by the struggle between these two conceptions.

Nearly all the leaders of the Communist Party—Klement Gottwald, Rudolf Slansky, Sverma, Vaclav Kopecky and others—had spent the war years in Moscow; of the Communists who had taken refuge in England, Vaclav Nosek, who was to become Minister of the Interior, was the most important.

From the day when Russia was drawn into the war, the Czechoslovak Communists commenced to collaborate with our government in exile. Several Communists were named to the Czechoslovak National Council, which in some respects took the place of a parliament, but they rejected the offer of M. Benes when, in Moscow in December 1943, he invited them to join the Cabinet. While co-operating with us in a loyal manner, generally speaking, they intended to keep their hands free. But when the Czechoslovak refugees in London who were grouped about M. Benes sought before all else to create in international circles the political conditions which would be favourable to the liberation and political and economic reconstruction of the country, the Politburo at Moscow was completing a plot destined to permit the Communists to seize power immediately after the liberation.

The projects which we had worked out in London concerning the internal administration of the country were nothing more than a first draft. It was fully recognized that they were only

suggestions to be submitted to the first government of the liberated nation, in order to help it to solve its most urgent problems. Thus M. Giraj Slavik, Minister of the Interior, had proposed an act relating to a new administrative organization. Our Minister of National Defence, General Serjoj Ingr, had prepared a plan for the reorganization of the army. M. Ladislav Feierabend, Minister of Finance, who, even before the end of the war, had had banknotes printed in England, had worked out a plan for the reform and stabilization of the currency. M. Jaroslav Stransky, Minister of Justice, had submitted to us an act on the punishment of traitors and collaborationists, striking first of all at the Sudeten Germans. I myself, while I busied myself particularly with foreign affairs, had proposed a detailed plan for the transfer of the Germans. The Ministers of Reconstruction and Provisioning, Messrs. Frantisek Nemec and Vaclav Majer, who, in collaboration with Jan Masaryk and myself, were occupied with assuring the help of U.N.R.R.A. for our country, had elaborated a joint programme for the economic recovery of the nation.

According to our conception, immediately after the liberation of the country a first government ought to be formed from representatives of the internal and external resistance. Having re-established order, it would organize, not later than six months after the end of hostilities, elections for a parliament. In short, we wanted to see a democratic regime re-established as quickly as possible.

From the economic and social points of view, all the members of the Cabinet of London, without distinction of party, were in favour of the nationalization of the mines and heavy industry, of the completion of agrarian reform and of the institution of a more highly developed system of social insurance. But we took our stand on a strictly democratic point of view, and we held that only regularly elected representatives in parliament were qualified to take decisions on important matters.

The Communists had a very different conception of the way in which Czechoslovakia should be reborn to political life; they counted on profiting by the confusion of the first weeks to seize all the levers of command before the will of the people could be demonstrated in free elections. Their calculations were based largely on an element which necessarily gave greater weight to their decisions: the presence in the country of the Red Army.

It was not until March 1945 that the Communists began to show their hand. Analysing their tactical movements of that period from the vantage point of today's knowledge, it becomes clear that from that moment they knew exactly by what means and in what circumstances they would come to power. In March 1945, then, President Benes and most of the members of the Cabinet of London visited the Soviet capital. The eastern provinces of Czechoslovakia had just been liberated, the first of the country to be freed, and it was necessary to proceed to form a new government which would sit in the national territory and in which representatives of the Slovak resistance movements would naturally participate.

I had not accompanied Benes and my colleagues, but had remained in England to direct our political and administrative services, whose headquarters were still in London, and to maintain contacts with our Western allies.

The Communists found themselves in an advantageous situation owing to the fact that the new Government was to be formed in Moscow and that it was also in Moscow that an understanding on the new ministerial platform was expected to be reached. Strengthened by Soviet support, they showed themselves aggressive and threatening. Promising a large measure of autonomy to the "Slovak nation", they neutralized the Slovak statesmen of the non-Communist parties. The Social Democrats, with the exception of Vaclav Majer, who was completely isolated, aligned themselves entirely on the Communist side. Msgr. Sramek, who was ill, did not take part in the negotiations. Jaroslav Stransky, Minister of Justice, with Prokop Drtina, who was later to replace him in that post, were alone in conducting an unequal fight against the Communists. They deserve all the more credit for having secured the acceptance of certain proposals conceived in a democratic spirit.

The Communist plan was admirably prepared and had been carefully worked out in its most minute details. The principal instruments of the Muscovite clan were "national committees" composed of "representatives of the people" which were to replace the administrations of the communities, departments and provinces. It was through their intermediacy that the Government was to exercise the executive power.

Slovakia was to enjoy a large degree of autonomy and was endowed with a parliament known as the "Slovak National Council" and by a "Council of Commissars", which was vir-

tually a Slovak Cabinet. The Communists hoped to win over the majority in Slovakia by flattering local nationalism in this fashion; by maintaining in another form the institutions created by the "State" of Tiso, a communized Slovakia in their hands would be a weapon with which they would be able to threaten the Czechs if the latter were not disposed to accept domination by the extreme Left.

Several parties of the Right, particularly the Czech Agrarians and the Slovak Catholic Populists, accused of having Fascist tendencies and of having collaborated with the Germans, were to be suppressed. The number of parties in the Czech provinces would thus be reduced to four (National Socialists, Catholic Populists, Social Democrats and Communists) and in Slovakia to two (Communists and Democrats). These parties were to form a "National Front", whose role would exceed that of a simple coalition. The "Front" was, in fact, to constitute a common organism superimposed on the different parties and charged with determining their common policy in the Cabinet and in Parliament.

There was also a question of the creation of a bloc called the "national bloc of the working classes of the cities and the country", whose objective was to prepare a merger of the three Socialist parties which composed it. In the interval before this final objective was attained the bloc would have as its mission to persuade the Social Democrats, and especially the National Socialists, to bow to the will of the Communists, and at the same time to put the Populists and the Democrats in a minority within the Cabinet.

The punishments striking at traitors, collaborationists and Fascists were to become another instrument for the projects of the Communists, thanks to which the latter would be enabled to intimidate or suppress their political adversaries.

The collectivization of the entire national economy was to be prefaced by the nationalization of industry and the banks and by a new agrarian reform. The unions, the co-operatives, the Sokols, the Boy Scouts, the gymnastic societies and various cultural institutions were to be unified—in other words, subjected to Communist control.

Finally, alliance with the U.S.S.R. and the other Slav countries was to constitute, if not the only aim, at least the principal aim of our foreign policy.

In short, in the political, economic, military and cultural

domains, Czechoslovakia must follow in the wake of the U.S.S.R.

Similar programmes, adapted to the circumstances in each one of them, had been prepared in Moscow during the war for all the countries of Central Europe which made up the Russian sphere of influence. The Communist tactics were all the more dangerous in that the final aim was carefully camouflaged behind slogans nationalistic and democratic in appearance which deceived a large proportion of popular opinion. It is true, however, that the Communists did not succeed in realizing this programme completely by democratic means, as they had dreamed; but they did manage to occupy at one stroke a most advantageous position in inducing the first post-war Government to accept their project.

The distribution of Cabinet portfolios according to their wishes was for the Communists even more important than the defining of a programme of action; the latter was not in fact realizable except on condition that a preponderant role should be accorded to them within the Government. On this point also they were able to have their way: with only slight variations, the first Cabinet formed after the war presented exactly the appearance they had desired.

In addition to the Premier-President of the Council and five vice-presidents, representing the six parties of the National Front, fifteen Ministers entrusted with portfolios and three Secretaries of State with the same rights as the other members of the Cabinet were included in the Council of Ministers. Each party had three representatives. But the Communists, who defended the autonomy of Slovakia, were represented by two parties: the Czech Communist Party and the Slovak Communist Party; thanks to this specimen of legerdemain, they occupied six seats. Moreover, and at their suggestion, portfolios were assigned to several "technicians"; and on the pretext that four of them were not Communists (Jan Masaryk, Foreign Affairs; General Ludvik Svoboda, National Defence; General Hasal, Transportation; and General Ferencik, Secretary of State for Defence), the Communists secured the acceptance, also as technicians, of two members of their party, Professor Zdenek Nejedly, who became Minister of National Education, and Vlado Clementis, who became Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The Communists thus had within the Government eight representatives, subject to their strict discipline,

while the other parties were represented by only three Ministers each.

The extreme Left being able at this time to count on the entire support of the Social Democrats and of General Ludvik Svoboda, and having in addition the possibility of influencing the votes of one or another of the other "technicians", it followed that they were never in danger of being in the minority.

The strength of the Communists resided especially in the fact that they had assured for themselves, directly or indirectly, preponderant influence in the most important ministries. The departments of the Interior, of Agriculture, of Information, of National Education and of Social Welfare were directed by members of the Communist Party. The Communists knew that they would be able to exert considerable influence on military affairs by placing at the head of the Ministry of National Defence General Ludvik Svoboda, who during the war had commanded our troops in U.S.S.R. and who was a man motivated by great goodwill, but weak and without political experience. This was all the more certain since General Bocek,* Chief of Staff, was ambitious and an opportunist. Through M. Vlado Clementis, who had been a Deputy of the Communist Party since 1935 and in 1945 was named Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Communists supervised our entire foreign policy and placed their agents in systematic fashion throughout the diplomatic services. At the Ministry of the Interior, which had for its principal task the putting into effect of the nationalization of a large part of the factories, they had a docile instrument in their hands in the person of the Minister himself, the Social Democrat, Dohus Lausman.

For Premier the Communists had chosen Zdenek Fierlinger, until then Ambassador of Czechoslovakia to the Kremlin. The personality of Fierlinger, a Social Democrat entirely devoted

* General S. Ingr, who had been Minister of National Defence in the London government and by his knowledge and remarkable capacities was clearly fitted for the post of Chief of Staff, had been kept on the sidelines since immediately after the war. The Communists had tried to make it be believed that, together with General Moravec, chief of the intelligence service of the London government, he had planned a Fascist coup d'état. It was only thanks to energetic intervention by President Benes and our party that we were able to prevent the Communists from dragging him through the mud, as had been their intention. In 1947, General Ingr, completely cleared, was named Ambassador to The Hague. After the coup d'état of February 1948, he remained abroad to collaborate with the political refugees. General Moravec also succeeded in getting out of the country.

to the Communists, was to hide from the country and from foreign nations the fact that the real head of the Government was Klement Gottwald, who, while awaiting promotion, contented himself with being one of the vice-presidents of the Council of Ministers.

We would have preferred to have Gottwald in the Premiership in order to avoid any misunderstanding and to put the responsibility for their policy upon the Communists themselves. From London I sent a telegram to this effect to President Benes and to Jaroslav Stransky, whom I wanted to support in the campaign he was conducting against the naming of Fierlinger.

Jaroslav Stransky had played an outstanding role in Czechoslovak life in the course of the years immediately following the war of 1914–18. A member of the National Socialist Party and a Deputy, he distinguished himself by the vigour with which he denounced the abuses and corruption which reigned in certain political circles. He was an orator whose talent and frankness had always compelled respect; during the last war he was Minister of Justice in the Czechoslovak Government in London. Together with Jan Masaryk and Jan Sramek, I had already opposed the sending of Fierlinger to the U.S.S.R. in 1941. Benes overruled us. But no sooner had Fierlinger reached Moscow than, with unbelievable cynicism, he betrayed the confidence which the President had shown towards him. Our ambassador, in fact, found it expedient to play his own game, completely ignoring the instructions of Benes and the Government in London. The only directives with which he complied were those of Klement Gottwald, then in Moscow, and his only aim was to please the Russian Government. In such conditions, was it astonishing to see him defending Soviet and Communist interests rather than pleading the cause of his country with the Moscow Government?

This ambitious man, who had a very high opinion of himself, but whose abilities were greatly limited, seemed likely to be a perfect instrument in the hands of the Communists. In his position of Premier, he had the means of exerting a considerable influence within his party, although up to that time he had never held an important position in it. He did not fail to profit by this opportunity to eliminate or thrust into the background all the anti-Communist leaders of his Muscovite orientation. Through the intervention of Fierlinger and other "fellow-travellers" among the Social Democrats, the Communists

succeeded in sowing the greatest confusion in the ranks of the Social Democrats, whom they thus prevented from getting together with the National Socialists to form a strong barrier against Communism. It is on Fierlinger and his friends that a great part of the responsibility for the Communist domination of Czechoslovakia rests.

Being unable to constitute a government in any other fashion, Benes at last gave way to the pressure exerted upon him on the part of the Communists, and resigned himself to charging Fierlinger with the formation of the Cabinet.

During the political negotiations which had taken place in March 1945 in the shadow of the Kremlin, the Communists had obtained nearly everything they wanted. They had, in accordance with their plans, created the conditions which would assure their primary influence in the country after its liberation, while awaiting the day when they would become its sole masters. The projects worked out by the Government in London were completely ignored and the democratic Ministers present at the negotiations in Moscow, Stransky in particular, succeeded at the best only in diluting on certain points the radical character of the Communist propositions. Thus they were able to include in the governmental programme an allusion to the principle of parliamentary democracy and civil rights, and also a paragraph emphasizing the necessity of friendly co-operation with the Western democracies.

As only the eastern part of the country had been liberated, our desire to see the first government installed on its native soil established at Prague could not be realized. Our choice thereupon fell on Kosice, the only city of any importance in this region.

The list of the new Cabinet and the governmental programme were published officially at Kosice on April 5, 1945. On the same day, Klement Gottwald, in a speech made to mark the occasion, made a grandiloquent declaration on Slovakian autonomy, which he himself described as "the Magna Carta of the Slovak nation".

There and then was demonstrated the decided intent of Moscow of opposing every unifying tendency in the Danubian countries. It was necessary at all costs to prevent the crystallization of a rival force capable of talking back to the U.S.S.R.

From that moment Czechoslovakia was a divided State. The politicians of the democratic parties hoped that the Communists

would be obliged to make concessions on many points on the day when, after the liberation of Prague, a new government would be formed in which representatives of the Czech resistance would also be included. But the Communists knew how to counteract that danger. As soon as the capital was liberated by the army of Marshal Koniev in May 1945, Klement Gottwald arrived in Prague with Zdenek Fierlinger and several Ministers, and his first act was to brush aside the Czech National Council, within which were represented all the parties of the resistance and which had directed the internal revolt.

Our protests were in vain. We found it impossible to get the wishes of the resistance taken into account in the formation of a new government, as the political refugees had promised throughout the war. Decidedly, the Communists felt themselves to be masters of the situation.

In short, the struggle for liberty was continuing after the liberation. From the very first we were confronted with the threat of a Communist totalitarian regime which would take the place of a Nazi totalitarian regime; from the very first we had to resume the battle to prevent the undermining of the very foundations of our national existence.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIBERATION OF PRAGUE

WHILE THE FORMATION of a new government was being discussed in Moscow in March and April 1945, while the Allied armies were penetrating into Czechoslovak territory and while Prague was fighting for her liberation before the arrival of the Russian tanks, I was still in England. I had not foreseen that heavy responsibilities were to fall upon me, that I would have to take grave decisions without being able to consult the President of the Republic and the Cabinet.

I was the only Minister of the new Government who had remained in London. Masaryk had left Moscow, and after having spent a few days in the British capital, had gone to the San Francisco Conference. I found myself in a very delicate situation owing to the fact that I could not make direct contact with President Benes and my political friends: all our dispatches in cipher passed through our embassy in Moscow, which meant that they were at the disposition of our Communist colleagues and, as a result, at that of Soviet circles.

On his arrival at Kosice, President Benes was received with all the solemnity the circumstances demanded. But immediately afterwards certain vague pretexts concerning his safety were invoked to put him under such strict surveillance that it practically cut him off from the outer world. The promise which the Soviet Government had made to him that it would furnish him with means of communicating directly with London by radio was not kept. The Soviet military officials also refused authorization to foreign diplomats to install themselves at Kosice, under the pretence that hostilities were not yet over. They made an exception, however, for Soviet Ambassador Zorin.

To acquaint Benes with news which was not destined for the Communists I could only make use of extremely vague allusions. The information and instructions which reached me from Kosice were scanty, and I was thus led to take most urgent decisions myself, able only to inform the Government of them subsequently.

From the month of April 1945 the surrender of Germany

seemed imminent. But the development of the military situation was to reserve a surprise for us. While we were expecting to see the whole of Czechoslovak territory liberated by the Red Army, it happened that the American Army arrived at top speed within reach of our frontier. At the end of April, Eisenhower's troops penetrated into western Bohemia.

The United States *chargé d'affaires*, Mr. Rudolf Schoenfeld, with whom I maintained the most friendly relations, asked me if the Czechoslovak Government would be prepared to conclude an agreement with the Inter-Allied High Command on the administration of the liberated territories, or at least sign a convention relative to the financial questions which would arise as a result of the presence in our territory of American forces.

Mr. Schoenfeld regretted as much as I did that the British and United States Governments had not accepted a proposal which I had submitted to them a year before, in the spring of 1944: it was a question of concluding with the Czechoslovak Government agreements on the administration of liberated territories identical with that which was then being negotiated with Moscow. My suggestion had been inspired by political considerations: an agreement of this kind would in effect have permitted the United States and Great Britain to demonstrate their interest in Czechoslovakia, and Czechoslovakia, reciprocally, to show her firm intention of remaining on the best possible terms with the Western Powers as well as with Soviet Russia. London and Washington declined the offer for practical reasons, for they thought it hardly likely that the Western armies would ever penetrate on to our territory.

Having received no answer from the Kosice Government, which seemed to want to avoid committing itself in any way towards the Americans, I accepted Mr. Schoenfeld's proposal to sign a financial convention. Later events having confirmed the necessity of such an agreement, the Government never disavowed my action.

At the end of April we learned that the resistance groups in Prague were preparing to rise against the occupying Power without waiting for the arrival of the Allied armies. I transmitted this information to President Benes, whom it reached only after a delay of several days. That is why on several subsequent occasions I had recourse to the British Broadcasting Corporation to inform President Benes and his collaborators directly of various matters. In some cases I was obliged to

answer myself, in the name of the President of the Republic, certain questions put by the leaders of the resistance. After my return to Prague, Benes approved all the decisions I had taken and thanked me for having assumed that responsibility.

During these critical days I had the joy of again seeing in London my great friend, Petr Zenkl, former Mayor of Prague, who was returning from Buchenwald, where he had been imprisoned for six years. Immediately after his arrival he was proclaimed president of the National Socialist Party. In spite of the sufferings he had endured, he was in excellent form; he had lost none of his vitality and energy. Czechoslovak democracy found in him an ardent defender who, up to February 1948, opposed all his strength to the totalitarian tendencies of the Communists, without permitting himself to be intimidated by the violent attacks and constant threats to which he was exposed.

When, on May 5, 1945, revolt broke out in Prague, the task which devolved upon me became even more delicate, since I was still without regular means of communication with the President and the Cabinet.

Beginning on May 6, anguished appeals from the insurgents, who asked urgent aid from the Allied armies, reached us hourly. I made appeal after appeal to the British, United States and Soviet Governments to obtain help for the threatened capital. Sir Philip Nichols, British Ambassador to our Government, showed himself particularly understanding and anxious to help us. The sincere friendship which linked us had been proved during the long years of the war. I thought highly of his ability, his diplomatic finesse and his sincerity, as well as of his constant endeavours to take the interests of our country into account. He had learned the Czech language during the war, as had Lady Nichols. Apart from Sir Bruce Lockhart, who was the diplomatic representative of the British Government with President Benes, and who had an admirable knowledge of Czechoslovakia, to which he was sincerely attached, there was no other British diplomat who had shown a more sincere and active interest in our country than Sir Philip Nichols. When, at the end of the year 1947, he left Prague, where, after the war, he had continued to represent the British Government as ambassador, his departure was greatly regretted not only by his friends, but by the entire population, which felt a deep sympathy and gratitude towards him.

It was in large part thanks to his efforts that without hesitation the British Government declared itself ready to send aid to the Czechoslovak capital, which had risen against the Germans and was threatened with being crushed by a stronger enemy. Churchill, who, better than anyone, had foreseen the catastrophic consequences of the Munich agreement, considered the restoration of an independent Czechoslovakia as the *sine qua non* of the rebirth of a free Europe. He had already expressed this idea to me six years earlier—on March 16, 1939, to be exact, the day after the entry of the German troops into Prague, when I met him in the House of Commons. "It will be hard," he said, "it will be long; but you will be free again. Europe cannot be free if your country is not."

So, in a special telegram, he asked President Truman to send help without delay to the insurgents of Prague.

On May 7, Czechoslovak airmen serving in the Royal Air Force were ordered to prepare to leave for Prague. The Air Minister announced the good news in the Czech broadcasts of the B.B.C. The crews were already aboard their planes when the operation was abruptly forbidden by the Inter-Allied Command.

In appeals which became more and more pressing and pathetic Prague demanded help. The patriots, lacking arms and ammunition, were seconded only by General Vlassov, the Soviet deserter who had ranged himself on the side of Hitler and, seeing that a German defeat was inevitable, had turned against the Nazis. I foresaw grave complications with the Soviet Government should the patriots accept the help of Vlassov, who was considered a traitor by the U.S.S.R. That is why, in several approaches to the Foreign Office and the United States Embassy in London, I renewed my efforts to obtain military support from the Western Allies.

On May 7, late at night, General Karel Janousek, commanding the Czechoslovak Air Force in England, and the head of my office, Ivo Duchacek, whom I charged with maintaining liaison with Patton's army (which was already on our territory), returned from the Inter-Allied staff headquarters. They announced to me that it was highly probable that the American Supreme Command and the Soviet General Staff had agreed to stop the advance of Patton's armies at Pilzen, less than ninety kilometres* from Prague.

* Fifty-six miles.

To my great astonishment, this news proved to be correct. For that matter, I was not the only one to be surprised: official circles in London seemed little better informed. But it was necessary to bow to the evidence: General Eisenhower had given way to the insistence of the Soviet General Staff, which was bent on having Prague liberated by the Red Army. More than two thousand patriots were killed because it was necessary to wait two days longer for the tanks of General Koniev to break a way through to the capital. They reached it on May 9, and with this reinforcement the inhabitants finally drove the Germans out.

Later Soviet and Communist propaganda, completely distorting the truth, spread the rumour that the Americans had refused to come to the aid of the Czechoslovak patriots, who were saved by the Red Army alone.

While London, in a burst of joy, celebrated the Allied victory, we followed with anguish the dramatic events which were unrolling in Prague. We knew that the Germans would soon be out of our territory, but we had a presentiment that when the enemy had departed, our country would still not be entirely free.

Having taken an active part in all political and diplomatic negotiations with the Allies, whose importance for the future of our country I fully appreciated, I felt my heart become heavy when I saw the result of our work compromised by the formation of the Government of Kosice and by the programme that it had proclaimed. I realized that many of the successes gained during the war had been wiped out at Kosice, and that by constant struggle it would be necessary for us once more to toil slowly upwards until we fully regained our liberty and independence.

However, even before my departure from London I found some reasons for believing that if our struggle promised to be difficult, it would not be in vain. I had listened on the radio to the triumphant return of Benes to Prague. The enthusiasm with which he was greeted by the whole population was indescribable, and exceeded everything we had been able to hope for. Everywhere he was hailed as the real liberator of the country. It was amidst a veritable delirium that the President on May 16 passed through the crowds which filled the streets of the capital. Nothing proved more clearly than these demonstrations that the Czech people was hailing in the person of Benes the defender of democracy as Masaryk had conceived it.

The day after the arrival of Benes in Prague I left London, full of gratitude to the great British nation, which had offered us its hospitality and which had given us so many proofs of its friendship. Before leaving, I sent to Churchill a telegram which ended thus:

"I would like to extend to Your Excellency my heartiest and most sincere congratulations on this day of victory of which you have been the glorious creator. Your courage, your determination and wise leadership will be always remembered not only in the history of your great country, but also in the annals of humanity. Our people will never forget the full understanding and help which you have given them in the tragic days of 1938–39, and which you and your Government have continued to give us during this war in which British and Czechoslovak friendship have been sealed for ever. I am sure of expressing the wishes of our people if I assure you of our deep gratitude to your great nation, to your Government and to you, whose name is gloriously inscribed in the souls and minds of all Czechoslovak patriots."

That same evening I arrived in Prague with Zenkl and several other Czechoslovak politicians. I scarcely had time to greet my mother and my sister, together with several members of the Cabinet, who were waiting our arrival at the airfield, before, with Zenkl, I was led from the airfield to the largest hall in the capital, where our party had organized a public mass meeting for that date. After seven years of separation, we thus again found the friends who had survived the Nazi reign of terror. Many had disappeared in the storm. How can our feeling be described? On every face we saw the stamp of starvation. Many of those who had come from concentration camps were unrecognizable. Some of them weighed no more than fifty kilograms* and could not walk without leaning on the arm of a comrade. The atmosphere in the hall was deeply moving; an enthusiasm without bounds allied itself to an unshakable will to defend our democratic institutions and our newly-won liberty. Each time a speaker pronounced the name of Masaryk or of Benes the hall burst into frantic applause. When I declared that we owed our liberation to the U.S.S.R., to Great Britain, to the United States and to France, the whole audience rose to give an ovation not only to Stalin, but also,

* about 110 lb.

and especially, to Roosevelt, to Churchill and to de Gaulle. Enthusiasm was at its height when we declared that our slogan would remain "fidelity to the ideals of Masaryk".

It was the first great demonstration organized since the liberation by one of the non-Communist parties. It was perhaps not by chance that the first appeal for the defence of the democracy of Masaryk was launched by the National Socialists. Beginning on that day and as long as we remained in existence, our party was always in the first line of the fight against the Communists, the fight the stake of which was parliamentary democracy and national independence.

CHAPTER V

THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM BEGINS AGAIN

WHEN I RETURNED to Prague, two weeks had passed since the city was liberated. There was still in the air something of the enthusiasm which had marked the first days of recovered freedom, but already it could be felt from this, that and the other detail that it was only a fleeting enthusiasm—that it would not last. The very night of my arrival I found it impossible to avoid being struck by one fact: that if the population was happy—immensely and undeniably happy—at being freed from the Nazi yoke, it was happy with reservations. The future remained uncertain: all those who had not been blinded by their own beatitude realized that very clearly. How, under those conditions, could they feel an unmixed joy?

A woman who had returned from a concentration camp said to us: "Here we are in possession of our home. And we are free —only I should very much like to know how free. My aim from now on is going to be to eat well, because I want to regain my strength as rapidly as possible to begin the struggle all over again." It was really most stirring.

On another day I met a Social Democrat politician who had also spent several years in a Nazi camp. "This isn't what we fought for," he declared. "We are forced to admit that we have simply changed labels."

At that moment I thought these words were marked by a bewildered pessimism. I was wrong to show myself so confident of the future.

The struggle against the communization of the country began on the morrow of the liberation in extremely difficult conditions. From the beginning it was unequal; the Communists, in fact, possessed means for action infinitely more powerful than ours.

After having seized the principal controlling levers of the Government, the Communists had recourse to the national committees (which were not elected, but appointed, usually according to the instructions of the Communist Party) to put their hands on the entire administrative machinery of the State.

The presence of the Red Army, which occupied the whole country with the exception of a small piece of territory where the American Army was ensconsed, was one more trump in their hands. They were the only strongly organized party in the country. So far as the Social Democratic Party was concerned, Fierlinger and Bohumil Lausman had thrust into the background those of the former leaders who had survived the war. Majer, the young Minister who led the anti-Communist wing, was not yet well enough known by the general public, and found himself almost completely isolated.

The Communists having, for another thing, launched a campaign for the formation of a unified Socialist Party, a large number of the workers belonging to the Social Democrat or National Socialist parties did not wait for a merger which they knew was imminent to enter the Communist ranks. In Slovakia the fusion of the Social Democrat and Communist parties had been brought about as early as 1944, during the revolt.

Finally, one of the most effective weapons which the Communists used was the united trade unions, whose president was the present Premier, Antonin Zapotocky, and its secretary-general, a Social Democrat fellow-traveller, E. Erban.

The Communists were admirable at taking advantage of the atmosphere, compounded of uncertainty, confusion, fear and revolutionary hopes, which prevailed at the moment. They succeeded notably in seducing a large part of the population, in particular the young people and many intellectuals.

In these circumstances the Communists had no difficulty in assuring acceptance for a radical programme including the nationalization of industry, of the banks and of insurance companies, all the more so since all parties were, in principle, in favour of the nationalization of certain industries. The draconian proposals which Lausman, Minister of Industry, submitted to the Cabinet were approved without debate by the Social Democrat Party, of which he was a member. For that matter, the situation was sufficiently typified by the fact that it was often easier to come to an agreement with Gottwald than with Fierlinger.

With the Social Democrats forming a bloc with the Communists, we were in the minority whenever in some concrete case we showed our opposition. In my role as Minister of Foreign Trade I was charged with busying myself, among other things, with the economic questions which were discussed by

the Cabinet. All my efforts to secure the limitation of nationalization to mines and industries were in vain. My proposal that the same pattern of nationalization should not be applied to different types of industries had no greater success. When I suggested changing certain light industry companies and companies engaged in the food business into corporations of which the State would hold the majority of shares, the Communists, as well as Fierlinger, scoffed at me. All proposals originating in non-Communist ministries were rejected on sight and described as attempts to save Capitalism; and, thanks to the Social Democrats and several non-party Ministers, the proposals of the Communists, who were inspired above all by political considerations and controlled a majority, were adopted without taking into account the financial and economic consequences which their system of nationalization would bring in its wake.

After laborious negotiations which dragged on for more than three months, and during which we gained a few partial victories, we accepted a final draft of a law on nationalization. It did not correspond to the idea which we had held of the socialization of the country; we continued to hope, however, that it would not bring on catastrophic consequences. At least social difficulties should be avoided; that advantage was appreciable. Besides, we thought it was in the interest of the national economy to establish with precision the line between State-operated enterprises and private industries, the Government having declared that the limits fixed by the new law would not be exceeded. We thought also that competition between the nationalized section and the private section (the latter represented nearly 40 per cent of our industrial resources) would contribute to the perfecting of the nationalized enterprises, with experience bringing about the gradual revision of certain inopportune measures and certain badly conceived forms of organization. If the normal development of affairs had not been brusquely interrupted by the *coup d'état* of February 1948, our hopes would perhaps have been realized.

Today, after two years of practical experience, I am obliged to confess that if the Communist conception of nationalization was disastrous, even ours went too far. I remain a partisan of nationalization of the resources of the subsoil, of certain sections of heavy industry, of transportation, of power and of insurance, provided that a different organization is established for each of these branches, but I am of the opinion that one should stop

there. It is true that two years' trial cannot be conclusive; however, it was enough to show that, in a democracy based upon several parties, each of them inevitably seeks to assure itself of decisive influence over the different nationalized industries subject to the authority of the Government. This competition among the parties affects production adversely, and the interests of the parties often threaten to gain the upper hand over national economic interests. This danger can be avoided only if the evil is destroyed at the root—that is to say, if parties are suppressed by the institution of a dictatorship. Thus, since a State-managed industry presupposes a strong central authority, it can prosper only under a totalitarian regime.

The promulgation of the nationalization decrees in October 1945 marked the culminating point of the revolutionary era during which the Communists had been able to occupy all the important positions in the administrative machine. It was on October 28, 1945—the day of the national holiday—that the provisional National Assembly, to which each party had delegated its representatives, met for the first time. Theoretically this important event marked the opening of a more normal epoch, since thereafter the executive was subject to regular parliamentary control.

At the same period the American and Soviet armies left the country. This important decision had been taken by the Governments of the United States and the U.S.S.R. as the result of skilful negotiations by Mr. Laurence Steinhardt, United States Ambassador. After having represented his country at Moscow and Ankara, Mr. Steinhardt, even before the end of the war, had been nominated as Ambassador to Czechoslovakia. The choice for this post of one of the best American diplomats was indicative of the importance Washington attached to Czechoslovakia. From the time of his arrival in Prague a close and most friendly co-operation grew up between Mr. Steinhardt and myself. Endowed with a penetrating intelligence and a remarkable political sense, Mr. Steinhardt rapidly familiarized himself with the complicated political conditions of our country, and sought by every means to encourage the democratic camp by emphasizing particularly the necessity of aiding the country from the economic point of view. He attracted several important Americans to Prague, whom he never failed to put in touch with Czechoslovak political and economic circles. He enjoyed great popularity throughout the country.

Once the Soviet troops had departed and the provisional National Assembly had been convoked, one might have hoped that the extremists would gradually be relegated to the background. A whole series of facts justified this hope in our country, where democratic traditions were so deeply rooted. Aversion to the Communist regime, similar in many respects to Nazi totalitarianism, was increasing. President Benes enjoyed greater prestige than ever—to such an extent that the Communists, surprised to find him so popular, were obliged to show respect for him. In spite of certain differences which opposed the Soviet Union to the Western Powers, there was nothing to show that an immense gap was to be opened between them, and we were justified in hoping that co-operation between Russia and the West would still continue for a considerable time.

It was with confidence that we set to work. To begin with, we reorganized our party, whose effectives had been decimated by the war. Next we intensified our propaganda for the democratic cause and against Communism, denouncing the manner in which the latter often sheltered itself behind apparently democratic terminology.

With a group of friends, I began to work out a positive programme defining the principles and structure of a democracy which should be Socialist but not Marxist, which we were opposing to the totalitarian doctrine of the Communists. Convinced that the complete nationalization of our economy would inevitably lead to dictatorship by a single party, I proclaimed at a public mass meeting the necessity for a mixed political and economic system, which, in my view, represented the only possible basis for a real democracy. Our slogan was: "Men must not be exploited either by men or by the State." All our efforts tended towards the realization of a synthesis of liberalism and Socialism which would guarantee not only civil rights, but also security and social justice. Thanks to the efforts of our party, as well as to those of the Populist Party, to save the situation, public opinion gradually began to recover its senses.

The Communists, for their part, met with several checks: they failed in their attempt to "unify" the physical culture organizations: the Sokols and the Boy Scouts refused to bend to their will. If they did succeed in forming the "Union of Czech Youth", it quickly became clear that after an initial success it had only been able to bring together in its ranks the young Communists and Social Democrats.

The students were the first to adopt a combative attitude towards Communism: what revolted them was not the social radicalism of the Communist Party, but the hypocrisy and dishonesty of methods which recalled strangely the procedure of the Nazis.

The Communists were no more fortunate when they attempted to use the Socialist bloc to bring the other two Socialist parties under their influence and through it to assure themselves of dominating all the parties of the National Front. Having discovered the meaning of this manœuvre, we undertook a systematic opposition until, several months after its formation, the Socialist bloc died of starvation.

The National Committees, in addition, showed themselves less docile than the Communists had hoped, the non-Communist elements affirming their will to resist more and more; these organizations, which were to have constituted a responsive tool in the hands of the extreme Left, converted themselves into simple administrative organisms of the communes and the districts, except in regions where the Communists were in an overwhelming majority. The prosecution of collaborationists, which the Communists had taken as a pretext for liquidating their adversaries, caused great bitterness, especially when it became apparent that a large number of notorious collaborationists and of dubious persons had succeeded in securing themselves from any trouble by joining the Communist Party. The public also did not fail to appreciate the efforts of Jaroslav Stransky, Minister of Justice, and of his successor, Prokop Drtina, who defended, as it was their duty to do, the independence of the courts and the integrity of the judges, and courageously opposed any compromises.

The cause of democracy, it can be seen, was far from being lost. So it was with high hopes that the democratic parties set to work to prepare for the first elections, fixed for May 1946.

The elections of 1946, unlike those of 1948, took place in normal circumstances. It is true that the Communists enjoyed a privileged position for their electoral campaign owing to the fact that they held the ministries of the Interior and of Propaganda, as well as several of the economic ministries, and were able to bring considerable pressure to bear upon the electors. They controlled the radio, several daily newspapers (while the other parties had only one) and important financial resources. Some 250,000 to 300,000 persons were struck off the electoral

rolls on the pretext that they were suspected of having collaborated with the Germans, and this measure deprived the democratic parties of at least ten seats. Finally, the suppression of the Agrarian Party threw a great part of the rural population into confusion.

It was during these developments that it was learned with stupefaction that the Soviet High Command had chosen the election period to transport across Czechoslovak territory occupation troops which had been garrisoned in Austria and were being transferred to Eastern Germany. An energetic protest by Stransky succeeded in bringing about the postponement of this troop movement, but nevertheless a large number of voters had been frightened by the prospect.

The results of the elections surprised everyone: they expected to see the Communists obtain about 30 per cent of the votes. They actually polled 37 per cent (winning ninety-seven seats in Bohemia and Moravia, seventeen seats in Slovakia). Contrary to expectation, they had greater success in the Czech provinces than in Slovakia, where the Democratic Party polled more than 60 per cent of the votes (that is, forty-one seats), thus winning a brilliant victory over the Communists, thanks to the understanding it had reached with the politicians of the former Catholic Populist Party, which had been dissolved after the war. The National Socialists, for their part, gained more than 18 per cent of the votes (or fifty-five seats), the Populists 16 per cent (forty-six seats), the Czech Social Democrats 12 per cent (thirty-seven seats), the Slovak Social Democrats 3 per cent (two seats) and the new Slovak Liberty Party 4 per cent (three seats).

In short, of a total of 300 deputies, the Communists and the Social Democrats had an absolute majority with 153 deputies. As a high official of the Soviet Embassy in Prague put it: "The majority is not large, but it is enough to govern against the other parties in an entirely democratic manner."

In any case, the results of the election had shown how difficult it was to combat a party which held all the levers of control of civic life.

The formation of the new Government proved extremely difficult, although everyone had accepted the nomination of Gottwald, head of the strongest party, as Premier. But the fight for the other portfolios was sharp, especially between the Communists and the National Socialists. Being the second largest party, we claimed at least one of the important ministries

which the Communists had held before the elections. We were able finally to obtain the Ministry of National Education, where Zdenek Nejedly was replaced by Jaroslav Stransky. Our representation in the Cabinet was reinforced by the inclusion of Zenkl, who became one of its five vice-presidents. Drtina and I remained at our posts. I was then Minister of Foreign Trade, and Drtina Minister of Justice. The vice-president of our party, M. David, was elected President of the Chamber.

The Slovak Democrats, in spite of their victory, did not succeed in improving their position. The campaign which the Communists launched against them on the morrow of the elections intimidated them to such an extent that during the ensuing negotiations they did not show themselves sufficiently firm. The Communists, seeing that their zeal for Slovak autonomy had not produced the expected effect, suddenly transformed themselves into ardent defenders of a centralized national government to which all the Slovak administrations should be subordinated.

Of the twenty-six Ministers of the new Government, nine were Communists, three Social Democrats and the other parties each had four representatives. Jan Masaryk and Ludvik Svoboda, who were members of no party, retained their posts of Foreign Minister and National Defence Minister respectively. In the new Ministry, as in the old one, the Communists were sure of a majority as long as they could count on the Social Democrats.

The new National Assembly, which had for its principal task the drafting of a constitution, was elected for two years. The Communists counted on using this period to take all the measures necessary to guarantee them an absolute majority in the next elections.

However, their electoral victory had had consequences which they had not foreseen. After having recovered from the first shock, public opinion quickly crystallized, and seemed to understand more clearly that democracy was threatened in its very existence, and that to survive it was therefore necessary to put up an active opposition to Communism. To our surprise, we found the ranks of our party swelling: in the first few months after the elections we gained more than 100,000 new members. The effectives of the Populist Party were similarly reinforced.

As for the Social Democrats, their members who were not fellow-travellers, seeing that the policy of Fierlinger had caused

their defeat, showed their desire to free themselves from Communist domination and to return to the traditions of a party undeniably Socialist but resolutely democratic. Majer's position improved. In the National Committees they showed themselves more and more combative, and drew nearer to the National Socialists. In parliament their deputies demonstrated an increasing independence. Lausman became more reserved in his co-operation with the Communists.

On October 28, 1946, the Government published a two-year plan which was in general well conceived and had consequently been approved by all parties. In the negotiations which had preceded the drafting of this plan we had succeeded in obtaining the law's guarantee of equal rights for private and nationalized enterprises. We won another important victory by obtaining a governmental declaration that the era of nationalization had been closed. Meantime the considerable deliveries reaching us from U.N.R.R.A. constituted, quite as much as a material help, a moral encouragement to the population, which realized the interest the Western Powers were showing in us.

It is extremely regrettable, in this connection, that in the autumn of 1946 Mr. Byrnes, American Secretary of State, refused to grant us the credits of which we had urgent need for the reconstruction of the country. It is true that the violent campaign of the Communists against "dollar imperialism" was not designed to facilitate negotiations with the Washington authorities. We hoped nevertheless that the Government of the United States would reverse its decision when it came to understand that Czechoslovakia was a country basically democratic, which must be helped against the Communist danger. Unfortunately our hopes were disappointed.

In May the Populist Party organized an impressive youth demonstration in Prague. Several weeks later 300,000 National Socialists celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of their party; on this occasion a procession which took several hours to pass marched through the streets of the capital. The cheers of the crowd, and the joyous atmosphere in which the celebration took place demonstrated the strength of the democratic camp and its determination not to submit to a Communist dictatorship.

After two years of intense work and constant struggles, we were able to look to the future with confidence, convinced that we would succeed in saving democracy and the liberty of our

country. When, in the spring of 1947, Gottwald and Slansky declared that they expected to poll at least 51 per cent of the votes at the next elections, no one was prepared to admit that they would achieve this result by legal methods.

But at the moment when our hopes seemed most justified an event of capital importance occurred in international politics. The tension between the United States and Soviet Russia, already sufficiently acute, assumed the proportions of a serious conflict in June 1947 in connection with the Marshall Plan. Czechoslovakia was going to be drawn inevitably into this conflict.

It was the intervention of Stalin against the participation of our country in the Marshall Plan which marked the beginning of the great crisis in Czechoslovakia.

BOOK TWO

THE SOVIETS INTERFERE

CHAPTER I

PRAGUE ACCEPTS THE MARSHALL PLAN

THE NEWS THAT the United States was offering to contribute to the reconstruction of Europe through the Marshall Plan was received in Czechoslovakia with immense joy. Economic circles knew how extremely valuable American aid would be to a country whose prosperity depended in such large measure on its foreign trade.

The public in general experienced a feeling of relief and hope: it saw in this development the promise of an improved economic situation and of a reconciliation, if not an agreement, between Moscow and Washington.

At first Communist circles, while they maintained great reserve, made no objections to the American plan. The political line which they followed did not permit them to rejoice openly over an initiative coming from the headquarters of "imperialistic capitalism", but in their hearts they were no less satisfied than the other parties. One of the Communist leaders expressed the feelings of his comrades perfectly when he said to me: "The fact that it is once more from America that help is coming is not a matter for rejoicing for us. I know that you National Socialists will take advantage of the opportunity to sing the praises of democracy, as you did about U.N.R.R.A. But what of it? For us the essential thing is to have dollars."

The Communists, then, realized the real worth of the American offer; and as they had not forgotten that in September 1946 public opinion had attributed to their violent campaign against "dollar imperialism" the refusal of Byrnes to grant new credits to Czechoslovakia, they did not dare to utter too openly the criticism which their ideology suggested to them.

For all these reasons it was considered obvious in official circles that Czechoslovakia would accept the invitation to participate in the Marshall Plan, although its exact terms were not yet known.

I first felt anxiety when I learned that the American project had been received rather coldly in Moscow. But when it was announced that Molotov would participate in the conference which was to meet in Paris at the end of June to discuss the Marshall Plan, I was reassured, all the more so since the Foreign Commissar was to be accompanied by a large group of economic specialists. That was a good omen.

Hilary Minc, Polish Minister of Industry and Commerce, was of the same opinion. He happened to be in Prague at the beginning of June to sign a treaty destined to develop considerably the commercial relations between our two countries and to tighten the economic bonds uniting them.

I had become acquainted with Minc at the time of an official visit to Warsaw in March 1947, during which a treaty of alliance was signed between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Among the Polish Ministers whom I met on this occasion, Minc was one of those who made the most favourable impression on me. I knew that he belonged to a small group of Communist politicians who were the real masters of the new Poland. The conversations I had with him had revealed to me an intelligent man very well informed on Polish and world economic problems. Although he was a sincere Communist and a convinced Marxist, Minc was not a prisoner of his ideology, and he had broad and realistic views on international politics. He had studied in Paris for several years. His general education lent much charm to his conversation, and talking with him never failed to be interesting.

During a dinner I gave in Prague in his honour we were told that Molotov had left the Paris Conference and that the Soviet Government was refusing to participate in the deliberations concerning the Marshall Plan. This unexpected news, as may well be imagined, caused a considerable stir. I understood at once that this spectacular gesture of the Soviet Government directed against America would not remain without effect on our Communists, and that owing to this fact our Government would find itself in an increasingly difficult position. I imparted my apprehension to M. Minc, who answered, to my great surprise: "You are right. The situation is becoming complicated for you and for us. Without any doubt, Molotov had serious reasons for leaving the Paris Conference, and it is clear that we must respect them. We must wait for more detailed information. But our countries are not at all in the same situation as a

great Power like the U.S.S.R. We need American help. I am convinced that the Soviet Government will take that into account."

I agreed with Minc; what he had just said was particularly true for Czechoslovakia. "Coal, which Poland exports," I said to him, "is as valuable as American dollars; and in addition, you depend less than we do on trade with the Western countries. For you Poles, American aid is far from being as indispensable as it is for us."

On this point Minc was of a different opinion: "You forget that our industry is not yet as well developed as yours," he explained. "The industrialization of our country has only just begun, and Poland has been ravaged by the war. The reasons are not the same for you and for us, but both of us need American help."

On the following day a Polish delegation headed by Premier Cyrankiewicz arrived in Prague to return the visit which the Czechoslovak Cabinet had paid to Warsaw several months earlier. The Polish Ministers, in the conversations which we had during their stay in our capital, talked with us about the Marshall Plan in the same terms as Minc. M. Modzelevski, the Foreign Minister, also a Communist, was as categorical as Minc in emphasizing the vital interest which the aid offered to Europe by the United States had for Poland. Our Polish colleagues hoped that Moscow would take into account the economic needs of Poland and Czechoslovakia and would not oppose their participation in the Paris discussions.

It goes without saying that I was very pleased to discover that the Polish Government had adopted so clear-cut a point of view on this question. I attributed greater importance to the opinion of the Communist Ministers, who were in a better position to foresee the reactions of the Soviet Government, than I did to that of Premier Cyrankiewicz, who was leader of the Socialist Party.

The Poles, to emphasize the importance which they attributed to the American proposal, suggested heading our delegations by members of our respective Cabinets. Masaryk showed himself more cautious, and advised confiding this mission for the moment to our ambassadors in Paris. "We'll see later," he said. The Poles, however, reserved the right to send a Minister to Paris, and we decided definitely that our two delegations would remain in permanent contact in order to act in concert.

Like Masaryk, I was highly satisfied with the result of our conversations with the Poles on a question which was invested with exceptional importance for our two countries, both from the economic and political points of view.

At the Cabinet meeting of July 4, Masaryk proposed accepting the invitation to the Paris Conference. His presentation of the matter was brief: he brought out in a few sentences how necessary American credits were to refloat our national economy; he underlined the fact that we would not accept any conditions incompatible with our political and economic independence; he reminded us that the Polish Government had decided to take part in the conference; and he proposed finally that our delegation should be headed for the present by our Ambassador to Paris, Nosek. Gottwald, the Premier, then asked the Foreign Minister if he knew the opinion of the Government of the U.S.S.R. on the subject of our participation in the Conference of Paris. Masaryk answered that he had informed Bodrov, Soviet *chargé d'affaires*, in the absence of the ambassador. Bodrov, taking into consideration the reasons which had inclined us to accept the American offer, had raised no objections.

Masaryk's proposal was accepted without debate and unanimously. The matter had been settled in a few minutes. Gottwald asked only that Masaryk submit to the next Cabinet meeting the instructions which were to be sent to our Ambassador to Paris. The directives which Masaryk proposed three days later, July 7, were extremely simple: foreseeing complications as the result of the departure of Molotov, we instructed our delegation to maintain a reserved position until we could see more clearly the aim behind the Marshall Plan and until we learned what conditions were attached to participation in it.

Gottwald's attitude during the Cabinet meeting of July 4 seemed to indicate that the Communists were hardly enthusiastic about the idea that we should be represented at the Paris Conference, but, realizing the importance of the American offer, they voted for Masaryk's proposal.

The same evening I fell seriously ill. I felt unwell during the whole day; nevertheless I made it a point to be present at the Cabinet meeting and, later, at a reception at the Polish Embassy in honour of the Polish delegation. During the brilliant affair, which took place in the old gardens of the Furstenberg Palace, at the foot of the Hradcany, residence of the President of the Republic, we had an opportunity to resume our conversations

with our Polish colleagues and to settle the details of certain questions which we had already discussed.

The Polish Ministers showed themselves very satisfied when they learned that the Cabinet had formally approved our proposal to send a delegation to Paris. Cyrankiewicz confirmed to us that the Polish Government would do the same immediately after its return to Warsaw, probably on Monday, July 7.

Unfortunately, I felt increasingly ill, and was not able to stay to the end of the reception. The following day the doctor diagnosed my ailment as infectious angina.

This mishap annoyed me a great deal. As it happened, I was expected to leave for Moscow two days later to discuss a new trade treaty with the U.S.S.R. At the same time as our commercial delegation, a political delegation, made up of Gottwald, Masaryk and myself, was to consult the Soviet Government about the Franco-Czechoslovak Treaty which we were preparing. It was at my suggestion that this special delegation was being sent to Moscow, and I had been particularly keen on taking part in these conversations.

Our treaty with France had given rise to some lively debates in the Cabinet. The Communists maintained that Moscow would advise us against accepting the project which the French Government had submitted to us. We did not know to what extent the Communists, in their negative attitude towards this treaty, were sheltering themselves behind the Moscow Government, and we asked ourselves what reasons the U.S.S.R. could possibly have for regarding the French proposal with an unfriendly eye. It was clear that at bottom it was not a question simply of some clause or other of the project, and it seemed to me that the best way to clear up the matter would be to put the question directly to Stalin. As the matter was one of vital importance, I insisted that Gottwald himself should take part in the conversation. So I proposed that the Premier and the Foreign Minister should go to Moscow. My proposal was accepted, and I was added to the delegation.

I very much regretted that my sickness would prevent me from making the trip. The departure of the delegation having been postponed three days, I still hoped, thanks to a rigorous penicillin treatment, to be able to leave with my colleagues. Alas, my condition grew worse, and it was decided that Drtina, Minister of Justice, should take my place.

CHAPTER VII

STALIN'S ULTIMATUM

ON THE MORNING of July 6, Gottwald, Masaryk and Drtina boarded the plane for Moscow. On the same day it was announced that the Polish Government had refused to take part in the Conference of Paris. This news was a bad omen. It was clear that the U.S.S.R. had intervened in Warsaw, and later I learned, indeed, that the Soviet Government had been obliged to put strong pressure upon the Poles to persuade them to give way.

It was a Polish diplomat who revealed to me an interesting detail: Moscow radio had announced that Poland and Roumania would refuse to take part in the Paris Conference while the Cabinet was still debating the matter in Warsaw. As late as July 8 a spokesman for the Roumanian Foreign Ministry denied the report.

The day after the arrival of our delegation in Moscow we were informed, to our deep stupefaction, that Stalin was asking us not to participate in the Marshall Plan.

I shall never forget that day, of which every detail has remained engraved on my memory. I was still in bed, and after my penicillin cure I felt rather tired. About nine in the morning my wife came running into my bedroom and asked me to take a phone call myself. "There is news from Moscow; it seems that Stalin insists that we revoke our decision to take part in the Marshall Plan."

At first I could not believe that it was true. "Impossible!" I exclaimed. "You must have misunderstood."

"See for yourself," she said, handing me the receiver.

It was my secretary, Brzorad, who was at the other end of the wire. His voice trembled with emotion. This young man, always calm and reflective, was beside himself.

"It's terrible!" he said. "Gottwald and Masaryk went to the Kremlin last night: Stalin is demanding that our Government proclaim immediately our decision not to go to Paris. Gottwald and Masaryk are now insisting that the Cabinet adopt a submissive attitude at once."

I did not believe my ears, and I asked Brzorad to repeat

everything he had just said. There was, alas! no possible error. My secretary informed me, moreover, that the Cabinet had been summoned to a special meeting that very morning: we had, in fact, been called upon to signify our submission to the injunctions of Stalin before noon.

Shortly after my secretary's phone call several friends visited me to confirm the news. They told me that during the morning an urgent telegram from our delegation had reached the Foreign Ministry. This telegram informed us that late on Wednesday, July 9, Gottwald, Masaryk and Drtina had been received by Stalin in the presence of Molotov. Stalin had expressed to them his surprise at learning that we had accepted the invitation to the Conference of Paris. According to him, the Marshall Plan had no other aim than that of isolating the U.S.S.R. On the pretext of hastening the reconstruction of Europe, the Western Powers were plotting against Russia, so that if she gave her adherence to the American Plan, Czechoslovakia would be participating in a political act directed against the Soviets, her allies.

So far as Stalin was concerned, our friendship and our alliance were at stake. To accept the help of the United States in such circumstances would constitute, according to him, a breach of that alliance. That is why Stalin asked us not to send a delegation to Paris. Gottwald and Masaryk for their part urged that the Government should conform to this desire without delay.

Gottwald's telegram informed us only of the result of the conversations at the Kremlin. We did not know what had been our delegation's answer to Stalin. We had no idea whether they had tried to persuade the Soviet statesmen to reverse their decision. The meaning of the dispatch was clear: Stalin placed before the Czechoslovak Government the alternatives of either giving up the benefits of the Marshall Plan on the spot or of clashing with the Soviet Union.

In short, it was a question of nothing more or less than an ultimatum.

The friends who met at my bedside hid neither the indignation nor the anger which the brutal intervention of Stalin aroused in them. "It's scandalous," they protested. "The Russians are treating us like slaves. The order of Stalin is a flagrant violation of the treaty in which they engaged themselves not to interfere in our affairs. With unprecedented

brutality, they are striking at our sovereignty. Will the Communists be able to argue any longer that the Soviets alone respect the independence of other nations? Must we sacrifice our interests to those of a foreign Power? It is out of the question! We cannot give way to such pressure!"

Others asked themselves: "What about Masaryk? That Gottwald accepted will surprise nobody: he obeys Stalin openly. But Masaryk? What can he have said to Stalin?"

These questions remained unanswered.

Meanwhile the Government had met hastily at the Premier's office.

About eleven o'clock, Zenkl, just back from the country, phoned me; it was he who, in the absence of Gottwald, was to preside at the Cabinet meeting. He asked me if I could be present. Unfortunately the doctors had strictly forbidden me to get up. Of the Ministers of our party, only Zenkl and Stransky were present. Drtina was taking my place in Moscow; Majer was in Paris at the Food Conference; Msgr. Stramek, who was ill, had not attended a Cabinet meeting for a long time. All these absences made our position difficult.

It was Clementis who read the report on the conversations in Moscow. He said no more about them than had been contained in the telegram of our delegation. He insisted that the instructions of Gottwald should be executed without delay. Fierlinger declared that the question could not even be the subject of debate, and that of course we would conform to the desires of Stalin. What he did not tell us was that Majer, in a telegram to the Cabinet, had asked us to stick to our guns and to send a delegation to the Paris Conference. It was only later that we learned of that.

The Communists repeated all the arguments of Soviet propaganda: they maintained that the Marshall Plan was an undertaking of American imperialism against the Soviet Union, and they claimed that Czechoslovakia would gain no appreciable advantages from American aid. When the non-Communist Ministers, particularly Zenkl and Stransky, opposed their theory, the Communists heaped insults upon them, charging that they were ready to sell Czechoslovak independence to Yankee capitalism for a mess of pottage, and accusing them of drawing upon our people the anger of our ally, Soviet Russia.

Zenkl vehemently refuted these slanderous insinuations

through which the Communists sought to make us forget their unexpected *volte face* at the dictation of the Kremlin.

Twice during the meeting Masaryk telephoned from Moscow to ask the Government to accept Stalin's conditions without delay. Zenkl protested against the revolting pressure to which the Cabinet was being subjected.

"In these circumstances," he cried, filled with indignation, "the Government cannot act in accord with its own convictions nor make its decisions freely."

Stransky and Zenkl kept me informed by telephone of everything that was happening. I asked myself again and again what attitude we ought to adopt in the face of Moscow's ultimatum. Stalin's demand lent itself to no ambiguity: if we did not refuse to participate in the Marshall Plan, Russia would consider her alliance with Czechoslovakia as void. Could we risk a complete break with Moscow? The Soviets would have profited by it to incite the Communists to effect a *coup d'état*. Moreover, we were unfortunately unable to expect effective help from the Western Powers, even if they were unreservedly sympathetic to us.

But there was another reason, still more serious. I knew that we could not win over the majority of the people for such a policy. Public opinion might well be revolted by the brutal interference of Moscow, but nevertheless it would not have agreed that we should push the matter to the point of a complete break with our Russian allies. At that moment, moreover, we had no detailed information on the help which America was offering to the nations of Europe, nor on the conditions which she would attach to it. And Soviet propaganda was already sounding the alarm by spreading the rumour that the American capitalists were not seeking to help Europe, but that it was Germany they wanted to reconstruct first of all. This sort of argument was very dangerous, and did not fail to have an effect on a large part of our public opinion.

Caught on the horns of a dilemma, and offered the choice between the American credits and the alliance with Russia, the democrats themselves began to hesitate. All Czechs have constantly in mind the German danger which has threatened them since the Middle Ages. From the beginning of the nineteenth century it was to Russia that they had turned in the hope of finding a counterweight against German expansionism. After the experience of Munich this hope had greatly increased.

I realized that if we refused to bow to the will of Stalin the public would applaud us on the first day, only to stone us later, when the consequences of our refusal made themselves felt. The Social Democrats in particular would not have followed us. And even within the other parties there would have been debates when they were faced with such an embarrassing alternative.

I was torn between the desire to reject the outrageous demand of Moscow categorically and the necessity of abasing ourselves before Stalin's ultimatum. After having thought it over at length, I was, alas, compelled to recognize that we had no alternative but to give way.

Zenkl and Stransky had reached the same conclusion. The discussions at the Cabinet meeting, and especially a long conversation with Clementis, convinced them that the Soviet Government would not compromise. They had the impression that our delegation at Moscow was not disposed to resume the argument with the Russians. Zenkl assumed, correctly, that Gottwald had reached an understanding with Stalin behind the backs of Masaryk and Drtina.

For the rest, we knew that we would command no majority in the Cabinet. The Government included nine Communist Ministers, three Social Democrats and twelve belonging to the other three parties (National Socialist, Populist and Slovak Democrat). In this instance Masaryk and Svoboda, who were connected with no party, would undoubtedly have voted for the acceptance of the Russian ultimatum. With these two votes the Communists were assured that the balance would swing in their favour.

I asked Zenkl if he had been able to consult President Benes, who was then at his summer residence of Sezimovo Usti. Zenkl said that he had been able to reach him by telephone. The President thought as we did: that in the circumstances nothing remained for us except to submit.

For all these reasons, we decided to vote for the Government resolution reversing our decision to send a delegation to the Paris Conference. It was only by doing violence to our own feelings and with a sense of deep humiliation that we resigned ourselves to this course.

If we were unable to act contrary to the will of Moscow, at least we refused to accept the reasons by which Clementis, in an official *communiqué*, wished to explain the change of attitude

imposed upon our Government. The Communists, who a few days earlier had voted for participation in the Marshall Plan, did not feel the least embarrassment in proclaiming now that the American offer was unacceptable because it endangered our national independence. In the resolution which they proposed they accepted all the theories of Soviet propaganda and, in addition, presented the withdrawal of the Czechoslovak Government as a spontaneous decision. Servility to Moscow could have been pushed no farther. Zenkl and Stransky protested energetically against this resolution, which would have covered us with ridicule.

While the Communist project was being debated at the Cabinet meeting, I sought, in my sickroom, an acceptable formula to explain our change of attitude.

I suggested proclaiming openly that our Government had taken this decision at the instigation of the Soviet Government, and that the latter contended that since the American project was aimed against the U.S.S.R., the participation of Czechoslovakia would therefore have been incompatible with its alliance with Russia.

Zenkl, to whom I read my draft over the phone, declared himself in complete agreement. When he submitted to the Cabinet a resolution drawn up along these lines, the Communists turned it down flatly. They were afraid of offending the Soviets. But Zenkl and Stransky insisted that the truth be made known. How could public opinion have understood that in an interval of three days the Government should have about-faced on a matter of such importance? After a bitter argument, which lasted more than two hours, the Communists ended by accepting our point of view.

Gottwald meanwhile had telephoned repeatedly from Moscow, first to ask that the Government obey Stalin's order, and later to demand that the governmental decision should be unanimous. During one of these telephonic conversations the Premier had let it be understood that the over-lengthy hesitation of the Cabinet might result in incalculable consequences.

Towards the end of the afternoon of July 10, 1947, a *communiqué* was at last published. It said, among other things:

"It has been decided that the States of central and eastern Europe, with which Czechoslovakia carried on close economic and political relations, based upon her contractual obliga-

tions, will not participate in the Conference of Paris. In these circumstances the participation of Czechoslovakia could be interpreted as a blow to the friendly relations existing between her and the Soviet Union, as well as with her other allies. For this reason, the government has decided unanimously not to take part in the Conference."

CHAPTER VIII

INTERVIEW AT THE KREMLIN

THEY WERE SATISFIED in Moscow. In Prague everyone, with the exception of the Communists and the friends of Fierlinger, was crushed.

With the feeling of astonishment which the mass of the people experienced were mingled indignation and deep discouragement. The shock was terrible. The disappointment caused by the ultimatum of Stalin was as painful as the hopes aroused by the American offer had been great. But without any doubt what produced the sharpest pain was the brutality of the Russian interference and the humiliation which had just been inflicted upon us.

I received visits from several friends that day. They told me that the persons they had passed in the street wore expressions so grave and preoccupied that one might have believed it the morrow of the Munich agreement. The only subject of every conversation was the Soviet intervention. The people were much more revolted at the cavalier fashion in which our sovereignty had been brushed aside than appalled by the economic consequences that would result from our rejection of the Marshall Plan. Every comment that was heard ran along the same lines: "The devil take the dollars; we'll tighten our belts. But are we free men or are we slaves?" A workman who was employed at my home at the time said to me in a sad voice: "Everyone's saying it's another Munich. You will see that this will end badly for us." My wife, who had just been shopping in the city, told me that the name of Munich was on all lips and that never since the liberation had she seen our fellow-citizens so sad and so burdened.

In the evening and during all the following day some worthy persons from the provinces, not only from my constituency, but also from other parts of the country, called on me to ask for an explanation of the upsetting news they had just learned. One peasant woman said to me, with a heart-broken expression: "How impatiently we waited for the Russians during the whole war! How joyfully we hailed them on the day when they came to free us and to chase the Germans out! We thought of them as our brothers. Why have they done this to us?"

When the peasant woman had gone, my wife, who had recently made a trip to England, confided to me: "I feel exactly the same way as that woman. During my stay in England, in many conversations with friends who thought we were only a Soviet colony, I tried to make them understand that so far as Czechoslovakia was concerned, the Russians, since the departure of their army, had behaved with propriety and had not meddled in our affairs. 'We hope,' I told them, 'that it will be possible to remain on good terms with Soviet Russia without being Communists.' After what has just happened, I can no longer defend the same point of view."

We awaited the return of Masaryk and Drtina with understandable impatience. We knew about the conference at the Kremlin only what Gottwald had deigned to tell us in his telegram. Three days later the delegation returned to Prague. Even the Communists did not dare to celebrate Gottwald's arrival.

Masaryk came to see me the next day, after having talked with Benes at his country house. He seemed even graver than usual, and as soon as we were alone he allowed his anger to burst out. "There was nothing to be done," he said, even before he sat down. "You may congratulate yourself that you were not there. It was frightful, and horribly humiliating! Do you know what discouraged me most? The fact that some members of our own delegation did not even realize that we had just been slapped. And you won't believe this: there were even some who showed their pleasure. I blushed for shame!"

Then he told me how the thing happened. On its arrival, about four in the afternoon of July 9, our delegation had been greeted at the Moscow airfield by M. Molotov with the usual ceremonies. It went straight to a private house where the Russians habitually lodged official delegations.

As Masaryk had been told that talks with the Soviet Government would not begin until the next day, he retired to his room to rest. After a time he came down into one of the salons where the Civil Servants of our delegation were gathered. They were conferring on certain economic and commercial questions which were to be the subject of the morrow's conversations. Masaryk, who wanted Gottwald to take part in this conference, sent to ask him to join them. But Reiman, head of Gottwald's office, informed him that the Premier was still sleeping.

An hour later Masaryk again requested Reiman to go

and convey his request to Gottwald. In a few minutes Reiman came back to report, with a broad smile, that Gottwald was still resting and did not wish to be disturbed. Thereupon Masaryk returned to his own room.

A little later Gottwald appeared in the room where the members of our delegation were gathered and announced to them, with an extremely satisfied air: "I have just come from Stalin. Everything is going well."

It is difficult to depict the surprise which these words caused. Thus, not only had Gottwald not informed the other two Ministers of the delegation of his visit to the Kremlin, but he had not hesitated to mislead them. It was only after his return from the Kremlin that he asked them to confer with him in his room.

Before the Civil Servants, Gottwald had shown himself delighted with his conversation with Stalin, doubtless because he regarded them all as Communists. When receiving Masaryk and Drtina he assumed a severe and preoccupied expression.

"Now we're in a pretty pickle because of your policy towards the West!" he declared to them. "I always thought it was a mistake. I have just come from Stalin. Never before have I seen him so beside himself. He reproached me bitterly for having accepted the invitation to participate in the Paris Conference. He does not understand how we could have done it. He insists that we acted exactly as if we were preparing to turn our backs on the Soviets. I thought we were wrong in approving that decision without first referring it to Moscow, but you people were in such a terrible hurry! Now we're in a fine mess! Stalin is furious, and I think he has a right to be. You'll see for yourselves tonight. Stalin wants us to go and see him at 11 p.m."

"I was thunderstruck," Masaryk continued. "For my part, there was no doubt: Gottwald had come to an understanding with Stalin. Here is the stenographic transcript of the interview which Stalin granted us. Read it."

I ran through the pages which he handed me. Here is their gist:

The conference began at eleven in the evening. On the Soviet side Stalin, Molotov and Bodrov, *chargé d'affaires* of the Soviet Embassy in Prague, were present; on the Czechoslovak side, Gottwald, Masaryk, Drtina, Arnost Heidrich (secretary general of the Foreign Ministry) and Jiri Horak, Czechoslovak Ambassador to Moscow.

By way of introduction, Gottwald explained that "the Czechoslovak Government desired to talk over three questions with Generalissimo Stalin and Molotov:

1. Participation in the Paris Conference.
2. The Franco-Czechoslovak treaty.
3. Certain economic and commercial problems."

This agenda proved amply that Gottwald had indeed come to an understanding with Stalin behind the backs of the other Ministers, since our delegation had not been sent to Moscow to discuss our participation in the Paris Conference: it had been charged specifically with consulting the Soviet Government on the subject of the project for a Franco-Czechoslovak treaty and on various commercial questions. Without informing his colleagues of the fact, Gottwald had broadened the programme of his mission: by himself raising the question of our adherence to the Marshall Plan, he indicated that, so far as he was concerned, this business had not been settled, in spite of the unanimous vote of the Cabinet and the publicity given to the matter in the Press.

Gottwald defended himself with skill. He explained that we had accepted the invitation to the Conference of Paris, but with serious reservations; it was therefore still permissible for us to act with complete freedom. "The Czechoslovak Government," he said, "had decided from the beginning to recall its representatives in case of need. We now find ourselves confronted with a new situation, since we are the only Slavic State and the only State of eastern Europe which has accepted the invitation to go to Paris. Is it not natural, therefore, that the Czechoslovak Government should wish to know the point of view of the U.S.S.R.?"

Since Gottwald had put the question in this form, there could be no shadow of a doubt as to Stalin's answer. Here it is word for word, exactly as it was reported in the transcript:

"After the return of Commissar Molotov from Paris, the Government of the U.S.S.R. was informed of the point of view of Yugoslavia. Later Tatarescu* raised the question. At first the Soviet Government did not answer, judging that it would be better to be present at the conference, with the possibility of leaving it if that should be necessary. But after the arrival of the reports of the delegates of the U.S.S.R.,

* Of Roumania.

another point of view prevailed: the credits which are involved in the Marshall Plan are very uncertain and it became established that through the bondage of these credits, the Great Powers were seeking to form a Western bloc and to isolate the Soviet Union."

The Generalissimo went on:

"France has no programme for the re-establishment of her economy; she is in a delicate financial situation. Great Britain is also the prey of grave financial embarrassment and is struggling with difficulties of an economic order; yet in spite of that, these two Great Powers are seeking to draw up the programme for the economic recovery of Europe. Now the principal creditor is the United States, for neither France nor England has a cent. For all these reasons the Government of the U.S.S.R. does not consider the Paris plan as genuine and, basing its opinion on objective reasons, it has come to the conclusion that in reality it is solely a device for the isolation of the U.S.S.R.

"The Government of the U.S.S.R. has consequently sent telegrams to Tatarescu, to Yugoslavia and to the Poles. The Poles at first hesitated, but they decided later not to accept the invitation.

"So the Soviet Government has been surprised to note that you are acting differently.

"For us this question puts our alliance at stake. Besides, you will gain no immediate advantages by being present at the Conference. You certainly do not want credits which will threaten your economic and political sovereignty. The conditions attached to loans will certainly be onerous also.

"We look upon this matter as a question of principle, on which our friendship with Czechoslovakia depends. If you go to Paris, you will prove that you wish to participate in an action designed to isolate the Soviet Union. All the Slavic States have refused. Even Albania was not afraid to reject the invitation. That is why, in our opinion, you ought to reverse your decision."

Having read this first part of the transcript, I asked Masaryk if Stalin had seemed irritated or even enraged at us, as Gottwald had maintained. Masaryk remarked that, on the contrary, he had been surprised by the benevolence and apparent calm of the Generalissimo, but that his tone was no less categorical: in

short, he hardly admitted any rebuttal. For the rest, Stalin had not thought it necessary to explain to our delegates how the Soviet Government had reached the conclusion that the Marshall Plan had for its aim the isolation of Russia, though she had been invited to take part in it. Nor had Stalin explained the reasons on which he based his assertion that the American offer would bring no immediate advantages.

"What did you answer Stalin?" I asked.

"Gottwald said nothing," our Foreign Minister told me. "With a satisfied smile, he signed to me to speak. I pointed out that we had urgent need of credits, since we depended on the Western countries for from 60 to 80 per cent of our raw materials. I asked him especially to make our withdrawal easier: I proposed that we should go through the formality of attending the Conference only to leave it at the earliest possible moment."

But Stalin remained unshakable. "If you take part in the Conference," he said, "you will find yourself in a false position. It will be a rupture of the front. It will be a success for the Western Powers. Switzerland and Sweden are still hesitating. By accepting, you will certainly influence their decision. We know that you are friends. In the Soviet Government no one doubts the friendship of Czechoslovakia for the Soviet Union. If you take part in the Conference you will prove by that act that you allow yourselves to be used as a tool against the Soviet Union. Neither the people nor the Government of the U.S.S.R. would tolerate that."

Everyone knows what that kind of warning means in Stalin's mouth, especially when it is addressed to a small neighbouring country.

"Drtina made a last attempt to explain the special position in which we found ourselves," Masaryk continued. "Once again he recalled the importance of our trade with the Western countries and emphasized that, contrary to what was the case in the other Slavic States, this factor determined the standard of living of our population. He did not hide his fear of seeing Czechoslovakia impoverished if, from the economic point of view, we detached ourselves from the Western countries.

"Drtina's arguments had no more effect than mine. Stalin objected that our trade balance with the Western countries was an adverse one, and that, since our exports to the West were not substantial enough to pay for our imports, we were compelled to pay the difference in foreign exchange."

Here I interrupted Masaryk to point out that the pretext which Stalin used to prevent us from participating in the American plan constituted, on the contrary, a crushing argument in favour of our adherence to the Plan. It was exactly because we needed foreign exchange to pay for our purchases in the United States and Great Britain that it was urgently necessary for us to obtain American credits.

Masaryk showed me in the transcript that Gottwald himself had reminded Stalin that we had to pay in foreign exchange and that we had not enough of it. But Stalin retorted, laughing, "We know that you have enough." And, turning to Molotov he said, still laughing, "They thought they could lay their hands on some dollars, and they didn't want to miss the chance."

Masaryk burst out angrily: "You see with what arrogance, with what irony, they treated us! I really had great difficulty in controlling myself."

Then, more calmly:

"Since it was so obviously necessary to renounce American help, I tried at least to obtain some economic compensation from the Russians."

Stalin declared himself ready to help us. However, the industrial products which he proposed to buy from us (pipe for pipelines, electric motors and other metallurgical items) were those which we could sell advantageously to the Western countries.

The only effective aid which Stalin promised us was the delivery of Russian wheat. We had urgent need of it because our 1947 harvest was proving a very bad one. Two hundred thousand tons of wheat as well as some barley and oats were thus to be supplied to us.

The Russian wheat was extremely valuable to us. But it could not make up for the losses to us that would result from the boycotting of the Marshall Plan. Moreover, the necessity of importing large quantities of wheat for which we should be obliged to barter industrial products would result in the diminution of our exports to the Western countries, and thereby cause us to feel the lack of foreign exchange even more acutely.

"After having discussed the economic questions," Masaryk continued, " Gottwald, returning to the political aspect of the problem, asked Stalin to help us out of the difficult situation in which we found ourselves. Stalin answered: 'You can say to Paris that recently it has appeared that participation in the

Conference risks being interpreted as a blow struck at the Soviet Union, all the more so since none of the Slavic States and the countries of eastern Europe have accepted the invitation.' " And he added that the more quickly we acted, the better it would be.

I was not able to prevent myself from smiling at the reflection that our Communists had shown themselves more royalist than the King: for Stalin was not at all opposed to our saying openly that our *volte face* was the consequence of the attitude adopted by the Soviet Government, while the Communist Ministers had been bent on giving the impression that the decision was a voluntary one, with the aim of hiding Moscow's game.

Masaryk seemed lost in thought. After a moment of silence, he said: "They backed us up against the wall while pretending to treat us as friends. Stalin was, as always, very friendly, almost jovial; but he did not give way an inch. The game was clear: he had come to an understanding with Gottwald; the interview with us was nothing but a formality."

Once more Masaryk lost his temper:

"My dear friend, we are nothing but vassals! The saddest thing is that there are people of our own blood who are doing this dirty work. The Communists have not an ounce of patriotic pride. They are slaves of Moscow, and they rejoice in their servitude."

I asked Masaryk for what reasons, in his opinion, the Soviets had refused American help. Their country having been particularly devastated, they had every reason to accept it to hasten reconstruction.

"They claim that America wants to isolate them," I remarked. "By rejecting the Marshall Plan, they are isolating themselves."

"I see only one explanation for the curious attitude of the Soviets," Masaryk answered. "They do not want Europe to recover economically; they are afraid of the success of the reconstruction of western Europe. I cannot explain to you just why, but as I listened to Stalin I had more and more clearly the feeling that he is counting on war. Everything they do is done with one aim in view: war."

This interpretation did not fail to surprise me and to cause me to think. I knew that Masaryk was gifted with intuition and had a very sure instinct in such matters; he had often divined realities that were not yet apparent to most persons.

"If you are right," I said, "the future is hardly brilliant for us."

"You might say it is a nightmare." And with a more and more downcast air he added: "When I think that in the next war the nation will be divided into two camps, that the citizens of a single country will slaughter each other . . .!"

Masaryk left me late at night. I could not sleep. For a long time I thought over what he had said. Even better than before, I now realized the scope of the developments which had just occurred. Nothing very spectacular had happened: we had been invited to an international conference, and our powerful neighbour had prevented us from taking part in it. Yet this apparently insignificant episode was the first act of a great tragedy which was to shake our country to its foundations. We had ceased to be allies to become vassals.

What struck me still more was that we were not the only ones involved. As had so often been the case in our history, our country was the seismograph which registered deep and distant shocks. The great clash between the U.S.S.R. and the United States was in preparation: the interventions of Moscow in Prague and in Warsaw were only the first rumbles of the approaching storm.

CHAPTER IX

MOSCOW FROWNS ON THE FRANCO-CZECHOSLOVAK ALLIANCE

AT THE VERY moment when it was forbidding us to benefit from American aid, the Soviet Government was also torpedoing the negotiations which we had entered upon with France in order to conclude a new treaty of alliance and of mutual assistance. These two events not only coincided in time: they were both set down in the general plan of Soviet policy, which consisted of gaining control of all the countries of Central Europe to convert them into a rampart. In isolating herself, Soviet Russia also isolated the States which fell within her sphere of influence.

The disapproving attitude of Moscow towards the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty was one of the symptoms which marked the end of the era of co-operation between the U.S.S.R. and the Western Powers. The bridges which still existed were being demolished, and Moscow did not permit new ones to be built. So on the one hand Czechoslovakia had been prevented from adhering to a plan which would have hastened her reconstruction and, on the other, the strengthening of her political position by an alliance with France had come up against an obstacle. Like all the other countries of central and eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia had to be integrated into the Soviet bloc. In this way the checking of the Franco-Czechoslovak negotiations was one of the signs that presaged the division of the world into two opposing blocs.

The negotiations between Prague and Paris had begun in the spring of 1945. They had, indeed, been prepared for during the war, the two Governments having felt before the end of hostilities the need for giving new expression and a solid foundation to their traditional friendship.

From the legal point of view the alliance between the two countries was still in force, the treaties of 1924 and 1925 never having been denounced. But from the political point of view they had been gravely shaken by the Munich agreement: there were many who despaired of Franco-Czechoslovak friendship, which they believed was finally destroyed.

I had fought against this opinion from the first. I did not

in any way under-estimate the disastrous consequences of the policy of the Munichites; I was nevertheless convinced that even an event as catastrophic as the Munich agreement would not destroy the bonds between two countries whose interests and anxieties were often identical, in particular where their national security was concerned. The policy of Munich had struck a mortal blow at the independence of Czechoslovakia and dangerously compromised the security of France and of all the countries which were threatened by Nazi aggression. It was contrary to the traditional policy of France, whose leaders since François I had always sought to assure themselves of allies not only in the west, but also in the east of Europe. I remained certain that Paris would sooner or later return to this conception, and I knew also that Czechoslovakia would always have need of France, the strongest neighbour of Germany and, of all the Great Powers, the one which best understood the German problem in all its intricacy.

I had still another reason, no less important, for defending the project of our alliance with France. We had all been in agreement with Benes in believing, after Munich, that war with Germany was inevitable and that Russia would be drawn into the conflict. We were convinced that Germany would be crushed. In these circumstances the victory of the Allies would also be a Soviet victory, so that, because of her geographical position, the Soviet Union was destined to become our principal ally on the day when she would be called upon to play an active role in European politics. We were therefore justified in foreseeing that we would be much more dependent on our Russian neighbour than on France, who, after the First World War, because of her geographical situation and her democratic regime, had always shown the greatest respect for our national sovereignty.

This time, in order to defend our independence, it was in western Europe that we needed a counterweight: France was the only great Continental Power capable of offering us this guarantee. In spite of the sympathy and understanding which Great Britain and the United States had shown towards us during and after the war, the Anglo-Saxon countries were too far from us and were too often tempted to under-estimate the German danger to interest themselves in our situation to the same extent as France. Finally we hoped that once peace was made, co-operation between the East and the West, which

events had shown to be one of the essential conditions for victory, would continue for many years more, and we had reasons for thinking that among the great Western Powers France would be the first, in her own interest, to defend that conception.

No hostile feeling towards the U.S.S.R. was involved in our desire to counterbalance the excessive influence of Moscow by an alliance with France and a friendly co-operation with the other Western Powers. To-day more than ever I persist in believing that a free and independent Czechoslovakia cannot exist except in a balanced Europe in which the Western Powers and Russia are trying to live on good terms. Even the events of February 1948 have not been able to shake this conviction, which remains the keystone of my whole conception of our national policy.

During the war I never let an opportunity pass to emphasize that a strong France was indispensable to a free Europe and to affirm that we should be well advised to renew our alliance with her. I touched on this question as early as July 1940, during my first conversation with General de Gaulle. The leader of Free France was in agreement with me that it was in the interests of the two nations to resume the traditional policy which had been ours up to the time of the Munich agreement. A most friendly co-operation was established between our exiled Government in London and the movement of General de Gaulle. In short, from the very beginning, we considered the French National Committee as the sole legitimate representative of the interests of France, and we carried on with it the relations of one government with another.

In August 1942 our negotiations with the Foreign Office had ended in a declaration by the terms of which the British Government solemnly repudiated the Munich Pact, declaring that it "considered itself as freed from all the engagements which it had taken on this occasion". In a similar agreement concluded with the French National Committee the latter went even farther: it did not content itself with repudiating the Munich agreement, but formally recognized the Czechoslovak frontiers as they had existed before Munich. At the same time, the French National Committee and the Czechoslovak Government proclaimed: "One of the fundamental aims of their policies is to act in such a manner that the Franco-Czechoslovak alliance will emerge from the terrible ordeals of the present universal crisis strengthened and definitely assured."

On December 12, 1943, we concluded a treaty of alliance with the U.S.S.R. Several months later, as the Red Army neared the frontiers of Czechoslovakia, we began to negotiate a special agreement with the Soviet Government on the administrative status of the liberated Czechoslovak territories. This agreement, which had been the subject of several weeks of negotiations between Ambassador Lebedev and myself, was signed on May 8, 1944, in London.

So far we had not yet concluded a treaty with any of the Western Powers. I judged the moment had come to negotiate with the French National Committee if not a treaty, at least a formal agreement preparing the way for an alliance. I met with the greatest understanding on the part of M. Maurice Dejean, who was then the diplomatic representative of the French National Committee with our Government.

My relations with M. Dejean were most cordial. He was greatly interested in Czechoslovakia; since 1938, when he had been attached to the French Embassy in Berlin, he had followed with attention and sympathy the tragic events of which our country had become the theatre after the Munich agreement.

In conformity with the traditions of French foreign policy, of which the last great representative had been Louis Barthou, his conception was similar to our own: knowing Germany through and through, and realizing the constant danger she represented for Europe, he favoured co-operation between the East and the West. In the framework of an international system based on alliances between the U.S.S.R. and the Western Powers, he attributed a most particular importance to Czechoslovakia.

I found a sure friend in M. Dejean, whose great loyalty I appreciated, and whose passionate interest in international politics I admired. I often had recourse to the advice of this wise and erudite diplomat. Together with the British Ambassador to our Government, Sir Philip Nichols, M. Dejean was the foreign personality with whom I maintained the best personal and official relations. After the war M. Dejean was for three years Ambassador of France to Prague, where he won the sympathy and esteem of all political groups.

The friendship which attached me to M. Dejean considerably facilitated the negotiations upon which I entered with him in May 1944. Our talks took a turn which was all the more favourable when, on the occasion when General de Gaulle, installed in Algiers, proclaimed the French National Committee the Pro-

visional Government of the French Republic, I proposed to President Benes that we should recognize the Provisional Government of the French Republic without waiting for the decision of the other allies of France. The President having agreed to my proposal, we were, with the Belgians, the first State formally to accept the Committee of Algiers as the Government of the new France.

As it was not possible to conclude a treaty of alliance at this period, I suggested to M. Dejean that we study a plan for a declaration in which both countries would engage themselves to renew the old treaty as soon as possible. Letters exchanged between the Premier of our Government, Msgr. Sramek, and General de Gaulle, in which the necessity of renewing our treaty of alliance had been mentioned, as well as several important declarations made in the same spirit by French and Czechoslovak political personalities, could serve as a basis for a document of this sort; and this document would have all the more weight if it were signed by a Provisional Government of the French Republic already recognized by the other Powers.

M. Dejean, following up my suggestion, at once proposed to President Benes that the declaration in question be published on the occasion of his nomination as Ambassador to the Czechoslovak Government.

Benes having received this idea very favourably, M. Dejean prepared a draft together with myself, the text of which was approved, with a few changes, on June 8, 1944, by our President and by General de Gaulle during his visit to London.

In this declaration, which was signed on August 22, 1944, the French and Czechoslovak Governments proclaimed that since the Munich Pact and all its consequential measures were considered null and void, the relations between our two States were re-established as they had existed before the said pact. Moreover, the two countries were in agreement that in due time such modifications and additions should be made to the existing treaties as would be judged necessary to render closer and more effective the co-operation between France and Czechoslovakia within the framework of the general security and the reconstruction of Europe and of the world.

Thus Czechoslovakia established the foundation for an alliance with a Western country, and more precisely with the very one which was the best placed of the Great Powers of the West to understand the needs of Czechoslovakia and of the

other States neighbouring on Germany on the day when the question of finding a solution to the German problem should arise.

No sooner had the declaration been signed than Fierlinger (who was then Ambassador to Moscow) put his finger in the pie. He reproached us for having concluded an engagement without having first consulted Moscow, and expressed his fear that the Russians would interpret our declaration as an act incompatible with the Soviet-Czechoslovak alliance. To which I answered that although nothing in our treaty obliged us to consult the U.S.S.R., I had, before the signing of the document, informed Lebedev, Soviet Ambassador to our Government, of our intentions, as, for that matter, I had informed the British and American Governments.

Fierlinger's telegram was a bad omen; it compelled us to realize that we should soon have to face many difficulties in our relations with the Soviets. Our Communists and certain "fellow-travellers" of Fierlinger's type had a conception of our alliance with the U.S.S.R. which was quite different from ours; according to them, apparently, all our political activities ought to conform to Soviet desires, and it is probable that this interpretation was that of Soviet governmental circles. It seemed, besides, that Moscow looked with a jaundiced eye upon our efforts to preserve and to develop friendly relations with the West. The courtesy of Ambassador Lebedev when I informed him of the signing of our declaration had not sufficed to hide the glacial effect which this news had had on him.

At that moment the Soviet Government could not easily take a stand against the Franco-Czechoslovak declaration. During these war-time years it was on excellent terms with the French National Committee and, later, with the Provisional Government of France. Moscow then gave the impression that she had the intention of effectively supporting resisting France and of renewing friendly relations with her after the war. On December 10, 1944, a Franco-Soviet treaty of alliance and mutual assistance had been signed at the Kremlin. We were therefore all the more astonished to find Russia becoming anxious about a declaration signed with a Western Power with which she maintained the best of relations.

In a report to the Cabinet on Fierlinger's telegram—a telegram which aroused the astonishment and disapproval of all the members of the Cabinet—I insisted on the necessity of defending

our independence with the greatest vigilance, and once again I underlined the importance of our understanding with France and of the friendship which linked us to Great Britain and the United States, to counterbalance our alliance with Soviet Russia.

What I have said about this incident will suffice to define the tendencies of the policy which the non-Communist parties endeavoured to realize in Czechoslovakia after the war. We sincerely desired to remain faithful to our alliance with Russia, but we were also anxious to maintain friendly relations with the Western nations.

Unfortunately it was beyond our power to put this policy into effect because from the moment of the liberation Soviet influence was predominant.

CHAPTER X

DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN PARIS AND PRAGUE

THE END OF the war found us still as resolved as ever to maintain the best possible relations with the West. The alliance with France seemed to be one of the surest means to implement this programme.

It was on July 14, 1945, that the first major demonstration of Franco-Czechoslovak friendship took place in Prague. Its success was due particularly to the efforts of Count de Keller, who was then *chargé d'affaires* at the French Embassy during the absence of the Ambassador, M. Dejean, who was a delegate to the San Francisco Conference. Count de Keller had won everybody's friendship by his understanding attitude and by the active aid which he gave whenever there was an opportunity to encourage the resumption of Franco-Czechoslovak relations.

Several weeks later I had occasion to welcome, with the greatest satisfaction, M. Hervé Alphand, director of economic and commercial affairs at the Quai d'Orsay. Scarcely three months after the liberation of our territory he arrived in Prague to negotiate a provisional trade treaty. M. Alphand, with whom I had often been in touch during our years of exile in London, was a sincere friend of Czechoslovakia. His plan also contained a political aim: the treaty was, in fact, to demonstrate the desire of France and Czechoslovakia to renew their pre-war co-operation in every field. I accepted with enthusiasm, and proposed to go to Paris to sign the agreement as Minister of Foreign Trade.

The negotiations progressed rapidly, so that on October 23, 1945, I was able to go to Paris. It was the first official visit of a Czechoslovak Minister to the French capital since the end of hostilities. M. Georges Bidault, French Foreign Minister, whom I had known well before the war, and who had won the hearts of all Czechoslovaks by his courageous campaign in *L'Aube** against the Munich Pact, invested my visit with the character of a Franco-Czechoslovak political demonstration. On October 24 the trade treaty was signed at the Quai d'Orsay in a

* The Paris newspaper of which Bidault was editor before the war.

ceremonious fashion which far transcended the ordinary setting for a co-operation still on so small a scale. But M. Bidault desired to take advantage of this occasion to show that France had resumed her friendly relations with her Czechoslovak ally and that she had in no way renounced her interest in Central Europe. The French Foreign Minister did not fail to underline this intention in the moving speech which he made after a luncheon given in my honour.

General de Gaulle, who was then Premier, received me on October 25 and accorded me a long interview. I was surprised to discover that he was already following the evolution of Soviet policy with much anxiety. He feared that Russia, intoxicated by victory, would permit herself to give way to expansionist tendencies, and he wondered if Czechoslovakia would succeed in defending herself against the wave of Communism which was sweeping over Central Europe.

I tried to dispel his fears. Although he remained sceptical, the General admitted that we were undoubtedly the only country in central Europe which could hope to withstand the Communist danger, and apropos of this, he expressed the greatest confidence in President Benes. "You are fortunate to have at the head of your State a man of such authority," he repeated several times. At the end of our conversation, General de Gaulle said that France understood the difficult situation in which we had found ourselves since the end of the war, and he affirmed that she was ready to help us.

During the three days I spent in Paris I again saw several politicians who were tried friends of our country. I also had the opportunity of making contact with some persons who had won their spurs in the resistance movement. I took advantage of these conversations to emphasize that it was in the interest of Czechoslovakia, and of Europe in general, that our alliance with Soviet Russia should be complemented by an alliance with France.

I did not hide this idea either from Jacques Duclos, chairman of the Communist parliamentary group, or from M. Tillon, Air Minister, also a Communist, with whom I had friendly conversations. They were both in complete agreement with me, and expressed the desire to see the Franco-Czechoslovak alliance renewed as soon as possible. At this time the French Communists still participated in the Government.

I returned to Prague highly satisfied with my trip to Paris.

I had gained the impression that Franco-Czechoslovak co-operation would very shortly find expression in a formal alliance. My hope seemed all the more well-founded since all the French political parties were in agreement on this matter.

My mission had been greeted with the greatest sympathy by our people. The non-Communists were happy to renew good relations with the West; the Communists saw no objection to a *rapprochement* with France.

It was the period when the horizon was becoming brighter for Czechoslovak democrats. On October 28, 1945, the Provisional National Assembly met for the first time—a body which, by its control over the executive, would enable the democratic parties to oppose the Communists in a more effective manner than had previously been the case. Moreover, thanks to the initiative and skill of Mr. Laurence Steinhardt, United States Ambassador to Prague, an agreement had been concluded between the United States and the U.S.S.R. Governments concerning the evacuation of Czechoslovak territory by the American and Soviet armies. The departure of the Soviet army caused considerable psychological relief. From the economic point of view also the situation was improving.

In this atmosphere of comparative stability, relations with the Western countries began to develop in a more favourable manner, both in the political sphere and in those of economics and culture. Thus when, in the spring of 1946, Foreign Minister Masaryk asked the Government's authorization to enter upon negotiations with France with a view to renewing the alliance between our two countries, his proposal was received with unanimous satisfaction.

In June 1946 the Czechoslovak Foreign Minister submitted to the French Government a draft for a treaty of alliance conceived on the model of our treaty with the Soviet Union, by the terms of which the contracting parties promised mutual aid to one another against Germany and against any other State that should ally itself to Germany. The discussions with the French Government did not seem likely to be particularly difficult, and we hoped to see them concluded satisfactorily fairly quickly.

Contrary to what we had hoped, and without our knowing exactly why, the talks dragged on and lasted several months. When the peace treaties with Germany's satellite States were signed in Paris in February 1947, Masaryk and Clementis

reached an agreement with M. Bidault to facilitate the conversations on the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty, and an official *communiqué* was published to this effect.

When M. Bidault visited Moscow in March 1947 to take part in the conference of the Big Four he had intended to stop at Prague on his return journey to pay an official visit to the Czechoslovak Government. This visit did not take place; after the deadlock at the Moscow Conference, M. Bidault had to return directly to Paris, where a governmental crisis had arisen.

It then appeared that serious complications had retarded the negotiations, the French answer to our proposal being notably slow in coming. For reasons unknown to us it arrived only in May 1947. In certain circles it was maintained that the English had asked the French Government not to sign a treaty with Czechoslovakia before concluding an alliance with Great Britain.

The French counter-project differed from the Czechoslovak proposal in one extremely important point: the pledge to give each other mutual aid was to operate only against Germany, and not against other States which might be associated with her in an act of aggression.

The Communists immediately declared that the French counter-project was unacceptable. Nor were the other parties satisfied. We wanted the promise of mutual assistance also to include any possible allies of Germany. We were thinking especially of Hungary, whose policy, under the leadership of the Communist Matyas Rakosi, was no less nationalist than it had been under Admiral Horthy. Nevertheless we hoped to succeed in reconciling the two points of view.

Unfortunately, since the month of June 1946, the time at which the Czechoslovak draft had been presented, the international atmosphere had greatly changed. The tension between America and Russia was increasing from month to month. The conference of the four Foreign Ministers in Moscow in March and April 1947 had broken down completely. Not only on the question of the German frontiers, in particular the eastern frontiers, but also on the problems of reparations, of the Ruhr and of the future constitution of Germany the Russian thesis was exactly opposite to that of America.

So far as France was concerned, she shared the Russian views on certain points (for example, on the question of inter-

national control of the Ruhr), but in general she followed the same line as the Anglo-Saxon Powers. The Soviets looked with a most unfriendly eye upon the pact which France had signed with England on March 4, 1947. They maintained that it was the nucleus for a western bloc directed against Russia. The French for their part could not approve of the Soviet conception of a centralized Germany. Moreover, Molotov aroused the astonishment and indignation of the French by opposing the annexation of the Saar by France. In the end, relations between France and Russia grew appreciably worse, until at the end of April 1947 a new Government was formed in Paris without the Communists.

It goes without saying that the attitude of the Czechoslovak Communists towards France was always parallel to that of the Soviets. As long as relations between Paris and Moscow were good they were in favour of a treaty between our two countries. From the day when tension made itself felt between Russia and France they sabotaged the negotiations. In the circumstances which we have just described, they ceased to show the slightest interest in the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty. In their Press they put all the blame on France, maintaining that a government in Paris more and more submissive to the influence of international reaction no longer desired an alliance with "the progressive and popular Czechoslovak democracy". They used this argument to support their theory that only the Soviet Union was ready to aid us whenever we should be in danger. The hesitant attitude of the French Government, alas, strengthened their propaganda.

At the end of April and the beginning of May I made an official journey to Belgium and France to visit the fairs of Brussels and Paris. I was able to see for myself how much distrust of Russia had increased among westerners and how greatly anti-Communist feeling had sharpened. Everyone was wondering whether the Czechoslovak democrats would still be able to prevent the Sovietization of their country. During a lunch given by M. van Stratten, Belgian Minister of Foreign Trade, a Belgian diplomat said to me with a sceptical smile:

"Your policy of simultaneous co-operation with the U.S.S.R. and the West is correct, and we admire the Czechoslovak democrats who seek to carry it out with so much perseverance, in spite of all difficulties. But how much longer will you be permitted to pursue it? The world is dividing—or, more exactly, it is already divided—into two blocs, and you will inevitably be

drawn into the Soviet orbit. Moscow will not be willing to tolerate the democratic regime of M. Benes for very long. For that matter, she will not be able to, for war is drawing nearer."

Like the Belgian diplomat, French politicians and businessmen expressed to me more or less openly their fears concerning our country: they asked themselves if Czechoslovakia would be in a condition to maintain the comparative independence she had safeguarded so far. They were all under the spell of the breakdown of the Moscow Conference. It was believed everywhere that agreement was impossible because the Russians were showing themselves to be unmanageable and everyone was convinced that Europe would inevitably divide into two camps. It was not believed that war was necessarily unavoidable, except perhaps in economic circles, where the greatest fear was felt. An eminent French journalist just back from the Moscow Conference told me that the Americans had shown themselves to be deeply anxious; they found in the Europe of 1947 most disquieting resemblances to the Europe of 1939.

To the conclusion from this that the iron curtain would be clamped down over Czechoslovakia was but a step. But if our country was to be compelled sooner or later to suffer the consequences of the splitting of the world, our French friends still hoped that it would be possible to postpone the danger for at least a little longer. In France, as in Belgium, it was known that Czechoslovakia was in a more favourable situation than the other countries of central Europe; she had been able to safeguard a great part of her civic liberties and she maintained with the West commercial, cultural and even political relations which were more extensive than those of any of her neighbours. Everyone counted also on President Benes, who enjoyed great prestige in the Western countries. For that matter, the Russians at that time showed themselves much more meticulous towards us than towards the other countries in their sphere of influence.

M. Bidault assured me that he was most desirous that the Franco-Czechoslovak alliance should be signed as quickly as possible. As soon as the texts had been agreed upon, he added, he would go to Prague to sign the treaty, after which the French Government would be very happy in its turn to welcome President Benes to Paris.

In the meantime, Benes, for his part, had announced to the President of the French Republic that he would be happy to visit him soon after the signature of the treaty, to which he

attached a very special importance. M. Vincent Auriol, who granted me a long interview, asked me to express to Benes the pleasure he felt at the idea of welcoming him in the near future. "We will show M. Benes, by the reception we are planning for him," he said, "that France remains faithful to her friendship for Czechoslovakia and that she has not forgotten the great services which your President has rendered us."

These evidences of sympathy and of friendship on the part of French politicians had touched me deeply. Back in Prague, I was nevertheless worried. I was somewhat discouraged by the growing distrust of Western circles towards the U.S.S.R. and by their fear of seeing Europe divided definitely into two blocs. Moreover, I doubted if the French counter-project on the text of our treaty of alliance could be accepted by our Government. I had noted that M. Duclos, with whom I had talked at length during my visit to Paris, showed himself more reserved on the subject of the treaty than in the autumn of 1945. In 1947, it will be recalled, the French Communists were no longer participating in the Government.

CHAPTER XI

THE BRIDGES TO THE WEST ARE CUT

My apprehension unfortunately proved justified; for as soon as the debate on the French counter-project opened in the Cabinet, Secretary of State Clementis declared that it was unacceptable. Gottwald in turn held that a treaty which did not guarantee us the help of France against future allies of Germany had no value for us. The non-Communist Ministers engaged in argument with their Communist colleagues. The point of view which I defended was this:

"We should continue our talks with the French Government," I argued, "to try to convince it of the accuracy of our thesis, according to which it is desirable that our engagements should not concern Germany alone, but also any States which may join her. But even should France refuse to accept the clause which we are proposing, it would be wrong to abandon the treaty: it will be better to have a treaty with France guaranteeing us at least against Germany, who is our principal enemy and our common enemy, than to be left with no alliance at all."

Thereupon one of the Communist Ministers remarked that Germany no longer represented a serious danger. Immediately Zenkl exclaimed: "Then against whom do you want to conclude a treaty? What State are we thinking of when we speak of those which could join Germany directly or in any other fashion?" The question remained unanswered.

The interminable debates within the Cabinet concerning the treaty were due to the fact that Communists and non-Communists, while both defended the Czechoslovak formula for the project, interpreted it in a different manner: by "the potential allies of Germany" the Communists understood, first of all, the United States and Great Britain, while we non-Communists were thinking especially of Hungary.

Soviet propaganda was beginning to accuse the United States and Great Britain of wishing to use Germany against the U.S.S.R. and the other Slavic States. If, the Muscovites thought, France should accept this engagement, she would annoy America and England and make the formation of a Western bloc more difficult. If she rejected it she would make it

easier for the Soviets to form and consolidate the Eastern bloc, and would prevent Czechoslovakia and Poland, as well as the other States of Central Europe, from strengthening their position in relation to Soviet Russia by allying themselves to a Western Power. The negotiations which the Bulgarians undertook with us several months later, with a view to concluding a Bulgarian-Czechoslovak treaty, demonstrated by the more precise wording which they proposed that I had hit on the right explanation.

The argument in the Cabinet on the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty became sharper and sharper, setting the two main divisions of the Coalition against each other. One day one of the democratic Ministers objected to a colleague on the other side: "If you are right in saying that for the moment there is no German danger, even our alliance with the Soviet Union would be pointless." The answer was disarming. "That is an entirely different matter," the Communist contented himself with retorting.

In their opposition to the French counter-project, the Communists put forward still another argument: the Soviet Government was engaged in negotiating a revision of the Anglo-Soviet treaty; if we accepted the French formula, they maintained, we should weaken the position of the Soviets in relation to Great Britain, since the latter did not in fact desire that the treaty should be directed also against possible allies of Germany.

This argument did not fail to surprise us, because the Anglo-Soviet pact did in fact contain the clause "against Germany and her possible allies", and, so far as we knew, the British had shown no desire to suppress that clause. It is true that some weeks later Stalin informed our delegation which went to Moscow to ask the opinion of the Soviet Government on the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty that the English wanted to limit their engagement to aid against Germany. But even in this case we did not understand why this Anglo-Soviet difference should prevent us from concluding our alliance with France. It could be nothing other than a pretext on the part of Moscow and our Communists.

As for France, her treaty with the U.S.S.R., as well as her alliance with Great Britain, was directed against Germany alone, and nowhere was any mention made of the latter's possible allies. Therefore I pointed out to my Communist colleagues that it seemed to me difficult to ask France for

guarantees broader than those which she had granted to her other allies, from which I deduced that the French counter-project was in no way inspired by unfriendly feelings towards us, as the Communists opined.

It is to be regretted that what made the negotiations so difficult was the fact that on both sides considerations of domestic politics triumphed over the national interest. In certain French circles a rather marked reserve was evident towards our regime because it was a socializing Government. The Czechoslovak Communists, on their side, had evinced no haste to sign an understanding with France ever since their comrades had been excluded from the French Government.

During the veritable polemics which we carried on at Cabinet meetings on this subject it sometimes happened that in an outburst of anger one or another of the members of the Government, forgetting to confine himself to official arguments, would expose his cards without intending to do so. Thus one day, a Communist Minister known for his ardour and impulsiveness shot out at us: "Why so much haste all of a sudden? It took the French Government a year to answer our proposal. Undoubtedly M. Bidault was not pleased to see that it was the French Communists who were most insistent on the signature of a treaty with Czechoslovakia. It is at least curious that now that the Communists are no longer in the Government M. Bidault has been seized by a sudden desire to arrive at an agreement. It is impossible not to believe that his Government, deprived of its Communists, badly needs some striking success."

"And how about you? You are against the treaty now because your friends are no longer in the French Government," one of our group answered.

Whereupon the Communist confessed: "We have no desire to ally ourselves to reactionaries; our allies can only be found among the progressive elements of the French people, as is the case for other peoples."

In his conversations with the Ministers of all parties President Benes insisted strongly that the treaty with France should be concluded as quickly as possible. He considered it an important complement to the treaties which already bound us to the Soviet Union, to Yugoslavia and to Poland. He was all the more anxious to conclude it because we were shortly to open negotiations with Roumania and Bulgaria, and he judged that by this

action we would have an opportunity to demonstrate our will not to orient ourselves exclusively towards the U.S.S.R.

One day when we were talking this matter over between ourselves Benes said to me: "It will give us a window opening on the West. The more the Soviet circle tightens about us, the more important it is that we tighten the bonds which unite us to France, as well as to the Anglo-Saxon countries."

When I gave him an account of my visit to Belgium and France, I told him that I had tried to influence our French friends not to engage themselves against Germany exclusively.

"You did well," the President said, "and I hope that we shall end up by finding a wording that will satisfy both parties. Clementis has been trying to convince me that the French counter-project is unacceptable, and I reminded him that we had paid the price to learn that a treaty, even if it contains the clearest and broadest engagements, is of value only if there is an intention of respecting it. It is not the exact words that matter: what counts is the spirit behind the treaty, and at the decisive moment everything depends on the good faith with which its signatories implement their engagements. I also remarked to Clementis that our treaty with Russia would have only a comparative importance if and when the Soviet Union reaches an understanding with Germany, which could very well happen within the next twenty years—that is, within the period when our treaty remains in force."

President Benes was so completely persuaded of the necessity of an alliance with France that he did not wait for the results of the diplomatic talks between Paris and Prague to announce to President Vincent Auriol as early as the month of May that he would visit Paris immediately after the signing of the treaty.

Unfortunately the urgings of Benes remained without effect on the Communists. When, after a long debate in the Cabinet, it was decided to ask the opinion of the Soviet Government, Gottwald drew up, with the help of the Foreign Ministry, a note in which, as we learned later, he put the question in such a fashion that Moscow could hardly pronounce itself in favour of a Franco-Czechoslovak treaty. This note addressed to Moscow suggested and developed at length all the objections which the Soviets might have raised against the French counter-project, and did not hesitate to ask the Soviet Government whether the conclusion of the treaty in question would not embarrass it in

its conversations with the British Government. It was sent to Moscow without having been submitted to the Cabinet.

When we finally managed to have this remarkable note read to the Cabinet, we discovered that it contained questions which the Foreign Ministry had never been authorized to bring up, to say nothing of the fact that it incited—that is the least one can say of it—the Soviet Government to give a negative answer. After a long argument, which at times assumed an extremely violent character, it was decided that a special delegation should go to Moscow with the mission of settling this complex question in conversations with Stalin and Molotov.

Benes handed the Premier a personal letter addressed to Stalin, in which he explained why Czechoslovakia was anxious to conclude a treaty of alliance with France.

It is apropos to recall that at the moment when this decision was taken—that is, in the last week of June—the Cabinet had already agreed to our participation in the Marshall Plan.

During the same week a Polish delegation arrived in Prague. Conversations concerning a treaty of alliance were also going on between Paris and Warsaw. We knew that the Poles were defending the same thesis as our Communists, Moscow having without any doubt sent the same instructions to Prague and to Warsaw. I said to Modzelevski, Polish Foreign Minister, that I greatly doubted whether France would accept our proposition. Modzelevski thought that if we pressed our case on the French together, we should in the end be able to gain our point. He did not hide from me that Poland was highly desirous of concluding a treaty of alliance with France before the conference of the four Foreign Ministers on Germany, which had been convoked in London for the end of the year. He hoped that the talks with France would reach a successful conclusion during the autumn.

"I understand," I said to him, "that you are bent on having your Oder–Neisse frontier guaranteed by France—that is, by a Western Power. That is natural. But, then, why give up so important a guarantee because of a clause which is of no importance?"

M. Modzelevski only shrugged his shoulders. His embarrassed smile spoke eloquently enough. Evidently his hands were tied. The decisive factor in this case was not the interests of Poland, but the needs of the diplomacy of the Kremlin. Neither Poland nor Czechoslovakia could conclude a treaty of alliance with France.

Far from dispelling my fears, my conversation with Modze-

levski only strengthened my doubts on the success of the mission confided to our delegation to Moscow.

What happened at the Kremlin exceeded the most pessimistic prophecies. I have already related how Stalin not only advised us against concluding a treaty of alliance with France, but also pronounced himself categorically against our participation in the Marshall Plan, although our delegation had not been charged with taking up this matter with him. The problem of the treaty with France was relegated to the background. It was discussed in summary fashion only at the end of the interview. According to the report presented by our delegation on its return from Moscow, Stalin put forward the following reasoning:

"I have read in President Benes's note what he had to say on the subject of this treaty. I had the impression that President Benes thinks that the U.S.S.R. does not want you to conclude a treaty with France. It is the opposite which is true. We want this treaty to be signed, but we are anxious that it should not be less advantageous than those which you have concluded with the U.S.S.R., with Yugoslavia and with Poland. We are familiar with your plan, we are also familiar with the French counter-project, and we have remarked that on two points the French counter-project is less advantageous than your treaties with the States already named:

"In the first place, France does not guarantee you immediate automatic aid. Yet what Czechoslovakia needs is precisely a guarantee of immediate aid. For the U.S.S.R. that is less important: in case of attack, we can fall back several hundred kilometres, and push forward again later, but for you, because of your limited territory, even a retreat of 300 kilometres represents a grave danger. Your treaties with the U.S.S.R., Yugoslavia and Poland contain a clause for immediate aid. Why should your treaty with France be less favourable?

"In the second place, the French project limits French aid to the case in which you would be attacked by Germany. But it guarantees you no assistance in case you are attacked by an ally or a satellite of Germany. Nevertheless, an aggression by Hungary or Austria is possible; in that case France would not be obliged to come to your aid. Remember that once before France did not keep her engagements.

"The Government of the U.S.S.R. does not intend to advise you not to conclude a treaty with France, but it does not advise you to conclude with her a treaty less favourable than your treaties with Yugoslavia and Poland.

"Our treaty with England contains a clause according to which Great Britain is pledged to come to our aid immediately not only against Germany, but also against her satellites. On the other hand, our treaty with France, in which there is a clause on immediate aid, does not contain a clause on aid against satellites. We let that pass in the treaty with France because that treaty was not of very great importance for us. The fact is that what we wanted to do by means of that pact was to help France to get on her feet again.

"The English have proposed prolonging the validity of the Anglo-Soviet pact from twenty to fifty years. The Soviet Government is disposed to do this, but it is asking that certain articles which weaken the treaty should be amended. Bevin, during his visit to Moscow, raised no objections, but when negotiations began, it appeared that the British plan would weaken the treaty: that plan seeks to eliminate the clause on immediate aid and the clause against the satellites of Germany. The Government of the U.S.S.R. is anxious that the treaty should undergo no modification on these points, and it is proposing to complete the treaty by the following clause:

"'The two contracting parties engage themselves not to join any coalition directed against the other party and not to participate in any action or in any measure directed directly or indirectly against the other party.'

"The British Government does not wish to accept this clause. That is why negotiations, for the moment, have been suspended."

After this exposition of Stalin, Masaryk reported to the Generalissimo an observation which the French Ambassador to Prague had made to him on the eve of the departure of our delegation for Moscow. Czechoslovakia was demanding from France engagements broader than those taken by her in regard to the U.S.S.R.; M. Dejean suggested, therefore, that by an exchange of letters the French Government should permit that any clauses by which the Franco-Soviet treaty should eventually be strengthened should be added to its treaty with Czechoslovakia.

Stalin refrained from making any comment on this proposal. His silence was eloquent: if he refused to react to the proposal of M. Dejean, which permitted conciliating the two theses which were confronting one another, it was because, by his apparently benevolent and impartial arguments, he was in reality opposing squarely an alliance which would have bound Czechoslovakia to a Western Power. Everyone who has had occasion to negotiate directly with the chief of the Soviet Government knows that he often has recourse to this method, which consists in presenting, with much moderation and often with a certain joviality, a thesis which he intends to impose on the person to whom he is talking, on which he will not compromise.

Finally Gottwald created an opening for Stalin by asking him if the signing of our treaty with France might not have an effect on, for instance, the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. Stalin answered: "If you sign the treaty, it will certainly have a bad influence on our talks with Great Britain."

Thus Moscow simultaneously prevented our participation in the Marshall Plan and the conclusion of our treaty of alliance with France. For Czechoslovakia the window opening on the West had been closed.

Negotiations with France continued for several months longer, but after Stalin's intervention it could hardly be any longer hoped that they could have any success.

About the middle of the month of August, on my way back from Britanny, where I had spent my holiday, I broke my journey in Paris for two days. During private conversations which I had with French politicians I suggested that our treaty could engage us to mutual assistance against Germany and "States which should follow Germany after her act of aggression"—that is to say, States which might join her after she had launched a war against France or against Czechoslovakia. On the French side there was a favourable reaction to my proposal. Indeed, about the middle of September, M. Bidault handed to Frantisek Hala, Czechoslovak Minister of Posts, Telephones and Telegraphs, during his visit to Paris, the following draft:

> "If other States join Germany in hostilities launched under the conditions covered by the preceding paragraph, the same aid and the same assistance will be given to the interested high contracting party."

This wording was satisfactory; it responded fully to the national needs of France and Czechoslovakia. But the Communists rejected it because in any case Moscow did not desire an alliance between Czechoslovakia and any Western Power whatsoever.

M. Paul Ramadier, who was then Prime Minister, and who showed particular interest in the Franco-Czechoslovak alliance, said to me during my visit to Paris in September: "Since Germany will not be able for a long time yet to make war, the treaty will not have very much practical value. But, on the other hand, it will have a very great psychological and political importance; it will prove that the *policy of bridges* between the East and the West still exists. And this policy is the only one which can put an end to the economic impoverishment of Europe and prevent a new international conflagration."

Only, the *policy of bridges* was in bad odour in Moscow at this time. The tension between the United States and the U.S.S.R. was continually mounting, and Soviet policy was aiming on the one hand at completing the formation of the Eastern bloc, and on the other at preventing the formation of the Western bloc, or at least in weakening France and Italy as much as possible by the mobilization of the Communist forces in those two countries.

Abroad, less importance was attributed to the failure of the Franco-Czechoslovak negotiations than to the prohibition which had been imposed upon us against participating in the Marshall Plan. Nevertheless the failure of the talks with Paris represented as authentically as our exclusion from the plan for the reconstruction of Europe a symptom that the *bridges* between the East and the West had been cut. We had passed from the disastrous policy of spheres of influence to that of self-isolating blocs directed one against the other.

For our country both these events presaged difficult days ahead.

From the time, in July 1947, when the intervention of Stalin paralysed our foreign policy, the Muscovites engaged in a struggle to the death against the democratic parties of our country. Their aim was the suppression of Czechoslovak independence; their means, the destruction of democracy by the setting up of a Communist regime. After a short pause during the summer vacations, we no longer knew a calm day up to the *coup d'état* of February 1948.

It was also in July 1947, a few weeks after the visit of our delegation to Moscow, that Benes suffered a severe stroke of apoplexy, from which he was never to recover completely. Thus at the hour when the struggle was becoming more and more bitter, when the nation had need more than ever of the firm hand of the great champion of democracy, this man, whose political and moral authority was unequalled, was obliged to consecrate the greatest part of his energy to overcoming his illness.

The horizon was becoming dark on every side.

BOOK THREE

PRELUDE TO THE CRISIS

CHAPTER XII

THE FIRST COMMUNIST OFFENSIVE IS BROKEN

BEFORE MY DEPARTURE from Paris about the middle of August 1947 one of my French friends said to me: "You are going back to Prague. I am afraid that very soon you will be obliged to leave your country. I hope you will manage to escape in time." At that moment I thought the apprehensions of my friend exaggerated; I could certainly have had no idea that they would prove even more prophetic than he himself believed.

It did not take me long after my arrival home to understand that the situation was in fact very serious. It was only then that I learned how gravely President Benes had been affected by the stroke of apoplexy which he had suffered the previous month. During the critical period through which we were passing Benes would have needed all his strength to lead the nation, once again threatened by a mortal danger, into the combat.

Not the slightest political relaxation had occurred during the vacation period. The electoral campaign was at its height, though the elections were not to take place until May 1948. Now, it was in the spring of the year 1947 that Gottwald had declared that at the next election his party ought to win at least 51 per cent of the votes, and that Rudolf Slansky, secretary-general of the party, had said openly that it was necessary for the Communists to obtain a majority in order to put an end to any policy of compromise with the other parties. As this result could not be attained by normal methods, the Communists, before undertaking the final assault, sought to prepare the ground by gaining control of the police and attempting to demoralize the other parties. It was a question first of provoking the disintegration of the Slovak Democratic Party by accusing some of its leaders of high treason, then of reducing the Social

Democratic Party to subservience, and finally of undermining the foundations of the National Socialist Party and of the Populist Party.

The Communists did not expect to encounter any serious resistance. But the more aggressive they showed themselves, the more stubborn became the defence of the democratic parties, up to the moment when the latter, in their turn, went over to the attack. It was evident, taking everything into account, that the Communists could reach their goal only if the Soviets came to their aid by giving them their political support.

The disastrous results of the drought of the year 1947 furnished them with a pretext for a first offensive. At the end of August it was discovered that the harvest would not attain even one-half of the normal figure. This catastrophe brought on grave consequences: it would be necessary not only to reduce rations and to import wheat and forage, but also to grant financial assistance to farmers. To avoid an increase in the price of bread and other foodstuffs the State was compelled to pay an indemnity to the farmers. The expense entailed by this measure was estimated at five to six billion crowns. Abruptly, the Communists proposed covering this deficit by imposing a tax of 5 or 6 per cent on all property exceeding a million crowns in value (according to the official rate, $20,000; in reality, $16,000 to $17,000).

The demagogic character of this measure was evident. When the project was first submitted to the Cabinet, Fierlinger himself described it as infantile and ridiculous. Seeing that no one took it seriously, the Communists then launched a violent campaign against the "defenders of the millionaires". The tax which they advocated would have permitted them to strike a mortal blow at private enterprise (both industrial and commercial) while accusing the democratic parties of "defending the interests of the few capitalists against those of the millions of peasants, workers and employees".

We rose with force against an act which threatened the reconstruction of the country by discouraging savings and investment. Several Communists who concerned themselves especially with economic questions did not hide the fact, in private, that the dangerous consequences of this project filled them with grave fears. They confessed at the same time that they could do nothing against the decisions of the political bureau of their party. Some of them went so far as to tell me openly that they

hoped we would succeed in preventing the realization of this plan!

We were able to supply proofs of the bad faith of the Communists. Thus, to make their campaign more effective they had not hesitated to falsify the data of the problem; there were not 35,000 millionaires in the country, as they maintained, but fewer than 12,000, if one counted those who, after the Property Tax Act of 1945, had a fortune exceeding a million Czech crowns. Moreover, the fortunes of these "millionaires" did not add up to 50,000,000,000 but to 22,000,000,000 at most. Finally, the new tax would not bring in 5,000,000,000 but 1,500,000,000 at the maximum.

In spite of a fierce campaign, the project of the Muscovites was rejected by a majority of the Cabinet members on September 5. On the following day the *Rudé Pravo*, the Communist daily, published on its front page the names of all the National Socialist, Populist and Slovak Democrat Ministers who had voted against the project, in order, it said, "to pillory the defenders of the millionaires".

It was not a very effective way of defaming the Communists' political adversaries. Jan Masaryk, who had not been present at the meeting during which the project was defeated, published a letter declaring that he took his stand with the "pilloried" Ministers. The assumption of this position by one of the most popular men in the country was highly embarrassing to the Communists, who, however, did not diminish the violence of their attacks—attacks which degenerated into coarse insults. In some public meetings scenes of violence occurred; there had been no such disturbed and noisy public meetings since the electoral campaigns of 1946, and never before had the Communists stirred up passions with as much hate as on the occasion of the controversy over the tax on millionaires.*

In this tense atmosphere the news that three members of the Cabinet had just been the objects of attempts at assassination produced a terrifying effect. That evening (it was September 10) we were meeting with representatives of the Slovak

* The Finance Ministry presented a concrete plan for this tax only at the end of the month of October, probably because it had difficulty in drafting a text to conform to a slogan launched solely for propaganda purposes. The law which was finally passed differed appreciably from the first claims of the Communists. But the noisy campaign which they carried on had caused losses which it was difficult to recover, for it had shaken the confidence of private businesses and had encouraged hoarding.

Democrats. At the very beginning of the evening Zenkl was called to the telephone. We were thunderstruck when he told us that someone had sent him a parcel by post which his secretary described as suspicious. He had the police called, and they discovered that the parcel did not contain perfume, as the label indicated, but explosives. A few minutes later Drtina joined us, and announced that he had received a similar parcel, in which an infernal machine had been found. The next day we learned that a third parcel of the same sort, addressed to Masaryk, had been intercepted at the post office and handed over to the police.

We were more and more stupefied; trying to understand what was behind this disturbing matter, we lost ourselves in conjectures. Our first reaction was to see in these attempts the work of a madman, whose mind had been deranged by the violent polemics of the last few weeks. But some of us wondered if it were not a question of a deliberate and well-calculated act, designed to provoke a political crisis. It was possible to imagine that certain extremist elements of the Communist Party, led astray by the campaign launched against us concerning the tax on millionaires, might have committed this criminal act. But we rejected this theory almost immediately, for we knew that individual acts of terror were contrary to Communist doctrine and practice.

Later the thought came to me that N.K.V.D. agents had perhaps acted without the knowledge of the responsible leaders of the Communist Party. The disorders which would certainly have broken out had the attempts succeeded might have served as a pretext for the employment of force to install the Communists in power. However that might be, in the first moment none of us dreamed of attributing the responsibility to the Communist Party as such.

On the contrary, Rudolf Slansky, secretary-general of the Communist Party, declared on the following day that the National Socialist Ministers had "staged" this attempt; he added sarcastically that had the attempt been successful, the victims would not have been the three Ministers, but their secretaries, whose duty it was to open parcels, or their servants.

Premier Gottwald did not judge it necessary to send a word of sympathy to his colleagues. The police, directed by the Communists, showed a suspicious nonchalance from the beginning. Every time we asked if their investigations had had any results,

the Minister of the Interior answered that unfortunately the most diligent search had not yet disclosed the least trace of the perpetrator of the crime.

We understood why the police had shown themselves so lukewarm when Vladimir Krajina, secretary general of our party, succeeded in unearthing a clue which led directly to one of the secretariats of the Communist Party. Although the public was still unaware of this sensational revelation, the general impression none the less was that the investigation was marking time because the Communists were compromised in the affair. Every time questions were put to me on this matter while I was making a tour of my constituency I answered that the authors of the crime had not yet been discovered, but my words were received with sceptical smiles or with remarks that betrayed the thoughts of my questioners. "The Minister of the Interior won't find anything because he doesn't want to find anything, and he doesn't want to find anything because he's afraid of the Communists." That is what was said to me.

A former Communist (he had left the party before the war) told me towards the end of September 1947: "I know them inside out; by the way in which they talk about it in their papers, I have the impression that the guilty persons are in their ranks; but you will see that they will accuse you, the National Socialists, of having plotted the job yourselves."

Public opinion had not yet recovered from the shock caused by the news of the attempts at assassination when another event occurred to disturb it. Late on September 11 I learned that the Communists and Social Democrats had concluded an understanding by the terms of which they engaged themselves to act together "following the Socialist line", and they asked the National Socialists to join them to form again the "Socialist bloc of 1945". This pact was a surprise not only to the other parties, but also to the Social Democrats themselves. It had been prepared in secret by Gottwald and Fierlinger, who, by a skilful manœuvre, had at the last moment won over to their project the secretary-general of the Social Democratic Party, Vilim, and a Deputy, Frantisek Tymes. Nearly all the other leaders of the party had been faced with a *fait accompli.*

During a meeting of the steering committee of our party, I declared at once that the Communists alone would profit by this feat of prestidigitation. For some time the Social Democrats had seemed to want to free themselves, and they were beginning

to escape from the domination of the Communists, to which they had been subjected in the year following the liberation, under the leadership of Fierlinger and Bohumil Lausman. The more independence they showed, the more they could hope to increase the influence of their party in the national committees. The Social Democrats had been having increasingly violent conflicts with the Communists and had been drawing nearer to the National Socialists. In Parliament their Deputies were also beginning to show greater freedom. As a result, the position of Majer, the only Minister of the party who had always carried out an independent policy, had become strengthened.

This development worried the Communists. By the pact concluded with Fierlinger, Gottwald had sown confusion in the Social Democratic ranks. That was exactly what he wanted. The Social Democrats no longer understood what line their leaders were following, and wondered if they were once more in the process of becoming satellites of the Communists.

In addition, it was among the intentions of the Communists to provoke a crisis in the National Socialist Party; it was for this reason that the signatories of the pact of September 11 had issued an urgent appeal in favour of the re-establishment of a Socialist bloc composed of Communists, Social Democrats and National Socialists. The Communists knew that if we accepted this proposition we should alienate the sympathies of the rural and lower middle classes. But they thought that we would lack the courage to reject it, for fear of seeming to be a "reactionary party" and of driving the Social Democrats farther away from us as a result.

Without a moment's hesitation, however, we indignantly refused the Communist offer, and we unmasked the meaning of this manœuvre by putting the Social Democrats on guard against the consequences of Fierlinger's policy.

The Communists had not expected this reaction, and were not a little surprised when M. Majer, Food Minister, handed in his resignation as an answer. Their discontent increased when Benes, refusing to accept the resignation of Majer, did not hide the fact that he disapproved of Fierlinger's action. He had, indeed, such a heated and violent interview with the latter that his health suffered in consequence.

It was at this juncture that I saw Benes for the first time since his illness; he received me with Drtina to discuss the situation

created by the Communist offensive and the resignation of Majer. I was much depressed at the sight of the President; he spoke with great difficulty, his voice broke frequently and at times died away completely: his face bore the traces of considerable nervous tension and of great fatigue, which he had difficulty in hiding. But he had lost none of his lucidity: his analysis of the political situation was precise and logical, and he formulated his thoughts with the same clarity and the same distinctness as before. However, I was perturbed to see how irritable he was and how angry he became when we discussed the actions of the Communists; I was all the more surprised, since I knew that in all circumstances up to that time Benes had never been accustomed to lose control of himself.

I was happy to discover that once again we were in complete agreement. The President condemned the tax on millionaires, which he characterized as an "unpardonable demagogic move". He spoke of Fierlinger with indignation and with the greatest contempt. "I say openly," he said, "to everyone who comes to see me: 'The Social Democrats ought to get rid of Fierlinger, who is nothing but a Communist agent.' " He thanked me for the report I had sent him after my trip to France and reproached the Communists for sabotaging the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty. "You see for yourselves," he commented, "that they are not carrying on a Czechoslovak policy, but a Muscovite policy." And after a moment of silence, he added, "I fear more and more that they will lead our country to disaster."

Not to tire the President by a prolonged conversation, we outlined for him in a few words the political line that we intended to follow: we were resolved to refuse to enter a Socialist bloc, while at the same time we would try to support Majer's wing of the Social Democratic Party and not to give way to the Communists. The President seemed very much satisfied when I said to him: "Our policy will consist in adopting an ever more energetic and ever more active attitude towards the Communists."

Before the end of our interview the President congratulated Drtina on the failure of the attempt at assassinating him, and added with a smile: "You will see that this business, in which the Communists are certainly implicated, will cause them greater difficulties and will embarrass them much more than they think."

On leaving the President we were, of course, happy to know

that he shared our point of view, but his health caused us grave anxiety. Several days later he left for Slovakia, where he was accustomed to stay at this time of year, but the journey tired him so much that for several days he was threatened with another apoplectic stroke. But he recuperated at Topolchianky, and after his return to Prague, in October 1947, everyone hoped that he would soon be entirely recovered. His health had greatly improved, but he was never quite the same man as before, all the more so since his nerves were subjected to a harsh ordeal by the development of events, which daily became more serious.

Several weeks later the Communists had come to realize that the campaign they had launched at the end of August had not had the anticipated effect. It is true that their pact with Fierlinger had seriously shaken the Social Democratic Party, but it had also stimulated the opponents of Fierlinger's pro-Communist policy to enter into widespread activity within the party. At the end of September Social Democratic friends assured me that Fierlinger would be beaten at the party Congress which was to take place in November 1947 in Brno and that he would not be re-elected president.

As for me, I worked systematically to orient the policy of our party in a way that would facilitate the delicate task of Majer and his friends who were trying to free their party from Communist tutelage. Their hope of succeeding increased when their secretary-general, Vilim, who had signed the pact of September 11 with Fierlinger, realizing the deadly consequences of this alliance, set to work feverishly in the party organizations to prepare the defeat of Fierlinger.

The news of the creation of the Cominform at the beginning of October 1947 considerably weakened Fierlinger's position. In its first proclamation the Cominform, following the example of its predecessor, the Comintern, violently attacked the leaders of the Socialist parties of the Western countries, thus evoking the painful memory of the period when the Communists carried on bitter warfare against the Socialists. In these circumstances the Social Democrats understood less and less the policy of solidarity with the Communists advocated by Fierlinger. The latter had just made a mysterious visit to Poland, concerning which he had given his party only a rather vague account. His comrades had a right to ask him if his presence in Poland at the very moment when the Cominform was being organized was

only a coincidence, or if, on the contrary, he had been told in advance of the Soviet project behind the backs of the other leaders of his party.

The formation of the Cominform put the Czechoslovak Communists in an embarrassing position. All the parties, the Social Democrats included, attacked them, declaring that their policy was dictated by a foreign organization, in which the Hungarian and Polish Communists, who would be joined sooner or later by the German Communists, would force the Czechoslovak Communists to carry out a policy incompatible with the interests of their country.

Conscious of the fact that the Czech people were particularly sensitive about any threat of foreign interference, the Communists knew very well that they were vulnerable on this point. That is why they imposed a certain prudence on themselves: their Press thus said very little about the Cominform, about its proclamations or about the bulletin which it published in Belgrade.

I considered the reappearance of the Comintern in a disguised form as an event of great importance. It is true that the Communist policy in all countries remained subject to that of Moscow even after the dissolution of the Comintern during the war, but its revival indicated that Moscow was returning officially to the doctrine of international and expansionist Communism, and that the chasm between the U.S.S.R. and the Western Powers would become still deeper and wider. The policy which the Czechoslovak democrats had always carried on thus lost one of its essential bases: without an understanding, or at the very least a *modus vivendi*, between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union, it was hard to conceive of an independent Czechoslovakia. But, precisely because the danger to which we had always been exposed since our liberation had taken on disturbing proportions, I was of the opinion that the only correct policy, and for that matter the only possible policy, consisted in increasing the internal forces of democracy by a more and more active resistance to the Communists. It was on this condition only that our democracy had a chance of surviving until the day when a European balance would be restored.

CHAPTER XIII

AGITATION IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

THE COMMUNISTS, SEEING that their offensive had broken against the energetic resistance of the democratic Czech parties, concentrated their attacks thereafter on Slovakia. Their objective was to weaken the anti-Communist front by disorganizing the Slovak Democratic Party. The pressure they had been bringing to bear upon this party since October 1947 finally resulted in the "Slovak crisis", which was itself only the prelude to the *coup d'état* of February 1948.

After the liberation the political evolution of Slovakia was even more confused than that of the Czech provinces. To repair the damage caused by Hitler in bringing about the secession of Slovakia in 1939, the interest of the State would have called for the strengthening of the unity of the country by every means. But the Communists encouraged the autonomist tendencies of Slovakia from the time of the liberation; in other words, they favoured Czecho-Slovak dualism. In April 1945 Gottwald had proclaimed "the Magna Carta of the Slovak nation", which gave legislative, executive and judicial powers to the political institution of that region. A "National Slovak Council" was created, which constituted a sort of parliament, a "Council of Commissioners" which was in fact, if not in law, a "Slovak Cabinet". The Supreme Courts created at the time of the Slovak State of Hitler and of the Quisling Tiso were also kept in being.

In spite of certain changes brought about between 1945 and 1947, the relations existing between these autonomous Slovak administrations and the central institutions of Prague had never been clearly defined. This indefinite situation caused many difficulties and, at times, political conflicts. In the east of the country the principle of "Slovakia for the Slovaks" was applied; that is to say, the Czechs were eligible for no public offices in Slovakia other than, exceptionally, in certain economic organizations. The Slovaks, on the contrary, were represented in the first central Cabinet by nine members out of twenty-five, and after the elections of 1946 (for it was necessary to take into account the relative importance of the parties) by seven

members out of twenty-six. They were represented in addition in the Parliament and in all the central administrative departments. This inequality did not fail to create strong discontent in the Czech provinces, particularly in the rural districts, when the Minister of Agriculture, Julius Duris, a Slovak Communist known for his pedantic fanaticism and his brutality, began to treat the peasants of Bohemia and Moravia in a way that did not at all accord with Czech psychology.

The vague character of Czech–Slovak relations did not perturb the Communists; they were convinced that they would succeed in solving the problem in accordance with Stalin's formula. This formula, of course, consisted in granting the different nations of the Soviet Union a large degree of autonomy, offset on the one hand by the political line of the Communist Party and on the other by economic planning and, above all, by the all-powerful and highly centralized police.

Without doubt the Communists acted in accordance with directives from Moscow in supporting Slovak nationalism; the marked national individualism of the countries of Central Europe at this time fitted very well into the general line of Soviet policy. In London in 1944, after his return from Moscow, Benes had complained of not having found in Stalin the least understanding of his conception of a strong unified Czechoslovakia; he had understood very well there and then that Moscow was holding the threat of an independent Slovakia in reserve to bring pressure upon us should the need arise. For that matter, at the beginning of the Slovak uprising of 1944 certain influential Slovak Communists had not concealed their hope of seeing their provinces attached, not to the Czechoslovak Republic, but to the U.S.S.R. When, in July 1945, I made my first visit to Slovakia, only Slovak and Soviet flags were to be seen in Bratislava, and a few rare Czechoslovak flags which were lost in the crowd. A young Communist, a member of the Council of Commissioners, who was consequently a kind of Minister, said to me during a very lively argument: "What good is Czechoslovakia to us Slovaks? How unfortunate that we did not take the historic chance afforded us after the liberation of Slovakia by the Red Army; we should have made Slovakia one of the Soviet federal republics without delay. But perhaps it is not too late to repair this error? Slovakia will be Red, and, thanks to her, when the moment comes the whole of Czechoslovakia will be annexed to the Soviet Union."

At this period the Communists were convinced that they would enjoy overwhelming support from the Slovaks; therefore they counted on using a Bolshevized Slovakia to exert pressure on the Czech provinces, where they expected to encounter considerable resistance.

Great was their disappointment when, in the 1946 elections, it was the democrats, and not the Communists, who obtained 62 per cent of the votes. By cultivating Slovak nationalism, the Communists had not succeeded in counterbalancing the influence of Slovak Catholicism, which is not only nationalist, but also passionately anti-Communist. Moreover, the Red Army had fought in Slovakia since the autumn of 1944, while in the Czech provinces the battle had begun only in the spring of 1945. The Soviet soldiers had committed many more acts of violence in Slovakia than in Bohemia, so that the Slovak people conceived hostile feelings and deep distrust towards the U.S.S.R. And because in Slovakia the Communist policy was patterned on the Soviet model with even less scruple than in Bohemia and Moravia, the Slovak people, who were still under the influence of their clergy, voted *en masse* against the Communists.

It is certain that the Democratic Party owed its success in large measure to the fact that in the spring of 1946 it had concluded an agreement with the leaders of the Catholic Populist Party, to which it had guaranteed a large proportion of representation in its parliamentary delegation and in the party organization. It was unfortunately inevitable that certain elements of the Populist Party, which had been dissolved, and whose leaders, particularly Josef Tiso and Bela Tuka, had compromised themselves by collaborating with the Germans, should profit by this agreement to slip into the ranks of the Democrats. The Communists used this pretext to defame the entire Democratic Party by reproaching it for defending traitors, collaborationists and spies working for Slovak *émigrés* under the direction of Ferdinand Durcansky and Karol Sidor.

Immediately after the elections of 1946 the Communists, suddenly changing their tactics, proposed a revision of the political status of Slovakia by which the powers of the autonomous Slovak institutions would be limited, to the advantage of the central power. This struggle between the Communists and the Slovak Democratic Party ended only after the *coup d'état.*

In spite of its electoral victory, the Democratic Party still

found itself in a difficult situation. It suffered from the presence within its ranks of heterogeneous elements: there were to be found in them, beside Conservatives, Progressives and former Agrarians, of whom the majority were Protestants, former Populists, who were Catholics. Within each of these groups partisans of a unified Czechoslovakia rubbed shoulders with radical autonomists, some of whom still maintained an anti-Czech orientation.

In Slovakia the consequences of the artificial reduction in the number of parties made themselves felt even more markedly than in the Czech regions. At the beginning only two parties were permitted: the Democrats and the Communists. The Social Democrats had been forced to merge with the Communist Party. The Democrats and the Communists also hoped to win over the large body of Catholic electors after the dissolution of the Populist Party. It was the Democrats who won. It is regrettable that they did not succeed in inculcating a new political conception in the former members of the Catholic Populist Party. Perhaps they would have succeeded in the long run had not everything been upset by the *putsch* of February 1948.

The most clear-sighted Democratic leaders knew that the bipartite system was not advantageous to Slovakia, and that it would be to the interest of the Czechoslovak Republic to see parties like those of the Czech provinces gradually formed in Slovakia. For that matter it had not been possible to prevent the formation of two new parties, which had already participated in the 1946 elections: the Liberty Party and the reborn Social Democratic Party. Having been organized only a short time before the elections, they could not obtain more than a limited success, which was nevertheless sufficient to permit them to be represented in Parliament by several Deputies. After the 1946 elections the Liberty Party developed considerably, especially when, thanks to the influence of several gifted and energetic young leaders, it began to turn towards a Christian Democratic conception. It is probable that in the elections planned for May 1948 an important part of the Slovak Catholics would have been allied with them.

The Communists found themselves in an advantageous position from the fact that they represented, both in the Czech provinces and in Slovakia, a unified and well-disciplined party; it was only for tactical reasons that they permitted the existence

of two Communist parties, one Czech, the other Slovak. The non-Communist Slovaks, except the Social Democrats, who were very weak, had no opposite numbers on the Czech side. The Slovak Populist Party, which might have found allies among the Czech Populists, had been suppressed. As for the National Socialists, the Communists and the Democrats had come to an agreement in 1945 to prevent the formation of a parallel party in Slovakia. It was only later that the Slovak Democratic Party understood the interest it had in seeking support from the Czech side to defend itself against the Communists.

Co-operation between non-Communist Czechs and Slovaks was made still more difficult because neither the National Socialists, the Populists nor the Social Democrats were disposed to recognize the Czech-Slovak dualism which had in fact existed since the liberation. All these parties were defending the traditional doctrine of national unity, and it was only grudgingly that they had to recognize the doctrine of two independent nations, with the hope that the experiment, both on the political and the economic plane, would end in an attenuation or a progressive suppression of the dual system.

Moreover, the regime instituted in Slovakia by the Communists and Democrats before the liberation of the Czech provinces appeared to the populations of Bohemia and Moravia as a renewed form of the Slovak State, of sinister memory, formed under the auspices of Hitler. Tiso, Tuka and their aides were considered as traitors to the nation, who had joined Nazi Germany to destroy Czechoslovakia; thus the execution of Tuka and of Tiso was interpreted as just punishment for treason committed not only against the Czechs, but also against the Slovaks.

Knowing that the Communists were the only beneficiaries from the absence of co-ordination between the Czech and Slovak democrats, we began to collaborate much more closely with the non-Communist Slovak parties, especially from the beginning of 1947. The interference of Stalin in the matter of the Marshall Plan and the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty gave us a better understanding of the necessity for supporting one another.

The haste which the Communists had shown in accepting Stalin's ultimatum seemed to indicate that, far from embarrassing them, it helped them play their game, and it also proved that all attempts to reach an understanding or a basis for co-

operation with them would be in vain. Up to that time I had always hoped that by faithfully keeping the engagements we had contracted in our treaty of alliance with Soviet Russia, we should be able to remain sufficiently independent gradually to bring about in our country a socialized democracy consonant with our national traditions and with our economic and cultural needs.

This development, once more, was possible only on condition that the U.S.S.R. and the Western Powers lived in an atmosphere of at least comparative harmony. But July 9, the day when Stalin by his veto prevented our foreign policy from orienting itself in accordance with our own needs and interests, marked for me the end of an era; all hope of coming to an understanding with the Communist world and of co-operating with it had vanished. There remained to us for the future only one course of action: to pursue a policy of firmness which would permit us to hold our positions until the time when the international situation was once more favourable for us.

Before leaving for France, where I intended to spend my vacation and finish my convalescence, I took part at Karlovy Vary in a confidential meeting with Zenkl, the Stranskys, father and son, Drtina, Krajina and Julius Firt: we wanted to decide upon our programme of action for the reopening of Parliament. My friends, who knew that I had always favoured a policy of co-operation and of good relations with our Communists and with the U.S.S.R., were surprised to hear me declare that the number one danger hereafter was Communism, and that all our efforts ought to be directed towards the struggle against this enemy, the most powerful and dangerous of all. At the same time I proposed that we should consult on the tactics to be followed not only with the Populists and if possible the Social Democrats, but also the Slovak Democratic Party. I suggested that we should ask the Slovak Democrats to take the initiative themselves in getting rid of certain undesirable elements which had insinuated themselves into their ranks; after which we would amend or establish together those paragraphs of the Constitution which defined the relationships between Czechs and Slovaks in a way that would make it possible to defend a common point of view in Parliament, or at least to avoid open conflicts in the presence of the Communists. All my friends agreed with me, and on these bases we were able to draw up our programme in all its details.

From the autumn of 1947 our policy conformed to the tactics decided upon at Karlovy Vary. For the rest, the other democratic parties had realized the Communist danger as clearly as we had, and they were entirely ready to adopt the same attitude.

With redoubled violence the Communists renewed the offensive against the Slovak Democrats which they had launched in the spring of the same year. They repeated and propagated the most threadbare themes, accusing them of defending collaborationists and of carrying on espionage for the benefit of the *émigrés*. In August the Union of Slovak Partisans, dominated by the Communists, demanded a radical purge in all spheres of public life. The Communists at the same time sought to maintain public anxiety by speculating on the danger which the "Banderistas" represented and by using this as a pretext for mobilizing the former Partisans against them.

The "Banderistas" were a group of Ukrainian nationalists who in the Ukraine and in Poland had taken to the hills to fight against the Russian Bolsheviks and the Polish Communists. From time to time they crossed the Czechoslovak frontier to escape the Polish army or to make their way across Czechoslovakia to Bavaria, where the central organization of Ukrainian nationalism had its headquarters. Adventurers of all types, among them former German S.S. men and common bandits, had infiltrated into the ranks of these fanatics. They had never been found in large numbers on Czechoslovak territory. If the Communists had not made so much to-do about this business, the public would not even have noticed their existence, and a simple police operation would have been sufficient to get rid of them.

There was nothing astonishing, therefore, about the fact that there was surprise when the Communists demanded the mobilization against these few hundred Ukrainians not only of the army, but also of the former Partisans. It was self-evident that if they wanted to arm the Partisans, it was not so much to hunt down the Banderistas as to intimidate the Slovak Democrats and their other political opponents in Slovakia. We foiled this manœuvre by succeeding in getting incorporated into regular military units the Partisans who were mobilized to help pursue the Banderistas.

In September, Messrs. Josef Lettrich and Fedor Hodza, president and secretary-general respectively of the Slovak Demo-

cratic Party, informed us that the Communists had the intention of discrediting, and even dissolving, their party by staging political trials against some of their Catholic Deputies whom they would accuse of having plotted against the State in collaboration with the Slovak *émigrés*. I knew from Mikulas Franek, Minister for Unification, that the Communists would first try to detach the Catholic masses from the Slovak Democrats. They had already hoped to achieve this result by the execution of Mgr. Tiso, by trying to give the impression that the Democrats had not been able to save the former Chief of State; now they wished to put the Democrats in a similar position by demonstrating that they could do nothing for the Catholic Deputies who were to be accused of high treason. Several weeks later this news proved to be true.

We once more asked the Slovak Democrats to rout out of their party all elements likely to compromise them. We drew their attention to the fact that according to certain information we had been able to obtain the Communists had in their possession documents indicating that a certain Otto Obuch, civil servant in the office of Jan Ursiny, vice-president of the Cabinet, was in touch with Durcansky, one of the leaders of the Slovak *émigrés*. The Democrats assured us that they would not hesitate to take action against all those who were guilty, but that it was impossible for them to exclude persons simply because the Communists had expressed suspicions about them.

What was our astonishment when, at the end of September, we learned that the police, apropos of the investigation concerning the Slovak conspiracy, had, in the absence of Jan Ursiny, carried out a search of the quarters of the officers of the Cabinet, and that several officials, Otto Obuch among them, had been arrested. The Minister of the Interior announced to the Government that it had been proved that Obuch was sending secret information, such as minutes of Cabinet meetings, to agents of Durcansky working abroad.

Several days later, on October 6, 1947, the office of the Commissioner of the Interior at Bratislava published a statement according to which there had been discovered in Slovakia "a plot of high treason" with the intention of destroying the Republic and of instituting an independent Slovak State "in co-operation with *émigrés* in foreign countries led by Karol Sidor and Ferdinand Durcansky". The statement announced that the police had made 380 arrests, 237 of whom had been detained.

Among the "conspirators" were Civil Servants and priests. At the same time two radio transmitting stations, 36 kilograms* of explosives, 400 revolver cartridges, 760 rifle cartridges, nine revolvers and a hand grenade had been confiscated. Immediately after the release of this statement the departmental court of Bratislava asked Parliament to suspend the immunity of Deputies Jan Kempny and Milos Bugar, both secretaries-general of the Slovak Democratic Party, which was said to be involved in this affair.

It was not at all necessary to be clairvoyant to understand that it was a question of a political trial against the Slovak Democrats. However, it was impossible to reject all the accusations offhand: the charges made against some of those detained did not seem entirely baseless. But it was intolerable that the Democratic Party as such should be held responsible.

Certain facts indicated, moreover, that the police themselves were not above suspicion. Thus a certain Rudolf Komandera, a Slovak *émigré* living in Austria, who was arrested during the investigation, and who was to become the leading witness for the prosecution, had been able to make several visits to Slovakia without difficulty, although the police had been warned about his activities. One wondered if Komandera, on whom the Communists counted to prove that Deputies Kempny and Bugar were in touch with the Slovak *émigrés*, was not an *agent provocateur* of the political police of Bratislava.

The results of the investigation aroused the greatest distrust among us; our apprehensions increased still further when we learned that it had been confided to Captain Pokoray. This worthy had been relieved of his functions as head of the intelligence service in Prague at our insistence; it had been established that he had sought to defame the secretary-general of our party, Krajina, with the aid of false witnesses from the Gestapo, by accusing him of having betrayed his comrades in the resistance movement during the war.

Despite all our doubts on the basis of the accusations of which certain members of the Democratic Party were the object, we thought that the law should follow its course.

The non-Communist Deputies hesitated to withdraw the immunity of their colleagues Kempny and Bugar, since the evidence cited against them seemed insufficient. The Communists, on the contrary, insisted that the two secretaries-

* About 80 lb.

general of the Democratic Party, who represented its Catholic wing, should be handed over to the law. On October 15, when the question came before the committee on parliamentary immunity, the Communist Deputies brought into the committee room a large number of delegations which noisily supported the demands of the Communist Party. Kempny and Bugar facilitated a solution of the problem by declaring, while protesting their innocence, that they would put themselves at the disposal of the courts in order to procure an opportunity to clear themselves. Thereupon Parliament withdrew their immunity, on condition, however, that they should be taken to a special place of arrest and not to a prison for common criminals. The Communists had voted against this restriction. On December 11, Minister of Justice Drtina, in a report to the committee on immunity on the results of the investigation on Kempny and Bugar, declared that the commissioner's office of the Interior Ministry had not yet handed its documentation to the chief prosecutor, although six weeks earlier the Minister of the Interior had published a pamphlet on the "Slovak plot".

Drtina pointed out other disturbing facts: Rudolf Komandera, the principal witness for the prosecution, had only been transferred by the police to the prison of the departmental court of Bratislava on December 8, that is to say more than two months after the arrests of Kempny and Bugar. The police seemed to have sought documents that would incriminate the defendants only after their arrest!

Meanwhile the democrats had established the fact that the police had been able to extort confessions from some of the prisoners by blows and torture. If the case had been heard before the *coup d'état* of the month of February these acts would have been revealed. Kempny and Bugar, and the other accused prisoners, were judged after the Communist *putsch* by the courts of Cepicka, the new Minister of Justice or, more exactly, the Minister of the New Justice!

From the beginning of this affair, it was felt that the Communists were trying much harder to strike at the Democratic Party than to punish the real culprits. Confirmation of these suspicions was soon forthcoming. Judging that the statements of the police had prepared the ground sufficiently, the Communists at the end of October took up the offensive against the Democratic Party.

Ursiny ended by giving way before the continuous attacks

and threats of the Communists, and handed in his resignation. The President of the Republic accepted it only after the Communist Ministers had assured him that his case would be examined by a committee made up of Ministers. This committee never met, and Ursiny was arrested after the *coup d'état* and condemned to seven years' imprisonment.

By this time the wrangling between the Communists and the Slovak Democrats had already taken the form of an open conflict.

On October 30 the Congress of the Slovak unit committees*, organized by the Unified Trade Unions (the U.R.O.), took place at Bratislava. The Congress violently attacked the Democratic Party, which it held responsible for the bad organization of food distribution and the ineffectiveness of the purging of collaborationist elements. The Congress demanded the resignation of the Council of Commissioners and the formation of a new Council which would include all the "democratic and anti-Fascist" forces of the Slovak nation, which meant that in it would be seen, side by side with the representatives of the political parties, representatives of the unions, of agricultural committees, and of resistance groups. On the following day the resistance groups associated themselves with the claims of the unions, and demanded that the commissionerships of the Departments of the Interior and of Justice should be given to former resistance fighters. Immediately afterwards the president of the Council of Commissioners, Gustav Husak, announced to the Premier, Gottwald, that the Council of Commissioners had resigned. He did not even take the trouble to notify the commissioners of the Democratic Party.

On the same day the Slovak Communists convoked the Slovak National Front, whose structure was changed by the inclusion of representatives of the unions, the peasants and the resistance groups. The Slovak Democratic Party took no part in this meeting, which did not prevent the National Front, thus diminished, from entrusting to Husak the duty of forming the new Council of Commissioners. All these decisions were taken without the Slovak Democrats, who did not fail to protest vehemently, emphasizing the fact that their representatives in the last Council of Commissioners had never resigned.

It was thus that a grave political crisis opened in Slovakia. It was only the prelude of the crisis in which the whole State was

* Union committees in individual enterprises.

to go under. The similarity between the methods applied by the Communists in Bratislava in November 1947 and in Prague in February 1948 is striking, and proves that in both instances it was a case of a plan carefully prepared and long premeditated.

In our opinion the developments in Bratislava constituted nothing other than a test of strength provoked by the Communists. We therefore asked that the Slovak crisis should be debated in Prague. Peter Zenkl, president of the National Socialist Party, insisted to Gottwald that he should call without delay a meeting of the National Front in which the four Czech parties and the four Slovak parties were represented. In the meantime I had talked over the telephone with Fedor Hodza, secretary-general of the Slovak Democratic Party, to whom I recommended categorical opposition to the Communist demands and particularly to the participation of non-political organizations in the National Front; in any case, it was essential not to accept any commitments before the meeting of the National Front in Prague.

When on November 4 the representatives of the different parties of the National Front began to gather at the Premier's office, we learned that Gottwald, without our knowledge, had also invited representatives of non-political Slovak and Czech organizations, notably the U.R.O. and the Farmers' Union. Thus he sought to change completely the nature of the National Front, which was virtually a coalition of political parties represented by the authorized delegates of the directing organizations of the respective parties. The Communists were now trying to enlarge it by including representatives of non-political organizations of which they were absolute masters. If Gottwald had not invited to this conference either the resistance groups or the Sokols, it was because these organizations were not under his control.

By this manœuvre, which would have brought about a change of government without striking a blow, the Communists wanted to effect a reversal of forces in their favour and to acquire a majority which they had not been able to win in the elections. Their methods were attuned neither to the structure nor to the traditions of the country.

In Czechoslovakia it was the parties, through their deputies—who were subject to a very strict discipline—which were the decisive factor in political life. By seeking to bring other groups into the institutions of the State, the Communists counted on

making a breach in parliamentary democracy as it existed in the country, preparatory to overthrowing it. As they had learned to their cost that normal elections would never give them a majority, they were attempting to create an artificial majority in their favour by infiltrating the National Front and the Government with "apolitical" organizations obedient to themselves. It was for this reason that we decided not to participate in the meeting of the National Front if representatives of non-political groups were to take part. The Populists and the Slovak Democrats declared themselves in agreement with us.

When we learned that the Communists had already brought representatives of the non-political groups into the room in which the National Front was to meet, instead of going there ourselves, we sent the secretaries-general of our respective parties to inform Gottwald of our refusal to be present. Gottwald, very much annoyed, immediately called together the representatives of all the political parties to attempt to induce us to reverse our decision. All his efforts were in vain; not one of us gave way. Finally the representatives of the Social Democrats, who were already in the room, seeing that they were isolated, left the meeting in spite of the desperate efforts of Fierlinger to dissuade them. The Communists therefore remained alone with the representatives of the non-political organizations.

The Communists had not expected so strong a resistance on our part. They reacted by having recourse to the most violent methods. In Slovakia they organized workers' and peasants' demonstrations, which gave rise to bloody fights. The leaders of the Slovak Democratic Party were insulted; Lettrich, president of the Slovak National Council, and Kvetko, Commissioner for Agriculture, were only able to escape from the raging mob by going into hiding. The unions called strikes; Zatopocky, the head of the U.R.O., threatened the country with a general strike; at a meeting of the officers of the U.R.O. he spoke of a Cabinet of technicians which might replace the existing government should the parties provoke a governmental crisis. The Communists went so far as to approach certain personages, including Professor Albert Prazak, president of the Czech National Council, who had led the uprising in Prague in the month of May 1945, and Sychrava, one of the most important representatives of the volunteers of the First World War, to

ascertain whether they would be prepared to participate in such a government. When the crisis broke out in February 1948 it was to the National Socialists that they attributed this project!

To make matters clear, the central committee of our party published a declaration drafted by Mr. Stransky: we submitted the Communist policy to severe criticism, and warned the public against the danger of a Muscovite dictatorship. We unmasked the manœuvre which consisted in transforming the National Front after the manner favoured by Marshal Tito. (According to the Yugoslav dictator, National Fronts could acquire their full significance in the domestic life of nations only when they gradually changed themselves into a unified national organization. That boils down to saying that the National Front should progressively absorb all the political parties, and replace them by a single totalitarian party, the Communist Party.)

We also took a stand in regard to the creation of the Cominform, the organization for the political direction of all Communist parties. In a resolution which I proposed we stressed that "the foreign policy of our country, to be a Czechoslovak policy, ought to remain faithful to the tradition of Masaryk and Benes". Once more we affirmed that Czechoslovak foreign policy ought to be based on the alliance with the U.S.S.R., as well as on friendly co-operation with the Western Powers, particularly with France, with whom we wanted to conclude a treaty of alliance as soon as possible, and we protested against methods which attempted to subordinate foreign policy to the game of the interests of parties and of regimes.

Our declarations had a considerable repercussion in all democratic circles, which applauded our firm attitude towards the subversive policy of the Communists. Later I learned that our resolution on foreign policy had greatly displeased Moscow, where the conclusion was drawn from it that the National Socialists were agents of the West. A Roumanian Communist told me that Anna Pauker, to whom the portfolio of foreign affairs in Roumania had just been entrusted, had insisted at length at the meeting of the Cominform that action should be taken against us.

The Slovak crisis was dragging on. The Communists had not succeeded in provoking a "spontaneous movement of the masses" against the Democratic Party; it was evident that the majority of the Slovak people was not following their offensive

sympathetically. Gottwald made a last attempt to force the Democrats' hand by himself taking charge of negotiations to that end. He went to Bratislava for three days. But the Democrats rejected his proposals, which would have deprived them of the commissionerships of Agriculture and of Food and would have given the Communists the commissionership of Justice. It was decided that the negotiations should be resumed in Prague. The National Front of the Czech and Slovak parties remained in session for two days, November 17 and 18. On this occasion representatives of the non-political organizations had not been invited; for the first time the Communists had openly retreated. For the moment the argument between the different parties took on a violent character. It was particularly Duris, Minister of Agriculture, and Slansky, secretary-general of the Communist Party, who attacked the Slovak Democrats and the National Socialists in the coarsest manner. We resolutely refused to give way. In the end the Communists were compelled to consent to a compromise on the question of the new Council of Commissioners. If the position of the Democrats was not as strong as in the past, their losses did not entail Communist gains, but an advance for the Liberty Party and the Social Democrats, which up to that time had not been represented on the Council.

The Communists did not gain a single Commissionership.

We had succeeded, in short, in foiling the attempt of the Communists to transform the National Front after the Yugoslav model, and in saving parliamentary democracy. It was a victory. We had proved that there were in the Czechoslovak democracy forces capable of standing up to the attacks of Communist totalitarianism. The confidence of the democratic camp increased still further with an event that occurred at about the same time: the defeat of Fierlinger at the Brno Congress.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEFEAT OF FIERLINGER

FOR SEVERAL WEEKS the Congress of the Social Democratic Party, which was to take place in Brno from November 13 to 16, had been attracting the attention of political circles. It was known that those Social Democrats who were seeking to escape from Communist tutelage were formulating certain changes in the constitution of their central committee. Fierlinger, who owed his nomination to the presidency of the party in 1945 to Communist manœuvres, and whose policy aimed at making Social Democracy an annex of Communism, was not to be maintained in that office. The Communists were making desperate clandestine efforts to prevent the defeat of their right-hand man, while the National Socialists were seeking by every means to strengthen indirectly the wing led by Majer, who favoured the realization of Socialist policies otherwise than under the Communist ægis. President Benes, in private conversations, never concealed his opinion that it was not only in the interests of Social Democracy but in those of the whole State that Fierlinger should be removed from the important position which he occupied. Benes, who had nominated Fierlinger as Czechoslovak Ambassador to Moscow in 1941, was not only disappointed by the results of his policy, but also very greatly annoyed by the servile attitude of Fierlinger towards the Communists. It was certain that Fierlinger was responsible in very large measure for the excessive power and the predominant influence accorded to the Communists in 1945 in the first post-war Government.

Since the beginning of October 1947 news had been reaching us from all the provinces which showed that in the local organizations the opponents of Fierlinger's policy were gaining the upper hand. But this development was not necessarily indicative of a victory for Majer's wing. It soon appeared clear that Fierlinger could only be defeated if Lausman, the Minister of Industry, and his friends took sides against him.

When, in the summer of 1947, Majer informed me confidentially that Lausman would be a candidate for the presidency of the party, I did not hide from him my fears and

doubts. Lausman was an opportunist to the marrow and it was impossible to rely on him. Moreover, as was the case with Fierlinger, it was to the Communists that he owed his influential position in the party. He had won it at the expense of Frantisek Nemeo, who had been a member of the Government in London and had carried on the definitely anti-Communist tradition of the former Social Democratic leader Antonin Hampl, killed by the Nazis during the war. In 1945 Lausman had pronounced himself in favour of a single Socialist Party formed by the merging of the Social Democrats and the Communists; in all his acts, especially in his duties as Minister of Industry, he conformed to the wishes of the Communists, and he had been one of the instigators of the radical nationalization of industry. He had only begun to turn away from the extreme Left in 1947, when he realized that the great mass of his own party was anti-Communist and when he saw the possibility of becoming its head. That is why I advised Majer against supporting the candidacy of Lausman for so important a post: if to-day he was deserting Fierlinger, whose faithful collaborator he had been, to-morrow he would not hesitate to betray his new friends. I had discussions along the same lines with other friends in the Social Democratic Party, but they all insisted that it was essential to back Lausman against Fierlinger.

The National Socialists greeted the Social Democratic Congress in a letter in which, having recalled the close co-operation of our two parties between 1918 and 1938, we expressed the desire to renew an understanding based on the defence of the principles and standards of parliamentary democracy in the spirit of humanity and liberty proclaimed by all the great leaders of the nation from Jan Huss to Masaryk. The Communists for their part, in the message which they sent to the Congress, expressed the hope that "Social Democracy would fight at their side in a Socialist bloc for the victory of Socialism in a popular democracy".

In his answer to a letter which the Congress had addressed to him, President Benes declared: "In this decisive period a heavy responsibility falls upon you Czechoslovak Social Democrats. If you succeed in realizing a synthesis of Socialism and democracy, you will have rendered a great service to the republic and —I am convinced of it—to all Europe and to the cause of world peace." No one misunderstood the meaning of this message.

At the Congress the battle was raging between the opponents

and the supporters of Fierlinger. For the moment Fierlinger seemed to have some chance of success. In the background the Communists supported him by exerting strong pressure on some delegates who were still hesitating. Several of his comrades abandoned him when they found that he was telephoning regularly to Slansky, secretary-general of the Communist Party, to inform him on developments at the Congress and to consult him on the tactics to be followed. The agreement which he had concluded with Gottwald on September 11 was severely criticized; several delegates emphasized the harm it had done to the party, the document having been interpreted in all circles as an act of complete submission of the Social Democrats to the Communists.

It was evident that the immense majority of the party members were calling for a policy independent of Communist policy and that the desire for complete freedom had been making itself felt with even greater force since the creation of the Cominform. But in the party machinery Fierlinger's friends still occupied a very important position which was out of all proportion to their real strength among the main body of the voters. Thus it was not possible to be entirely certain of the result which the Congress would reach.

The wing favouring an independent and genuinely democratic policy was appreciably strengthened after the speeches of several who were adherents of the former leadership, whom Fierlinger, in accordance with the wishes of the Communists, had engineered out of office in 1945: among these delegates were included Vojta Benes, brother of the President of the Republic, who during the war had worked with great success for the Czechoslovak cause in the United States; Alfred Meisner, former Minister of Justice, an eminent jurist and one of the chief authors of the first constitution; and Ivan Derer, an important Slovak political personage, who had always defended the idea of Czechoslovak unity. These three orators defended the cause of democratic Socialism with vigour, condemning all forms of political terrorism, and opposing especially the modification of the National Front by the admission to it of non-political organizations. They made a moving appeal to their party comrades, calling upon them to save parliamentary democracy in Czechoslovakia. Their intervention was decisive: Lausman's wing definitely moved away from Fierlinger.

Finally, after a stern battle which lasted for three days, Laus-

man was elected president of the Social Democratic Party by 283 votes, against 182 for Fierlinger. In the new central committee Fierlinger's adherents were in the minority; several notorious fellow-travellers, like Deputy E. Erban, whom the Communists had chosen in 1945 as secretary-general of the U.R.O. (the Association of Labour Unions) were excluded from the executive committee. The Congress, to the satisfaction of Derer and his friends, proclaimed the merger of the Slovak and Czech Social Democrats, who thereafter were to form a single party. Thus the fusion of the Social Democrats and the Slovak Communists, which the Communist Party had imposed upon them in 1944 following the Slovak insurrection, was annulled with the consent of Lausman himself, who now welcomed his Slovak comrades to membership in the reborn Czechoslovak Democratic Party, although in 1945 he had pronounced himself in favour of the merger of the two parties in Slovakia.

The result of the Brno Congress was hailed with enthusiasm by democratic opinion. The Communists did not hide their anger. They proclaimed that Fierlinger had been defeated because he constituted a guarantee that "the forces of Socialism would remain united against all reactionary and subversive elements". They were stupefied that Social Democracy had had the courage to blackball a man who had been the first Premier after the liberation and whose influence in the party machinery was still considerable. Particularly they had not expected the defeat of a candidate whom they had openly supported, and what pleased them least was that Fierlinger had been defeated precisely because he had become their lackey.

The Congress of Brno had shown that the democratic forces of Czechoslovakia were growing and that Communist influence was diminishing. It had ended with the defeat not only of the Czechoslovak Communists, but also of the Cominform, which at this same time was working towards the merging of the Social Democrats and Communists in Roumania, Poland and Hungary. While in these countries the fellow-travelling Socialists were getting the upper hand, in Czechoslovakia one of the most active representatives of the "Trojan-horse" policy had just been defeated.

Shortly after the Brno Congress I paid a visit to Moscow and Warsaw. I was surprised to see to what an extent the U.S.S.R. and her satellites had been irritated by recent events in Czechoslovakia. A high Soviet officer who had spent some time in

Czechoslovakia after the liberation said to me: "For us, Comrade Fierlinger was a guarantee of the friendship of your people for the Soviet Union; his defeat indicates that the anti-Soviet tendencies of Czech and Slovak reactionaries are gaining power; we consider that that is intolerable."

A Polish politician who played one of the foremost roles in his country and who, without being himself a member, was in direct relations with the leaders of the Cominform, violently criticized the National Socialists, whom he accused of being "the nucleus of Czech reaction", and who, according to him, hated the Soviets and the other Slavic popular democracies. He was convinced that the fall of Fierlinger was above all the work of President Benes and of my party. It was in vain that I tried to explain to him that Fierlinger's defeat was not due so much to the political leaders of his party as to the mass of Social Democrats, who had demanded his recall because they would not tolerate his servility to the Communists.

"The masses always allow themselves to be herded, and it is precisely this means which is used by the reactionaries," he answered. "If politicians like Fierlinger try to co-operate with the Communists, you immediately proclaim that they are the agents of Moscow, but little does it matter to you that people like Attlee, Blum and their kind are in the pay of international reaction, although it is obvious to everyone!"

I also learned that the Pan-Slavic Committee in Moscow regarded Fierlinger's defeat as "an act of provocation of Czech reaction led by the National Socialists and directed against the Soviets."

I understood the importance which political circles in Moscow attributed to the fall of Fierlinger, especially when A. J. Mikoyan, Minister of Foreign Trade, and one of the most influential collaborators of Stalin, abandoned his habitual reserve to ask me if the reduction of Fierlinger's following to a minority of his party and his departure from the Government did not mean that Czechoslovakia was detaching herself from her Soviet ally. At Warsaw, which I visited on my return journey from Moscow, I had a conversation with Soviet Ambassador Lebede. He asked me apropos of the Fierlinger affair if "the recent events in Czechoslovakia do not indicate at the same time as a desire to draw closer to the Western Powers, particularly America, the strengthening of certain dangerous anti-Soviet tendencies".

Finally, towards the end of December, a prominent Yugoslav

Communist said to me, with surprising sincerity: "What you have done against Comrade Fierlinger is an intolerable provocation, and you will soon see that it will only cause you trouble."

The similarity of these opinions proved conclusively that in Moscow, as among the Communists of all countries, the unforeseen fall of Fierlinger was regarded as an important fact, because it threatened to retard the communization and sovietization of Czechoslovakia. It was to be expected that the Cominform would make every effort to overcome this obstacle.

Immediately after the Brno Congress the Communists and the Social Democrats who worked with them spread the rumour that within four months Fierlinger would be reinstated, and become more powerful than ever. If in general very little importance was attached to these claims, analytical observers did not regard them as negligible. It is true that Fierlinger had been in the minority at the Brno Congress, but of 465 votes, 182 had been cast for him. His influence within the party had been weakened, but not destroyed. When Fierlinger, as well as Lausman, who had decided to devote himself entirely to the party, resigned from the Cabinet, the Social Democratic Party nominated to the Government Deputy Tymes, who had signed the September 11 pact with Gottwald at the same time as Fierlinger, and Ludmila Jankovcova, also a deputy, who had voted for Fierlinger at the Congress. During this change-over Jan Ursiny, vice-president of the Cabinet, was replaced by Stefan Kocvara, an eminent jurist who had the attentive ear of the constitutional committee of the Chamber. An ardent defender of Czechoslovak unity and a convinced democrat, he was able to escape to London after the *coup d'état.*

It was evident that the whole Social Democratic Party as yet lacked the courage to follow unreservedly the democratic policy of Majer's wing, and the latter, after Fierlinger's departure, was not always upheld by his two new colleagues.

In short, in view of all his previous changes of front, it did not seem that the new president of the party deserved unlimited confidence. Nevertheless it was hoped that Lausman would be led by the pressure of the masses and by his personal ambition to carry on an ever more anti-Communist policy—the only one which could give a new impetus to his party.

CHAPTER XV

RUSSIAN WHEAT: THE GIFT THAT WASN'T

THE DEFEAT OF the left wing of the Social Democratic Party at the Brno Congress did not constitute the only check suffered by the Communists in the autumn of 1947. Immediately after the Congress, on November 18, they were obliged to make some concessions on the solution of the Slovak crisis. On the following day, November 19, Krajina, secretary-general of the National Socialist Party, made sensational revelations regarding the assassination attempts against three Ministers, and filed a charge against several inhabitants of the region of Kroman, near Olomouc, who were suspected of having instituted them. The accused were all members of the Communist Party. Public opinion was still more disturbed when it was learned that the police services had tried to sabotage the investigation. In the country the strong dislike which was felt for the policy of Julius Duris, the Communist Minister of Agriculture, increased. In the federated trade unions the discontent caused by the Communist policy of their president, Antonin Zapotocky, was accentuated. At the elections of the student associations the Communists were everywhere in the minority, nowhere polling more than 20 per cent of the votes.

Everywhere, then, the Communists were losing ground. It resulted from this that if the elections took place under normal conditions they would hardly be able to attain the goal they had set for themselves—that is, to win 51 per cent of the votes. But while Communist influence was diminishing in Czechoslovakia, it was increasing in the other countries of Central Europe. In Roumania, Tatarescu was replaced on November 7, 1947, by Anna Pauker, who played a leading role in the Roumanian Communist Party and in the Cominform. At the same time a case had been instituted against the most eminent representative of Roumanian democracy, Julius Maniu, who was accused of high treason. In Poland the Communists were preparing to liquidate the Peasant Party by accusing its leader, Mikolajczik,

of high treason. At the last moment, Mikolajczik succeeded in escaping abroad.*

At the same time the Polish Communists were exerting considerable pressure on the Social Democrats to bring about a merger of the two parties at the Socialist Congress to be held in December 1947. A Soviet diplomat pointed out to me that after the defeat of Fierlinger, which had strengthened the opponents of a single Socialist Party, this merger would be more difficult to bring about. In Hungary at the beginning of November Communist terrorism was being intensified. Zoltan Pfeiffer, President of one of the opposition parties, had had to take flight, and a few days later Karoly Peyer, leader of the Hungarian Social Democrats, who had opposed the Communist policy of Arpad Szakasits, was accused of espionage in favour of "a certain Western Power". Towards the middle of November the "Bulgarian Patriotic Front" was transformed, after the Yugoslav model, into a single political organization which would assume the sole direction of the policy of the country and which would have a monopoly of the right to present a common electoral list. After the dissolution of the Agrarian Party of Petkov, who had just been condemned to death and executed, Dimitrov would be able to proceed without hindrance to the total communization of his country.

Of course all these changes which were occurring in the various countries of Central Europe were synchronized by the Cominform, which had given the Communist parties the order to assume the offensive. The French Communists had also taken the offensive towards the end of November, when they launched a general strike.

But while everywhere in Central Europe Communism was establishing itself more and more firmly, it was running up against increasing difficulties in Czechoslovakia, and even risked being dislodged from some positions which it had occupied since 1945.

Incapable of overthrowing Czechoslovak democracy, which was deeply rooted in the country, by their own efforts, the Communists called in the Soviets to their assistance.

The first reinforcements reached them in the form of ship-

* When I passed through Warsaw on my way back from Moscow in December 1947 a Polish Communist leader confessed to me that by his flight Mikolajczik had rendered a great service to the Government. It was in fact considerably embarrassed by the prospect of a trial which would have made a martyr of Mikolajczik.

ments of wheat. In July 1947, at the time when Stalin had prevented us from participating in the Marshall Plan, the Soviet Government had promised us 200,000 tons of wheat, doubtless to console us for the loss which the prohibition against benefiting from American help meant for us.

During the autumn of 1947 it was seen that as a result of the drought this quantity would be insufficient. For several months we had been working on a new trade treaty with the U.S.S.R. In November I was to go to Moscow to conclude the negotiations and sign the treaty. Before my departure I asked the Premier to support my demand for an increase in wheat shipments by a letter which I would hand to Stalin. Gottwald accepted my proposal and asked me to draft the letter. But several days before my departure he told me that "by chance" an "important Soviet personage" had passed through Prague, and that he had explained to him the critical situation in which we found ourselves as a result of the bad crop. Since this personage had the possibility of entering into direct contact with Stalin, he had confided a message to him in which he asked the head of the Soviet Government to increase wheat deliveries. Gottwald excused himself for not being able to tell me who this "important Soviet personage" was, and limited himself to telling me the contents of his letter orally, without giving me a copy of it. In fact, he contented himself with repeating the requests which I myself had formulated in the draft of the letter which we had discussed a few days earlier. What seemed clearest to me about this business was that in his message Gottwald had not spoken only of the deliveries of wheat which we needed, but also of certain other things of which I must not be informed.

On December 2, when I arrived at the Moscow station after four days on the train, our Ambassador, Jiri Horak, told me, to my great surprise, that Generalissimo Stalin had granted the request of Premier Gottwald, and was even promising us 50,000 tons of wheat more than we had asked. While I was on the way an official *communiqué* had appeared in the Press of Prague announcing that the Soviets would deliver to Czechoslovakia 600,000 tons of wheat and forage, or almost 40 per cent of the amount necessary to bridge the gap until the next harvest. In addition, a long telegram was published in which the Czechoslovak Government thanked Stalin in ecstatic terms for his "generous act". In this telegram the Government assured Stalin that the Czechoslovak people, convinced once more that

the Soviet Union was its only faithful, devoted and powerful friend, felt for the Generalissimo and his country sentiments of infinite gratitude, and that it would repay faithfulness by faithfulness, love by love. This all the more because it was apparent to the eyes of all the world that the U.S.S.R. was inaugurating "a new era in which international relations will be based upon the mutual respect of peoples and on the principles of democracy and of labour dedicated to peace".

The speed with which the Soviets had come to our aid to help us to solve our food crisis, and the spectacular manner in which the negotiations had been shortened by the exchange of letters between Stalin and Gottwald, indicated plainly that the U.S.S.R. was taking advantage of this transaction to strengthen the position of our Communists. The manœuvre was transparently clear. Stalin, in his answer to Gottwald, announced that he would deliver more wheat than we had asked for, and he let him know that "the Soviet Government was ready to grant the Czechoslovak Government other facilities concerning the commercial treaty between the two countries, particularly on the question of payments". The Czechoslovak public, but not the Soviet public—the official *communiqué* having been published only in Prague—thus learned of this great success of Gottwald, president of the Communist Party, before my arrival in Moscow, though as Minister of Foreign Trade I had been charged by my Government with conducting the negotiations with the Soviet authorities. The haste which had been shown in completing the negotiations even before my arrival in Moscow was explained by the fact that I was one of the leaders of the Socialist National Party, principal rival of the Communist Party; therefore the latter was determined to give the Czechoslovak population the impression that the shipments of wheat were due solely to the Communist Party.

The effect of this campaign, however, was lost. The clamour which the Communists raised about this matter, their lack of taste and of discretion, the loud-voiced publicity with which they greeted this fact, as though to emphasize strongly that the Soviets were not disposed to come to our aid unless we confided our public affairs to the Communists, were all too disingenuously obvious to impress a public like ours, which had a sense of proportion and a sense of humour. The Press was filled with articles praising Soviet generosity and photographs showing bakers engaged in putting into their ovens the first bread made from

the Russian wheat, or box-cars covered with flowers arriving at the Czechoslovak frontier station, where they were hailed by delegations headed by brass bands. Countless telegrams of thanks addressed to Stalin by various labour groups were published, and in all the public meetings organized by the Communists one heard of nothing except the Russian wheat. There were even comic incidents: thus during the exhibition of a special film showing bread made from Russian wheat, which was being enjoyed by consumers with beaming faces, the audience perceived that the bread was black, like that made from home-grown rye, and that it had nothing in common with Soviet wheat. Far from being impressed, the public was, on the contrary, annoyed by this false propaganda, which sought to exploit our misery for the benefit of the Communist Party and Soviet Russia. The relief and spontaneous gratitude aroused by the announcement of the supplying of Russian wheat gave way to disgust provoked by the Communist campaign. In the end the help which Russia was offering us was no longer appreciated even at its just value.

In all the public meetings where I gave an objective analysis of the treaty which I had signed with Mikoyan on December 11, 1947, I had great difficulty in convincing my audiences of the real advantages which the Soviet shipments meant for us.

The negotiations in Moscow had not been easy. The principal difficulty resided in the fact that the Soviets were not able to offer us sufficient quantities of certain raw materials which we were obliged to obtain in the Western countries; at the same time they were cutting down the imports of consumer goods, asking us to supply them chiefly with articles of equipment which we could easily have sold in other markets. It was the poor harvest which was the cause of the unexpected increase in our commercial exchanges with the U.S.S.R.: since the enormous imports of Russian wheat could not be paid for by the export of the products of our heavy industry alone, the Soviets finally accepted the increase of their imports of articles manufactured by our light industry.

Taken as a whole, the treaty which I had just signed was advantageous for us because I had been able to obtain certain valuable concessions: our exports of consumer goods had been considerably increased; the deliveries of special pipe intended for the oil-fields, which the Russians had attempted to force upon us in brutal fashion because this item interested them for

strategic reasons, had been appreciably reduced; the prices and conditions of payment were in general not unfavourable; and finally I had obtained a credit of a billion crowns which facilitated the payment for imports from Russia.

I did not fail to dwell upon these advantages in the accounts which I gave to the Cabinet, to Parliament and to several public meetings. But I also emphasized that if we should be grateful to the U.S.S.R. for helping us to bridge the difficult months which separated us from the next harvest, the Russian wheat was not a gift: to pay for it we should be obliged to work hard for two years and to deprive the population of many products which it had long urgently needed (shoes, textile goods, etc.).

The Communists had been careful to pass over this minor detail in silence, all the more so because it had just been learned that the deliveries of U.N.R.R.A. to Czechoslovakia had represented a gift of from 16,000,000 to 17,000,000 dollars.

According to the new treaty, commercial relations between the two countries were to be developed to a considerable extent. The volume which our exchanges with Russia might reach was estimated at 16 or 17 per cent of the total of our foreign trade, on condition that both parties would be able to fulfil their engagements. It was less than the Communists had desired for political reasons and more than economic circles had hoped.

In spite of all the advantages which we had granted to the U.S.S.R., our trade with the Western countries still far surpassed that with Russia and the countries of the Soviet sphere, which in the most favourable circumstances could not reach more than 40 per cent.*

The Czechoslovak economy, whose large productive capacity was based on heavy exports, presupposed commercial relations with the Western countries as well as with the East. It was to our interest to develop our exchanges with Russia and Central Europe, but these markets could never replace those of the Western countries. That is why, although I sincerely desired to develop our commercial relations with the countries in the Soviet sphere and with the U.S.S.R. herself, I considered it vital

* In December 1948 the U.S.S.R. concluded a new trade treaty with Czechoslovakia, by the terms of which the exchanges between the two countries would be increased by 45 per cent. over the preceding year. This fact was explained by the rapid aggravation of the economic situation in Czechoslovakia since the *coup d'état* of February 1948. But even this considerable increase in trade with the U.S.S.R. will not permit Czechoslovakia to eliminate commercial relations with the Western countries.

for our country to maintain and intensify our economic relations with the West. In my position as Minister of Foreign Trade I defended and practised that policy until the day when Czechoslovakia became a Soviet protectorate and lost her national independence.

This, then, is why, for reasons entirely objective, my commercial policy fell into perfect accord with my general conception of co-operation with the East and the West, which alone could guarantee our liberty.

CHAPTER XVI

MOSCOW'S SUSPICIONS MOUNT

In all the conversations which I had during my stay in Moscow I sensed a greater reserve in the Soviet officials with whom I talked than during my earlier visits. I was able to see neither M. Molotov nor M. Vishinsky, who were attending the conference of the four Foreign Ministers in London. I was not received by Stalin, as in 1946, when I had to carry out a political as well as an economic mission to Moscow.

The Soviet diplomats whom I did have occasion to meet were even more tight-lipped than usual. The most interesting—relatively—of the conversations was that which I had with Mikoyan. I was well acquainted with the Soviet Minister of Foreign Trade, with whom I had often negotiated various matters. He was an Armenian of great intelligence, sure judgment and an astonishing capacity for work. In "business" he was hard, often brutal; in our personal relations, on the contrary, he had always shown himself agreeable and friendly towards me. He was distinguished from most of his colleagues by his wide acquaintance with matters of foreign policy. He knew the non-Soviet world better than most of the Bolshevik leaders; he had made several trips before the war to Europe and the United States.

As I was questioning him on the possibility of an understanding between the U.S.S.R. and the Western countries, he showed himself very sceptical. He repeated the well-known themes of Moscow's propaganda: the Americans did not want to reach an understanding with the Soviets because they feared Russian influence in the world and believed themselves the stronger. He thought an economic crisis in the United States was inevitable, but he did not give as definite an opinion on its international consequences as the Soviet propaganda agents, according to whom it must strike a mortal blow at American imperialism.

When I spoke to him of my fear of seeing the Germans take advantage of the differences existing between the U.S.S.R. and the Western Powers, he admitted this danger, though he imputed the responsibility for it to the Americans. He added,

however: "We are watching the Germans closely; we are not forgetting what they did to us during the war." When I remarked that in my opinion a German Communist was quite as likely to dream of hegemony for his country as all the other Germans, he seemed to have no more illusions on that score than I: "Does that surprise you? They are Germans, aren't they?"

Mikoyan showed great interest in the internal struggles in our country. From certain discreet allusions which he made, I concluded that in governmental circles in Moscow they were beginning to be suspicious of the National Socialists. I explained to him very openly that we were engaged in a most bitter electoral battle with the Communists, and that we expected to see them suffer considerable losses, but that we thought they would remain relatively the strongest party. I stressed the fact that even if the Communists should no longer be the first party in the country, our policy towards the Soviet Union would not change. And I repeated to him what I had asserted to Molotov a year earlier: "If Msgr. Sramek should become Premier tomorrow instead of Fierlinger or Gottwald, we should honour just as strictly as we do to-day the commitments set down in our treaty of alliance with Russia."

To which the Soviet Minister answered, laughing: "All the same, I think something would be changed, and that the change would please you, especially if the Premier were a National Socialist." I knew very well that my explanations would hardly suffice to reassure Mikoyan. Nevertheless he declared himself in agreement with me when I said that the Communists were wrong to trumpet the slogan: "Whoever is against us is against the Soviets".

During a second conversation which I had with Mikoyan at the Czechoslovak Embassy in the presence of Valerian Zorin, who had been promoted to Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs after having been Ambassador to Prague, he said to me: "Your disagreements and your internal struggles are your own business; what interests us is your relations with the U.S.S.R.; we will trust you if you remain our allies."

These were words which could be understood in any way one wanted: they could be interpreted equally well as a promise of non-interference or as a threat in case we should not be sufficiently faithful allies. I encountered the same distrust in M. Lebediev, Soviet Ambassador to Poland, whom I saw when I

passed through Warsaw. Lebediev, who had been Ambassador to our Government in London at the end of the war, was a pleasant diplomat who had always showed himself extremely friendly to me and had often talked with me openly enough. I was struck by the unaccustomed distrust which he showed, particularly about my party, which he suspected of playing both ends against the middle. "You advertise your loyalty to the Soviet Union," he said to me, "but all the time you cherish the hope that some day America will get the better of us." Apropos of the defeat of Fierlinger, which seemed to worry him, he added: "We have the impression that you want to exclude the Communists from the Government and create a situation like that which now exists in France." I answered that if he attributed such an intention to us, he took us for innocents who paid no attention to political realities. But I knew also that I had not succeeded in dissipating his doubts.

Analysing the impressions which I brought back from Moscow, which I owed to my conversations with both Soviet politicians and foreign diplomats and journalists, it seemed to me that Moscow had no intention of interfering in our affairs for the moment. I was sure that the Soviets would take control of Czechoslovakia by installing a Communist regime there when the danger of war seemed imminent; but at the end of 1947 nothing gave credence to the belief that Soviet circles regarded a conflict as imminent.

Although I was of the opinion that the Soviets had no intention of intervening in Prague in the near future, I was worried. Soviet propaganda was lashing out more and more vigorously against the "Western imperialists", and thus was creating an atmosphere of suspicion and hate which became still more tense after the failure of the London conference. Russia more than ever seemed to be drawing into her shell, and to be shutting up within her defences all the countries located in her sphere of influence. I wondered how much longer she would allow us to remain on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

I did not regret the inclement weather which obliged us to make the return journey by train. At certain stations the train stopped long enough to permit us to talk at random with the local inhabitants, and at Brest-Litovsk we even had time to visit the city. We were struck by the frightful misery which reigned in all the provincial communities, contrasting with the rather prosperous aspect of the capital.

People in the streets hesitated less than in Moscow to speak to us or to answer our questions. Some persons came up to us of their own accord to talk to us. Nearly all of them asked the same question "Will there be a war?" The panic which the idea of a new armed conflict inspired in them was explained when one saw the ruins with which they were surrounded and the utter poverty in which they lived. In Brest-Litovsk my heart bled for several persons whom I saw vying with one another at the market for one old shoe someone was selling. It is difficult to describe the feelings of pity which were aroused in us by these unfortunates living in such misery and fear.

Immediately after my return I went to see Benes to report to him on my visit. "I believe," I said to him by way of conclusion, "that the greatest prudence is necessary on our part if we do not wish to give them a plausible pretext for interfering in our affairs; we must at all costs avoid any action which could be interpreted as being directed against the Soviets. But we must also, and especially, avoid giving them the impression that we are afraid of them."

The President was of my opinion. He thought, as I did, that only an energetic policy on the part of the Western Powers could bring the Soviets to a more conciliatory attitude and check their expansionist tendencies. He no longer believed in the possibility of agreement between Russia and the West. He realized that by the fact of the tension between the two blocs our situation was becoming more and more difficult, but he was convinced that with prudence and firmness we would succeed in saving democracy in our country.

I was most happy to see that Benes' state of health was much improved. He was in good humour, and showed himself confident about the result of the elections. But he foresaw a very hard electoral battle. "When Zorin came to see me for the last time," he told me, "I said to him frankly that in my opinion the Communists would lose ground at the next elections. I had the impression that he was expecting this result. Even Stalin's wheat will not save them."

CHAPTER XVII

AT LOGGERHEADS WITH THE COMMUNISTS

IT WAS CERTAIN that in every domain of public life the Communist influence was decreasing. Faced with the increasing resistance of the democratic parties, the Communists shrieked that they were reactionaries. On November 28, 1947, Gottwald, during a meeting of the executive committee of his party, delivered a speech filled with abuse. "The reaction," he said among other things, "wants to return to the pre-Munich situation. It is attempting to paralyse the activity of the Government and to form a Cabinet of technicians. This procedure must be considered as an attempt at a reactionary *coup d'état* to which we must answer by draconian measures. We must be on our guard."

At a meeting of the executive committee of my party at Hradec Kralove I answered Gottwald's speech by explaining that the Communists, unable to win a majority at the elections, were looking for an excuse to resort to direct action, and thus avoid an electoral defeat. According to their usual methods—methods which were a secret to no one—they attributed their own intentions to their adversaries. I concluded by saying: "The Communists will resort to direct action in two cases only: if we let ourselves be intimidated, or if they are aided directly by Moscow. The first possibility is ruled out; the second, in the present international situation, seems hardly probable. Communist threats will not shatter our will to defend democracy."

On December 3, 1947, there was an unexpected change in the Communist representation in the Cabinet: Zmrhal, the Minister of Domestic Trade, handed in his resignation for reasons of health, and was succeeded by Alexej Cepicka. It was known that Zmrhal was unwell, but it was known more pertinently that the Communist Party was not greatly satisfied with a representative who, as a specialist in the matter of co-operatives, had little disposition to apply a radical economic policy.

The selection of Cepicka surprised everybody. The non-Communist Ministers were informed of it only by the official *communiqué*, at the same time as the general public.

Cepicka, a young lawyer of thirty-eight, was known for his intransigence and political extremism. After the liberation, in 1945, he got himself nominated president of the National Committee of Kromeriz in Moravia. In the exercise of this power he acted like a dictator: he stopped the work of the regional court of Kromeriz on the pretext that certain judges were "notorious reactionaries", and moreover that the national committees were thereafter to be "the only organizations invested with all powers —executive, legislative and judicial". Five days later, thanks to the intervention of his superiors, order was re-established. In the National Committee he was supported by persons of doubtful reputation, of whom nearly all were later removed from their posts. Under his direction numerous cases of abusive use of power and of arbitrary arrests of innocent citizens had occurred. For a time he forbade religious marriages. At Kromeriz a sentence which had made him famous had become a household word: "Yes, I admit it; I will violate the law as often as political interests demand it."

In Prague this young Communist, whom the revolutionary wave of May 1945 had washed up on to the political scene, was little known. His nomination as Minister came therefore as a general surprise. It was difficult to escape the impression that the Communists wanted to have, in the person of Cepicka, a man who would make war on the merchants, always extremely hostile to the Communists, and who, in the Government, would play the part of a young radical. Cepicka did his best not to disappoint the hopes which had been placed in him.

The selection of Cepicka for the Ministry of Domestic Trade was not calculated to improve the relations between us and the Communists. But as if the presence in the Cabinet of so aggressive a representative of the Communist Party was not enough to embitter relations, our differences increased still more, and with reason, when we discovered that all the clues connected with the assassination attempt against the three ministers pointed to the Communist Party of Olomouc and its general secretariat, where Cepicka had played a prominent role, and we also learned that he had had associations with some of the accused. His nomination as Minister of Justice, replacing Drtina, after the *coup d'état*, completed our stupefaction.

The atmosphere was becoming more and more tense. At the end of 1947 a fresh conflict broke out concerning the project for a treaty with Bulgaria. During the negotiations with the Bul-

garian Government, the same problem we had encountered on the subject of the Franco-Czechoslovak treaty caused a clash between the Communists and non-Communists within our Government; the Bulgarians, no longer satisfied with the wording, "mutual aid against Germany and her potential allies", demanded the inclusion of a clause directed against any aggressor.

Kolarov, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister, explained that, in view of the direction which the international situation had taken, the Slavic world was not threatened by Germany alone. For Bulgaria, situated far from Germany, a treaty directed exclusively against that country had no immediate interest, and he regarded the Czechoslovak proposal as "outdated".

The reasons put forward by Kolarov could be explained by the tension which reigned between Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. But for Czechoslovakia, who had no desire to be drawn into distant conflicts in Eastern Europe, the Bulgarian project, in turn, had no immediate interest.

We had still more serious reasons for opposing the formula proposed by Bulgaria. It was evident that the Bulgarian Government, in referring to "any aggressor", was not thinking alone of Greece and Turkey, but more especially of the Anglo-Saxon Powers, who were supporting those two countries. In other words, we were once more to be drawn into a system of alliance directed against the great Western Powers.

Gottwald, in order to impress President Benes, told him—and he stressed this in a conversation which I had with him—that he had every reason to believe that the formula proposed by Kolarov was not due solely to Bulgarian initiative, but that it had been approved by Stalin during his latest conversation with Dimitrov. Gottwald was trying in this fashion to secure acceptance of the Bulgarian proposal by pointing out that Moscow as well as Sofia would be displeased by a refusal. Benes thereupon asserted that it was impossible for us to accept commitments directed against other nations than Germany and her eventual allies, and he recalled that before the war he had similarly risked displeasing Yugoslavia by rejecting a treaty of alliance directed against Italy.

The game of the Soviet Government was obvious: not wishing itself to engage in a system of alliance directed in fact against the United States and Great Britain, it preferred to hide behind its satellites by impelling them in this direction. In the circumstances I suggested to Masaryk that he ask the Soviets a question

which would force them to expose their cards: "Why not ask Moscow", I said, "whether the Soviet Government approved the Bulgarian project, and why not let her know that we are ready to conclude with Bulgaria, as well as with any other State of Central Europe or anywhere else, a treaty against 'any aggressor', on condition that the Soviet Government in its turn consents to conclude an identical treaty with us?" Otherwise, we would in fact risk being drawn into a conflict with a third Power without being assured of the help of our principal ally, the U.S.S.R. not being bound to come to our aid except against Germany and her allies. Masaryk, who understood the reasons that prompted this suggestion, declared himself in complete agreement, and immediately addressed a note along these lines to the Kremlin.

The answer which reached us in January 1948 was entirely satisfactory: the Soviet Government left us free to choose one formula or the other for our treaty with Bulgaria. Our negotiations with the Bulgarian Government therefore remained suspended for the moment.

We were all the happier at this success because we learned that Kolarov's formula had been decided upon by Stalin and Dimitrov during the trip of the Bulgarian Premier to Sochi, on the Black Sea, where Stalin usually spends his vacations, and that it had even been drafted by the Foreign Ministry of Moscow.*

The Soviet Government had had good reasons for giving way on this matter. In December 1947, the provisional Greek Government of General Markos had been formed. Belgrade, Sofia and Tirana were preparing to recognize it officially. The propaganda directed by the Cominform organized a campaign in all countries in favour of Markos and the Greek "popular democracy". The Governments of the United States and Great Britain, in accord with France, made no secret of their intention not to hesitate to take whatever measures they should judge necessary in the event of an official recognition of the rebels. Moscow then retreated; and, at her order, Sofia, Belgrade and Tirana in turn did likewise.

I attributed the greatest importance to this episode, which was highly significant: it seemed to me that for the moment Moscow

* The treaty was only concluded in April 1948, after the *coup d'état*, and it was the Czechoslovak formula, mentioning only Germany and her eventual allies, which was adopted.

had no desire to complicate its relations with the Western Powers. Since everything that happened to us had a direct bearing on the relations between Russia and the West, I drew from this the conclusion that if the Czechoslovak democrats maintained their attitude of resistance to the Communists, even at the risk of a conflict, Moscow would hesitate to send her army to the help of the Communists. For me this fact was decisive. Benes and Masaryk were of the same opinion. The experiment which we had just made regarding the Czechoslovak-Bulgarian treaty seemed to indicate that by manœuvring with firmness and skill, we had a chance of succeeding. Our will to resist the Communists could only be strengthened by this belief.

The Christmas holidays gave us a few days' respite. The annual message issued by Benes on this occasion was an appeal to the people with the intention of mobilizing all the democratic forces of the nation for the struggle against Communism.

This encouragement from the President did not fall on deaf ears. Everyone foresaw that the new year would be decisive.

BOOK FOUR

TWO CONCEPTIONS: DEMOCRACY *vs.* TOTALITARIANISM

CHAPTER XVIII

MULTIPLYING CONFLICTS

In 1948 Czechoslovakia had several great anniversaries to commemorate: it was six centuries since Charles University, a symbol of free teaching and of the freedom of human thought, had been founded; it was a hundred years since the revolution of 1848 had given to the country its first political liberties and, with the abolition of forced labour, had opened the way to reform; it was also a hundred years since the first Slav congress, which had defended the idea of co-operation among free Slavic nations in a free and democratic Europe, had been convened in Prague; it was, finally, thirty years since the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic, which, after three centuries of foreign domination, had consecrated the national independence of the Czechs and the Slovaks.

The political struggle which we had been carrying on since the autumn of 1947, and which was growing sharper day by day, had for its stake these same liberties which we had won during the last few centuries, which victory we were to celebrate in 1948. It was a question of nothing more nor less than safeguarding or renouncing civil, social and national liberty.

All democrats asked themselves anxiously if the year 1948 would bring them "a greater and more perfect liberty", to quote the words of Tomas G. Masaryk, or a new servitude.

The future was heavy with menace: in the field of international politics distrust between the East and the West was becoming more and more marked; in the field of domestic politics the gap was widening between the Communists and the democrats; abroad no improvement seemed possible; at home tempers were becoming increasingly frayed.

Since the beginning of January the struggle between the two

great factions which divided our country had been developing with a bitterness which was, so to speak, visibly increasing, and which speedily assumed such proportions that at the end of that month Government activities were completely paralysed. From that moment a crisis became inevitable; the very fabric of the nation had again been challenged. At the beginning of February many signs revealed that the Communists were preparing a *coup d'état.* The catastrophe broke upon the nation more quickly than had been foreseen.

The means which the Communists adopted to attain their ends were along the same lines as those which had already proved their worth in other Central European countries: they sought to nationalize the entire economy of the country, carrying on a policy of intimidation, and threatening the nation with Soviet intervention. In the case of Czechoslovakia they had no time to lose, for they could not risk facing the elections fixed for the month of May.

We began the new year convinced that in the near future a decisive test of strength would oppose Communists to democrats. In fact, a violent conflict broke out at the very first meeting of the Cabinet. The issue was the nationalization of private trade. The Communists had always regretted that commerce had escaped the nationalization decrees of 1945, which had affected only industry, the banks and the insurance companies. All their efforts to subject commercial enterprises to a degree of Government control or to nationalize them by successive steps had failed.

The scarcity of textile goods, due especially to the shortage of raw materials and of labour, furnished them with a pretext for striking a blow at private commerce. Instead of remedying the lack of merchandise by reorganizing and increasing production, they attacked the distributors, who, though not beyond criticism, were nevertheless not the root of the evil.

Communist Minister of Domestic Trade Cepicka proposed eliminating all textile wholesalers and replacing them by State-operated distribution centres, which would have the monopoly of distributing merchandise to the retailers. At the same time the Communists launched a violent campaign against private trade; the Minister of Domestic Trade ordered numerous searches and confiscated merchandise which he claimed had been spirited away from the public to be sold on the black market. In most cases this accusation was without foundation.

The Communist plan was a purely demagogic manœuvre: not only did it fail to improve distribution, but it created so much confusion that goods became even scarcer. The new distribution centres could not overnight replace wholesalers who had long experience. Moreover, the small retailers, being no longer able to choose their suppliers, were completely at the mercy of the distribution centres.

As the Ministry of Domestic Trade was in the hands of the extreme Left, it is not difficult to imagine the part which party interests and political intrigues played in this distribution of merchandise, to say nothing of the bureaucratic weight which retarded, and even paralysed, the normal process of exchanges. Thus the Communists, knowing that they would never win over the small merchants to their cause, used this system as a means of bringing pressure to bear upon them.

In my position as Minister of Foreign Trade, I was charged by my party with concerning myself, in addition to general political questions, with economic problems of all kinds. During the desperate struggle which took place within the Cabinet I defended not only an economic system, but above all a political principle. I had always supported the thesis that total nationalization of the country's economy would inevitably lead to political totalitarianism. For, in order to establish its domination over all sections of economic life, the State is obliged to institute a highly centralized authoritative regime; it is solely on that condition that it can direct, oversee and co-ordinate them. Only absolute political power provides the necessary means to operate the complicated machinery of modern economic life. It follows that, to avoid political dictatorship, it is indispensable to maintain a large segment of private enterprise. That was the fundamental reason why I fiercely opposed Cepicka's project.

Since the public does not always realize the interdependence of economic questions and political problems, we organized a series of meetings at which I explained the matter by exposing the Communists' demagogy. I showed in particular that all merchants would be dependent upon the distribution centres, which, in their turn, would be dependent upon the Ministry of Domestic Trade, which was ruled by the Communists. Moreover, according to Cepicka's project, consumers would be able to buy only a limited amount of merchandise, specified by the authorities, from stores also designated by the authorities. It was therefore not solely a question of fighting against specula-

tion by wholesalers and eliminating the black market, but, above all, of suppressing all liberty of distribution, sale and purchase, thereby increasing the hold of the State on the economic life of the country, and consequently on the private lives of all its citizens. I ended all my lectures by stressing the fact that in defending private trade we were defending not a few merchants but the whole nation against the danger of Communist dictatorship.

Unfortunately the Social Democrats did not associate themselves with the intensive campaign which the other non-Communist parties waged against the Cepicka project. If the Communists had assured themselves of the Social Democratic votes in the Cabinet, they did not dare to bring the debate before the Chamber, where they would have risked causing desertions from the ranks of the Social Democratic Deputies. So this radical change in our economic system was brought about by a simple governmental decree, though constitutionally the new arrangements should not have become operative except after the approval of Parliament.

The defeat which we had just experienced in the Cabinet, far from weakening us, provided us with a powerful weapon for our electoral campaign: it enabled us to warn public opinion by calling attention to the arbitrary methods employed by the Communists and to the political consequences which their economic policy might bring in its wake.

The Social Democrats withdrew from this battle because, in spite of the hesitation they had shown at the beginning, they had finally submitted to the Communists. The confidence which they had won when they removed Fierlinger from the leadership of the party at the time of the Brno Congress was shaken; people asked if the Social Democratic leaders were not still under the domination of the Communists, even after the changes that had taken place. Many Social Democrats passed into the ranks of the National Socialist Party at this time.

For my part, the attitude adopted by the Social Democratic Ministers on the textile question was one more proof that Social Democracy, always faithful to its Marxian theories, would never oppose the Communists when it was a question of the socialization of the national economy. We could, however, count on their co-operation for the defence of political rights and civil liberties. That is why during the February crisis, in order to secure the support of the Social Democrats, I always

made an effort to put political questions first (especially the question of the police), and to relegate economic problems to the background.

Immediately after the matter of the distribution of textile goods had been settled in the manner related above, a new conflict broke out between Communists and non-Communists on the subject of the organization of the nationalized banks. The projects submitted by the Minister of Finance indicated clearly that the Communists wanted, on the one hand, to set up a single bank, and, on the other, to endeavour to gain control of the whole banking system and, by stages, to assure themselves control of financial life in general. Once more we were in the minority in the Cabinet against a coalition including the Communists and Social Democrats. Likewise when we took up the problem of the reorganisation of the co-operatives, the chambers of commerce and the unions, it was to be expected that the Social Democrats would support the Communist thesis.

Nor could we count on the co-operation of the Social Democrats in the Cabinet debate on agrarian reform. If Majer opposed the demagogic proposals of Julius Duris, Minister of Agriculture, he could not always count on the support of his colleagues, Tymes and Mme Jankovcova.

The new agrarian reform, like the nationalization of trade and the reorganization of the banks, was for the Communists only a stage on the road which was to end in the complete bolshevization of the country.

In Czechoslovakia agrarian reform did not present the same urgent character as in the other countries of Central Europe, since it had already been realized in large measure after the First World War. Properties larger than fifty hectares* no longer represented more than 5 per cent of tillable land and pasturage. All parties, however, admitted that a new division of land was desirable to satisfy the claims of the rural population. It had been decided that private holdings should not consist of more than fifty hectares, excluding woodlands. But, contrary to the Communists, the other parties desired to make exceptions to this principle, notably in cases where the splitting up of large properties would cause serious losses to the economy of the country. The Populists demanded, in addition, a special statute for ecclesiastical properties, by virtue of the *modus vivendi* concluded with the Holy See in 1929. The Communists refused

* About 125 acres.

any compromise. In addition, they were violently opposed to any splitting up of State properties, even in regions where a need for it was making itself felt. On this point the Communists had been compelled to show their hand: if they were intent on keeping intact the great domains belonging to the State, it was because they counted on realizing the complete collectivization of the country districts, following the models of the Sovkhozes.

It was for the same reasons that they called for a minute subdivision of the land; they knew that in fact modern agricultural techniques do not long permit the survival of small properties, and that a radical agrarian reform would inevitably end in the formation of Kolkhozes. Nor did they hesitate to attack private properties of less than fifty hectares, proposing to divide among the peasants the smallest pieces of land not personally cultivated by their owners. Now, in Czechoslovakia, most city-dwellers are of recent peasant origin, so that minor Civil Servants, especially railway workers and postal employees, usually owned a plot of land inherited from their parents. This land, if it had been rented, or if agriculture was not the principal source of their incomes, would be taken from them under the Communist project.

Just as we endeavoured to prevent the complete nationalization of industry and commerce, so we opposed with all our strength the total collectivization of the rural districts. The Cabinet debates on agrarian reform were extremely violent. In Parliament it was still worse: the Communists tried to intimidate the democratic deputies by bringing into Parliament numerous delegations which vociferously demanded that the projects of Duris should be immediately accepted. Instead of being intimidated, the deputies increased their resistance. Even the Social Democratic deputies generally took their stand beside the other non-Communist parties against Duris. It was evident that in these circumstances the Communists would not find a majority to approve their agricultural demands. For them that was one more reason for putting an end to all their difficulties by crushing democracy.

Whether the question on the agenda was of an economic or a financial nature, it seemed almost impossible to arrive at a compromise solution between the Communists and the other parties. In truth, the endless conflicts which brought Communists and non-Communists to grips exceeded the limits of an electoral struggle. It was two conflicting ways of life which were confronting one another.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SEIZURE OF THE POLICE

OF ALL THE conflicts which had been poisoning the atmosphere for months, the gravest was that which broke out about the police service, which was the direct cause of the Government crisis of February 1948.

Ever since the liberation we had faced the consistent attempts of the Communists, as masters of the Ministry of the Interior, to gain control of the police in order to put them at the service of their policies. They infiltrated into all the higher and non-commissioned ranks in these services and, once in place, set to work to intimidate the population by using arbitrary methods in flagrant contradiction of the law: they threatened with arrest or actually arrested citizens who opposed them; they dragged out police investigations before bringing those arrested before a magistrate; they subjected their prisoners to brutal treatment during questioning; they used *agents provocateurs*; they tapped wires; they spied on the private lives of citizens and their personal relationships, especially those with citizens from the Western countries, etc. In short, bringing the police into line meant the institution of a police regime at the service of the Communist Party.

What means did we have to defend ourselves in this unequal struggle? The Communists occupied an advantageous position from the fact that they had control of the Ministry of the Interior. On the other hand, Drtina, a National Socialist, who had succeeded Stransky, also a member of our party, in November 1945 held the portfolio of Justice. Though it had not the same importance as the Ministry of the Interior, holding the Ministry of Justice allowed us to a certain extent to apply the brakes to the arbitrary procedures of the Communists: once the police inquiry was ended and an accused person was brought before the courts, the magistrates, whose independence Drtina defended vigorously (like his predecessor, Jaroslav Stransky), had the opportunity of redressing wrongs done to the defendants by the police organizations.

In our hands, in short, the Ministry of Justice could serve in

a certain measure as a corrective. But in order to triumph over our adversaries it would have been necessary also to take preventive action. We had only a single means for doing that: to warn public opinion, not only by pointing out the abuses of the services controlled by the extreme Left, but also by defending the democratic principles which were scoffed at by Muscovite propaganda. But when we sought to inform public opinion about the facts of the case, we ran up against two obstacles: first, we lacked precise data because of the reticence of our informers, terrorized by the totalitarian methods of the Communists; and secondly, the Ministry of Information was in the hands of the Communists.

It was not unusual for a citizen who came to seek my protection against Communist persecution to refuse to testify in public about the rough treatment of which he had been the victim, for fear of having to undergo renewed persecution or to expose his family to reprisals. There were many police officials to whom these methods were repugnant, but they hesitated to give us details, for fear of being punished for violating professional secrecy.

If free speech and a free Press still existed, and if we did not fail to profit by them, the Communists for their part could have recourse to them in a manner that was infinitely more efficacious. The Ministry of Information being their domain, the radio and the cinema, as well as the only Press agency in Czechoslovakia, were almost entirely devoted to them. No newspaper, no magazine could appear without the authorization of the Ministry of Information, which decided the allocations of paper; this was a formidable weapon, and the Communists knew how to use it. Citizens of democratic countries, accustomed to the separation of the public powers and to checks on the executive power, cannot imagine the often insurmountable difficulties with which we were faced. This desperate struggle which was waged, together with our party, by the Populists and the Slovak Democrats, and later by the Social Democrats, had begun on the morrow of the liberation, and ended only with the *coup d'état.*

The Communists were executing a plan which they had worked out—or, more exactly, which the Comintern had worked out—in Moscow during the war. Their tactics were the same in all countries: they tried to get hold of the Ministry of the Interior and gain control of the police, and once this goal

had been attained, they applied the methods advocated by the Soviet police. The Red Army was accompanied by well-trained agents of the N.K.V.D., who assisted local Communist organizations to take over the administration of the country immediately after the liberation of a territory. In Czechoslovakia it was at first General Machlis who, after the arrival of the Red Army in Subcarpathian Russia, prepared the annexation of this province to the Soviet Union.

In the other countries the Communists attempted to seize the controlling levers of power by means of three organizations: the Ministry of the Interior, National Committees, and the corps of the Security Police.

According to the Kosice programme, the National Committees were to be organizations elected by the people, which, within the limits of local communities, prefectorates or provinces, would supervise the proper functioning of administrative matters, the security services included. In the minds of the Communists they were to fulfil practically the same functions as the Soviets during the Bolshevik revolution, replacing little by little the whole administrative machinery as it had existed up to that time. But the Communists did not succeed in fully realizing this plan; none the less they did manage to gain a preponderating influence in the administrative services. It was only in Czechoslovakia that the democratic tradition was so solidly established that the Communists did not succeed in suppressing the former administrative set-up overnight, and that the non-Communist elements soon regained lost ground even within the National Committees. So much was this the case that the Communists, after having at first favoured the National Committees at the expense of the central administration, afterwards sought to make of them simple executive instruments in the hands of the Ministry of the Interior.

Finally, during the putsch of February 1948 they had recourse to a new organization, the "committees of action", formed under the close supervision of the secretaries of the Communist Party. Committees of action were established on the one hand within the National Committees themselves, to transform them and supervise them, and on the other hand similar committees were formed in all public organizations, the executive bureaus, the Sokols, the resistance movements, the ministries, the schools, the universities, the unions, the nationalized enterprises and private businesses. It was through them

that the Communist Party exercised its power over public life and, up to a certain point, over private life.

If the Communists had obtained only a limited success with the National Committees, they succeeded much better in the reorganization of the services of the ordinary and security police. To get their hands on these services at the first possible moment had been their principal concern. Immediately after the liberation of Prague, on May 10, 1945, a Colonel of the engineers, Sames, a militant Communist, seized police headquarters "in the name of the revolution" and removed from office two remarkable technicians, Colonels Sembera and Stukavec, thanks to whom the gendarmerie and the police had joined the national uprising to drive the Germans out of Prague. It was thus that, following a plan which had been prepared long beforehand, the Communists gained control of the police even before the arrival in Prague of the Czechoslovak Government installed in Slovakia, which, confronted by a *fait accompli*, could only accept it.

In conformity with the governmental programme of Kosice, it was announced that the various bodies of security police then existing were to be replaced by a single organization, the Corps of National Security. The centralization of all the services of the security police, placed under the Minister of the Interior, a Communist, would facilitate the complete bolshevization of the police.

The Communists made haste slowly in restoring order to the police and other branches of the administration disorganized by the fall of the Nazi regime. They had every interest, as one may imagine, in perpetuating a confusion and a disorder which permitted them to infiltrate everywhere. But instead of unifying the various bodies of the security police, as had been agreed, they created alongside the police and the gendarmerie the Corps of the Security Police (S.N.B.), which they put forward as a product of the revolution and which was endowed with immense privileges: often, ignoring the instructions given by the Minister of the Interior, the S.N.B. acted on its own account, with the most utter arbitrariness. It was composed almost entirely of old members of the Communist Party or of people who had rallied to the Communists at the last moment; it was thus that some doubtful elements, and even certain criminals, slipped into the ranks of the S.N.B.

The agents of the S.N.B. garrisoned in the frontier regions,

still inhabited to a considerable extent by Germans, were particularly feared. On the pretext of punishing Nazis, they committed innumerable acts of violence, when it was not simply a case of plain theft. Sworn to defend order and to assure security, they often made themselves the accomplices of adventurers who took advantage of the situation to lay hands on private property and State possessions.

The Communists did not content themselves with the S.N.B. They constituted "mobile detachments" of the police, veritable para-military formations. In official circles the creation of these detachments was explained by the necessity of having to face a possible revolt by Nazis who might have retained their arms. This did not prevent the continued formation of these special detachments after the transfer of the Germans.

For that matter, the Communists no longer hid the fact that it was a question of protecting the "popular democracy" from its "internal enemies". The mobile detachments were composed almost exclusively of fanatical Communists on whom the central committee of the Communist Party could count in all circumstances. It was they whom the Communists called upon in February 1948 to occupy Prague.

If the maintenance of several bodies of police almost completely independent of one another prevented the re-establishment of order and security, and operated in favour of the Communists, the "purge" of the former police and of the gendarmerie was carried out all the more quickly because it aimed at the same goal, by dismissing first of all the opponents of the Communists. Administrative confusion increased still further when "security commissions" were attached to the National Committee of the provinces—purely political organizations which arrogated to themselves the right to give instructions to the police and, in certain cases, even took over their work. Thus policemen and gendarmes no longer knew to whom they were responsible. As for the security commissions, which had no juridical basis, and whose members frequently possessed not the slightest competence, they pursued their ends without any regard for legality.

We could not tolerate such a state of anarchy from which the Communists alone profited. After the liberation, therefore, we made an effort to put some order into the services of the Security Police, and proposed to effect the unification of the new and old formations and to define their jurisdiction at least

by a provisional law. As long as disorder favoured their designs, the Communists managed to drag out the matter; it was only beginning with 1946 that the situation gradually improved, until in July 1947 the law on the National Security Police, which gave a legal basis to the S.N.B., was approved.

Even then the Minister of the Interior showed no haste to put this law into effect; it called, in fact, for the working out of a plan on the status of the Corps of the National Security Police and the organization of intelligence services, and the Minister preferred to do nothing, for fear that under the pressure of the democratic Ministers these branches would be removed from the exclusive influence of the Communist Party.

The question of the organization of intelligence services was to give rise to a clash of a violence hitherto unequalled.

A special section of intelligence services had been created at the Ministry of the Interior in 1945, and its direction had been entrusted to a technician of great merit, General Bartik. This division was in principle gradually to transform itself into a central organization entrusted with directing and centralizing all the intelligence services attached to the different ministries; from this fact, it would no longer be subordinate to the Ministry of the Interior, but to the Premier's office. Thus the information collected would have been at the disposal of the whole Government, and not solely of the Ministry of the Interior, which is to say of the Communist Party; the bureau, inversely, would have been subject to the control of the Cabinet.

No one will be astonished that this way of attacking the problem had not the good fortune to please the Communists. Instead of centralizing the intelligence services, they paralleled them—as usual, without the slightest juridical basis—by creating special "security sections" for Bohemia and Moravia—the Z.O.B., of evil memory. The Z.O.B. were responsible to the provincial National Committees, and were composed solely of Communists, most of whom were totally incompetent. Their activities consisted first of all in checking up the political ideas of the population and persecuting those citizens who, for one reason or another, took the liberty of embarrassing the Communists. The persons whom they arrested were usually beaten and often tortured; they had recourse to unscrupulous *agents provocateurs*, and did not hesitate to take action on the strength of statements made to them by imprisoned Gestapo agents. Often the Z.O.B., like the S.N.B., acted on its own initiative, entirely

disregarding the instructions given by the Ministry of the Interior.

There existed at the National Defence Ministry, in addition, a division which concerned itself not only with military counter-espionage, but also with political espionage. It was directed by Reicin, a Communist trained in Moscow, who was not of Czech origin, and on whom the rank of Colonel had been conferred, though he had had no military training. Finally, the Ministry of Information, directed by Vaclav Kopecky, also a Communist, organized in its turn an espionage bureau whose only function was to collect information on the activities of the non-Communist parties and to spy on certain citizens in order to obtain details regarding their political ideas.

These four different services, attached to the Ministries of the Interior, of National Defence, and of Information, and to the National Committees, had no administrative connection with one another; they even escaped the control of the Ministry of the Interior. There was indeed a directing brain, but to find it, it was necessary to follow the trails up into the hierarchy of the Communist Party to a certain special section of the central secretariat. It has never been possible to discover much about this notorious section, except that its most important posts were occupied by persons of German and Hungarian origin who co-operated closely with the N.K.V.D.

In January 1946 General Bartik* was suddenly removed from his post and replaced by a fanatical Communist, Captain Pokorny, who hated the National Socialists particularly. Public opinion was greatly alarmed at this change, which proved the intention of the Communists not only to seize all the services of the security police, but also all the intelligence services.

We protested in vain against this political measure, taken solely in the interests of the Communist Party. An intervention by the President of the Republic was equally ineffectual.

The tension between the Communists and us increased still further when we learned that the Ministry of the Interior, in a secret circular dated January 2, 1946, had ordered that members of the Gestapo who had been imprisoned were to be questioned on the political activity of certain Czechs during the occupation. In the course of these interrogations the investigators sought above all to obtain testimony compromising

* General Bartik was arrested in February 1948 and condemned to five years in prison.

certain Czechs whom the Communists were bent on discrediting. In exchange for such information the Gestapo agents were allowed certain privileges: they received better food, they were put in cells together, and in certain cases they were dazzled with the prospect of acquittal. Even Czechs were subjected to questioning by them!

The Communists hounded in this fashion some important members of the resistance movement who were particularly devoted to President Benes. During a Press conference on April 8, 1946, Captain Pokorny declared, basing his statement on the testimony of Gestapo agents, that with the exception of the Communist groups, the resistance had operated under the control of the Gestapo. It was at the same time that Communist propaganda spread the fable that Prague was liberated by the Russians because the Americans had hesitated to support the national uprising of May 1945.

The National Socialist Ministers protested to the Cabinet against these abuses and these lying theories without obtaining the least satisfaction. That is why we decided to take the matter to Parliament. In February 1946, Deputy Krajina, secretary-general of our party, declared in the name of all the National Socialist deputies that we had proofs showing that the police were using methods copied from those of the Gestapo, and that moreover the Communists had collected dossiers intended to compromise certain politicians, particularly of our party. The declaration had the effect of a bomb: never yet had so violent an attack been launched against the Communists, who, occupying all the important positions in every sphere of political and economic life, believed themselves protected from criticism. As we threatened to publish the documents in question, in spite of their fury they ended by giving way. They ceased referring to Gestapo testimony to slander their enemies. But this appeasement did not last long.

CHAPTER XX

THE KRAJINA CASE

AFTER KRAJINA HAD read his declaration to the Parliament, Minister of the Interior Nosek, losing his habitual calm, shouted at National Education Minister Stransky: "How dared you to do that? What insolence! But you'll see: now we'll go all out against Krajina."

We knew what he was driving at. For several months already the Communists had been spreading the rumour that Krajina, after his arrest by the Germans during the war, had sought to save himself by denouncing his comrades in the resistance movement to the Gestapo.

Krajina had been one of the most active leaders of the resistance. President Benes, for that matter, speaks in his *Memoirs* of his perseverance and courage, and stresses that it was Krajina who sent to the Czechoslovak Government in London the best information on the situation in the "Protectorate" of Bohemia and Moravia. Even among Krajina's opponents I have never found anyone who has not recognized his exceptional courage. It was in the most difficult and dangerous conditions that he worked from 1939 to 1943, nearly always cloaked in illegality. By means of a secret radio transmitting station he regularly sent political and military news to our Government in London.

When he had fallen into the hands of the Gestapo he succeeded in sending a message to London from his prison to warn us that the Germans had found on an arrested parachutist a code which they might try to use to communicate with us. After his transfer to the prison of Terezin, Krajina kept in touch with his comrades of the resistance movement until his liberation in May 1945.

The Communists detested him. They did not forgive him for having informed the Czechoslovak Government of London of the sabotage and political subversion to which they gave themselves up from the time of the Russo-German pact until the moment when Hitler, in 1941, attacked the U.S.S.R. In general, they were embarrassed by the fact that "the Benes camp", which included all the patriots with the exception of

the Communists, had played a leading role in the resistance during the war and had contributed to the liberation of the country at least as much as, if not more than the Communists.

When Karl Hermann Frank, who during the war was the Nazi "Protector" of Bohemia and Moravia, was handed over to the Czechoslovak Government by the American authorities, the police who were charged with questioning him asked him several times to testify against Krajina. In August 1945 the police interrogated him once more, not as an accused person, but as a witness! He declared then that, after promising Krajina a less severe sentence, he had obtained from him important information concerning the resistance, in particular on the parachutists sent from London. Captain Pokorny, who had set this trap, counted thus on furnishing proof that one of the non-Communist leaders of the resistance was nothing but a coward and a traitor.

When we discovered this plot, Zenkl and Drtina went to see the Minister of the Interior, who showed them the statement of Frank, while recognizing that it was "without any foundation". Krajina then asked to be confronted with Frank. Nosek promised that this would be arranged, but he did not keep his promise. It was only in March 1946, when Frank was tried, that chief prosecutor Drabek ordered that this confrontation should take place. Frank then confessed that on several occasions he had been questioned about Krajina by the police, and that great pressure had been brought to bear upon him in order to obtain from him a statement to the desired effect. He claimed that he had been forced to sign the statement in question, and, for the rest, he was not sure whether what had been set down in the transcript corresponded exactly to what he had said. He affirmed finally that he was unable to cite any fact which could compromise Krajina's reputation. He repeated this statement later before the examining magistrate.

The Minister of the Interior announced to the President of the Republic that Krajina, who had to answer to grave accusations which had been made against him, would be tried before a "People's Tribunal". Benes informed us of this at once: he had answered Nosek that he did not attribute the slightest importance to obviously absurd accusations, and that without doubt Krajina would know how to defend himself against his political adversaries as he had defended himself against the Gestapo.

During the Cabinet meeting which took place some days later,

Drtina, Minister of Justice, declared that we accepted without hesitation the inquiry ordered against Krajina, but he also announced that he would have a case opened against those who had been guilty of an abuse of power by seeking to obtain from Gestapo agents and war criminals false testimony with the aim of injuring heroes of the resistance. The Communists, who had not expected the Minister of Justice to react with so much firmness, immediately climbed down and consented to entrust the matter to a commission composed of three members, on which Adamec, a very influential Communist, would represent the Ministry of the Interior.

The Ministry of the Interior handed to the Commission an accusation containing thirty-six charges. It pretended to prove that during the war Krajina had conducted himself in a dishonourable manner and had been guilty of an act of betrayal. Krajina had no difficulty in refuting all the charges brought against him. He proved, for instance, that the parachutists whom he was accused of having denounced to the Gestapo had been arrested fifteen days before he was, and, to cite another case, that it was not he, but other persons, who had handed to the Gestapo the cipher which was used for radio communication with London. It was established, on the other hand, that, on the order of Captain Pokorny, the Communists of the intelligence services had obtained statements against Krajina and another very important resistance figure, Drabek, who was chief prosecutor at the Frank trial, from certain agents of the Gestapo, among others the notorious assassin of Terezin, Heinrich Joekl.

The commission unanimously declared that Krajina had conducted himself during the entire war in an irreproachable manner, that he had never denounced or handed over anyone whatsoever to the Gestapo and that all the charges brought against him were without foundation. As a result of these conclusions, and in recognition of the brilliant services he had rendered to his country, several high decorations were awarded to Krajina, and he was made a full professor at Charles University of Prague.*

For our part, we demanded that Captain Pokorny, who was

* In September 1948, after their victory, the Communists brought an action for high treason against Krajina, who had fortunately succeeded in taking refuge abroad. In his absence, the charges which had been refuted in 1946 were again made, and Krajina was condemned by default to twenty-five years' imprisonment.

guilty of having had recourse to intolerable methods, should be removed from the post he occupied as the head of the intelligence services of the Interior Ministry. Nosek declared himself in agreement, but Captain Pokorny, dismissed from his post, continued none the less a member of the intelligence service. So much so that when in 1947 the Communists launched a campaign against the Slovak Democratic Party, it was discovered that the investigation of the alleged Slovak "conspiracy" had been ordered personally by Captain Pokorny, who had in the meantime become the chief of the Department of Slovak Affairs in the services of the Security Police.

Other cases of the same kind arose to throw public opinion into alarm. In the spring of 1946 it was established, during the trial of a lawyer, Pospisil, before the "People's Tribunal" of Olomouc, that two police commissioners, Martinec and Stejskal, had offered special privileges, and even their freedom, to several Gestapo agents if they would testify against Pospisil. During the trial of the traitor Rysanek at Brno in the autumn of 1946 it was discovered that the organizations of the security police had indicated to certain Gestapo agents the way in which they wanted them to testify against certain members of the resistance, and the police had permitted them to confer and to prepare their statements together.

The cases I have just cited were not exceptional. Our deputies, especially Hora Alois, Cizek and Krajina, as well as several deputies of other parties, indignant at the police abuses, submitted to Parliament a crushing document on the infamous methods used by the Communists in the services of the national police, and in particular in the intelligence services. These methods were designated by a simple word which was incapable of being misunderstood: Gestapoism.

From day to day complaints about the Ministry of the Interior became more numerous. In the last weeks of 1947 a considerable number of militant Communists had been nominated to high posts in the security police, whilst many non-Communist officials, even the best qualified, had been dismissed. In the minor positions also there had been numerous changes, always to the benefit of the Communists.

All our remonstrances to the Premier and the Minister of the Interior, all our protests at Cabinet meetings proved useless.

Before the increasing danger we insisted that the reorganisation of the intelligence services, which we had been demanding

for so long, should finally be effected. The Communists opposed this by every means in their power. According to the law on the national security police passed in July 1947, the former organization of these services was not to remain in force after the end of 1947. Before that time the Government was to work out a new statute for these services in the spirit of the law; in other words, it was to carry out their centralization. The services in question, moreover, were to lose their right to undertake judicial inquiries or to make arrests, searches of homes or confiscations of property. These functions would devolve upon other organizations. All these measures had the aim of preventing the formation of a political police force dominated by one party and independent of any checks.

In conformity with these dispositions, the National Socialists and Social Democrats proposed to the Government the organization in the Premier's office of a central intelligence service responsible to the Premier and to the vice-Premiers, charged with co-ordinating and controlling all the other services, which would be subordinated to it. Since the vice-Premiers represented all the political parties, the Communists would no longer be alone in controlling this department of supreme importance.

The extreme Left, as one may well imagine, opposed by every means the putting into effect of this project. So successful were they that at the date fixed by law the Government had taken no decision. What was the result of this state of affairs? Beginning on January 1, the intelligence services no longer had any legal status, which permitted the Communists, using the most outrageous methods, to act as they pleased and to interfere in matters which were not in their jurisdiction. Profiting by the administrative anarchy which they had taken care to perpetuate in this department, they passed themselves off sometimes as agents of the security police, sometimes as agents of the intelligence services. As we had no right of inspection over these services, we encountered the greatest difficulties whenever it was a question of collecting concrete proofs of the abuses to which they were devoting themselves. Nevertheless, incidents revealing their scandalous proceedings became increasingly numerous.

We will cite only two of them. In the absence of Ivan Herben, editor-in-chief of the National Socialist daily, *Svobodno Slovo*, unknown persons broke into his apartment and searched his desk. They seem to have been looking for documents, for

they left without taking any valuable objects. The police made no attempt to discover the guilty persons. We learned from a reliable source that it was by no means a case of burglary, but that police agents had been ordered to break into the apartment in the absence of its tenant and secure papers which might compromise the police—papers which, incidentally, they did not find. The February putsch unhappily prevented us from placing before a court the proofs we had collected for that purpose.

On another occasion the intelligence services did not hesitate to violate the secrecy of postal communications. It was discovered that one Karel Krbecek, employed in the post office of the first ward in Prague, had, at the request of a certain Liska, an official of the political police, intercepted mail addressed to various persons and handed it over to Liska. Krbecek had, notably, handed to the police letters intended for Julius Firt, secretary-general of our party. We were able later to establish the fact that Liska had acted on the instructions of a high Communist official in the intelligence services.

Other cases of this kind, all of which proved that the intelligence services were constantly used to violate the most fundamental civil liberties, were reported to the parliamentary committee on the national police. As always, our reports were not followed up. These were only details, but details which nevertheless provided many symptoms of an evil which it was necessary to check before it corroded the whole structure of the State.

Moreover, it was not long before two scandals of much greater dimensions, which were to reveal the full gravity of the evil, broke out. They proved how well founded were our apprehensions. They were the case of the assassination attempt against the three Ministers and the Most "espionage" case.

CHAPTER XXI

THE JACK-IN-THE-BOX

IF THE COMMUNISTS displayed such great tenacity in opposing the reorganization of the police services, and in particular of the intelligence services, it was for fear that the authors of the assassination attempt made on September 11, 1947, against the three Ministers, Masaryk, Zenkl and Drtina, would be discovered.

The day after that crime Slansky, secretary-general of the Communist Party, declared at a public meeting that the National Socialists had organized the attack themselves. Faced by this revolting calumny, we demanded that a thorough investigation be undertaken without delay. During the first two days after the affair the police limited themselves to providing a stenographic record of the questioning of the persons to whom the packets had been delivered. The Minister of the Interior then announced that he had set up a special investigating commission, headed by Hora and Goerner, both Communists known for their fanaticism. The commission bustled about to give the impression that it was doing its utmost to discover the authors of the crime. Thus special films were exhibited in all the cinemas showing the most minute details of the three boxes of explosives, and promising substantial rewards to anyone who would put the authorities on the trail of the culprits.

A little later the Ministry of the Interior announced that boxes identical with those used in the crime were manufactured in Prague by one Stanislav Pilar, who had sold them to the Brazda store. Pilar identified the boxes in question as being indeed of his manufacture. Finally the police reported having found in a small pond on the banks of the Vitava several packages of explosives of German origin, identical with those used in the attempt.

These were the only two facts revealed by the investigation. Every time we put questions on this matter to the Minister of the Interior at Cabinet meetings he answered that in spite of unremitting search, unfortunately no clue had been discovered which could lead to the identification of the guilty persons.

But we on our side were working to throw light on before the which appeared to us as time passed increasingly ups against a Krajina, notably, had discovered certain suspicious facts at istry the police investigation. He had learned that Pilar was ad militant Communist, and that he often went fishing near the spot where the explosives had been discovered. He was struck by the fact that it had occurred to the persons who said they had found the explosives to look for them in a depression several metres deep, filled with dirty water. He learned in the end that the boxes made by Pilar had nothing in common with those which had been sent to the three Ministers. Krajina therefore suspected that the police had been deliberately set on a false scent.

Before the end of September Krajina had succeeded, by checking and cross-checking the clues, in tracing them back to the sources from which the affair had started. The boxes had not been made by Pilar, but by a certain Jan Kopka, also a Communist, a carpenter of Krcman, near Olomouc, at the order of Alois Zapletal, concierge of the secretariat of the Communist Party of Olomouc. Being Deputy for Olomouc, Krajina was able to secure information. He discovered quickly enough that Kopka knew the use for which the boxes ordered from him were destined. In July 1947 Kopka and Zapletal had boasted of having been entrusted with an important piece of work, and had announced that they would send the Ministers "some boxes of indigestible flour". They had mentioned the name of one of those Ministers—"Palestine Jew Jan", the epithet which the Nazis had applied to Jan Masaryk during the war.

Krajina took good care not to communicate the results of his private investigation to the political police dominated by the Communists; instead he put them at the disposal of the criminal police of Brno. The Kopka couple, arrested in October 1947, were not slow in confessing: Kopka's wife, after having denied everything for some time, revealed certain important details. Kopka's confession was confirmed by other witnesses.

But when, on November 8, 1947, the carpenter was taken to Prague to appear before Goerner, the magistrate assigned to the investigation, the case took another turn. Hardly had Kopka declared that he admitted having made the boxes which were shown him, than Goerner interrupted brusquely to point out that that was impossible, since the police had established long ago that the boxes had been manufactured by Stanislav Pilar.

ɹr Goerner himself took over the questioning of Kopka, ɹ him on in a very skilful manner to say that there were ɹin differences between the boxes of his make and those nich had been used in the crime.

Ignoring the confession that Kopka had made at Brno, Goerner himself dictated the minutes of the testimony, in which he stressed the differences between the boxes. He instructed Kopka, who was struck dumb with astonishment, to sign the minutes, and then ordered that he should be released, together with the other prisoners.

A few days later Krajina learned that on the very day when Goerner had quashed the charge an official of the political police of Prague had telephoned to a private number which the political police of Olomouc often used, giving detailed instructions for destroying all traces of the plot discovered at Kreman by the secretary of our party.

Without mentioning the facts we had just learned, we asked the Minister of the Interior during a Cabinet meeting if the investigation on the attempted assassinations had revealed anything new. Nosek answered, as he had already done several times previously, that all researches had, alas, led to no result. The obstructionism was systematic. The only means of overcoming it was to turn over the case to the judicial authorities. On November 19, 1947, Krajina filed a charge with the departmental court of Olomouc. The chief prosecutor, Frantisek Dolezal, who was not a member of any party, and who was known for his impartiality and integrity, was charged with the investigation. The Kopka couple and other suspected persons were arrested the same day.

The news that Krajina had filed a charge against Kopka and his wife created a sensation. The single fact that it was not the Ministry of the Interior but a National Socialist Deputy who had discovered clues in the crime seemed to indicate that the Communists had influenced the police to prevent them from probing the case. The Communists continued to maintain that the boxes had been made in Prague by Pilar, and that consequently the charge filed by Krajina was without basis; they accused the National Socialists of having staged a political case against the Communists solely for electoral purposes. Gottwald went so far as to say to me during a private conversation that our methods recalled those of the Nazis at the time of the Reichstag fire.

It was only after the matter had been brought before the courts that the Ministry of the Interior filed a charge against a person or persons unknown. At the same time the Ministry filed a further charge concerning a case of espionage which had just been discovered at Most, by which it hoped to compromise the National Socialist Party. This coincidence was by no means merely chance. All the evidence pointed to the probability that the Communists had prepared this blow to parry the action that we had taken in the case of the assassination attempts. In this way they counted on creating a diversion and intimidating us.

After his arrest Kopka repeated to the examining magistrates the confession he had made to the police of Brno and Prague. The investigation established in addition that Kopka had not had enough varnish for all the boxes, so that he had been obliged to make some more for the last one; this one was indeed lighter than the other two. The colour of the varnish as well as other technical details established that the boxes had been made by Kopka. In addition to him, other defendants confessed having known that the boxes had been ordered with the intention of assassinating the three Ministers.

The investigation of the court also made it possible to find traces of the man who had transported the dangerous packages from Olomouc to Prague. He was none other than the president of the local National Committee of Krcman, a Communist named Josef Stepanek, a friend of Kopka. A railwayman by trade, he often came to Prague. According to some of the depositions, he was there at the time of the crime, disguised as a Catholic priest. The examining magistrates then compared the handwriting of Stepanek with that of the address on the packages: the two exhibits were strikingly similar, and it was seen in addition that Stepanek and the sender of the packages made the same mistakes in spelling. Flanderka, the official handwriting expert, charged with examining the exhibits, declared that the two specimens were identical. But after a certain lapse of time he handed to the court an expert report drawn up with the help of his wife, also a sworn handwriting expert, in which the conclusion was reached that the addresses had not been written by Stepanek. Brushing aside the similarities in the two exhibits, they pointed out certain infinitesimal details that tended to prove they were not the work of the same hand. A curious detail: Nosek had informed Stransky of the

negative verdict of the experts before it was known to the examining magistrates!

At that we began to interest ourselves in the Flanderka couple, and discovered that they were in touch with the Communist circles of the security police. When chief prosecutor Dolezal questioned them, they answered in a confused manner, and were unable to explain certain contradictions in their report. They ended by admitting that nearly all the signs indicated that the two specimens of handwriting were identical.

During a Cabinet meeting Gottwald himself raised the question by asking the Minister of Justice to make a report on the pending investigation. Drtina, after having recounted the story of this odd expert report, announced, to the great displeasure of his Communist colleagues, that he had ordered a counter-report on the handwriting, as well as a chemical analysis of the two samples. Unfortunately the *coup d'état* prevented the investigation from being pursued further.

However, the judicial investigation which was going on simultaneously had revealed new facts which were entirely unexpected. During a search of the residence of Kopka several military rifles, a large number of hand grenades and a great quantity of munitions were discovered. Kopka confessed to the examining magistrate that these arms had been brought to his home from the Communist secretariat of Olomouc.

It was learned from another source that Zapletal, who had already been arraigned in this case at the same time as Kopka, had cached a veritable arsenal at the home of a railwayman named Vladimir Oplustil, again in Olomouc. And at Oplustil's house, as expected, searchers found machine-guns, some submachine-guns, many rifles, hand grenades, several thousand cartridges and various items of military equipment.

After his arrest the railwayman confessed that these arms came from the secretariat of the Communist Party in the region and that they had been placed in his house on the order of Communist Deputy Jaroslav Jura Sosnar, at the time of the first arrests in Krcman.

Other arms—about eighty rifles, some submachine-guns and several cases of munitions—had been secretly transported, also at Sosnar's orders, to the home of the chief of the political police of Olomouc, Frinta, a militant Communist. This case was particularly grave because it revealed the direct complicity of a high police official. To crown the climax, Frinta had not con-

tented himself with hiding arms in his house; he also went from time to time to Oplustil's to make sure that the arms and munitions were being kept in good condition. Although a charge was filed against Frinta, the Ministry of the Interior did not judge it necessary to remove him from his post. He was finally saved by the *coup d'état.*

As for Sosnar, other charges, no less troubling, were laid at his door. Oplustil and his wife testified that Sosnar had threatened them with death if they disclosed anything. When Oplustil hesitated to hide arms in his home, Sosnar insisted, saying that they could not be left at the secretariat because the arrests of Kopka and Zapletal had put the party in a vulnerable position. Finally Sosnar threatened him: "If ever you breathe a word of this," he said to the railway worker, "you may be crushed between two cars or fall off the train, without anyone ever knowing how it happened."

According to the testimony of Oplustil and Zapletal, Sosnar argued that these arms would be needed "against the reaction" on the day when "it begins", and he did not hide the fact that at that moment it would be necessary first of all to settle accounts with the National Socialists.

To complicate the investigation, which was decidedly taking a disturbing direction, the Ministry of the Interior asked the Ministry of National Defence to find out in what military depots, and when, German explosives of the type used for the crime had been stored. Nosek and his friends hoped to distract attention from Olomouc by showing that this sort of explosive could have been procured in several other cities. But the investigation of the Ministry of Defence disclosed the fact that explosives of the type in question were to be found only in the Olomouc depot. In the other military depots there were only a few samples of these explosives, which had been duly numbered and recorded so that they could not be stolen. On the contrary, at Olomouc, where there was a large quantity of them, keeping trace of them was less easy. Finally, only in the Olomouc depot were explosives found bearing the same serial number as those which had been used for the crime.

The Ministry of the Interior, as may be imagined, took great care that the result of this inquiry should not be published, much less communicated to the examining magistrates, as the law demanded. In fact it was not ignorant of the fact that, according to the testimony of Oplustil, Sosnar had boasted of

having himself placed the explosives in the boxes from Krcman.

This statement had been confirmed by Sosnar's relatives, the Honzak couple of Olomouc. According to them, Sosnar, not long after the appearance of the official *communiqué* on the crime, had boasted, in the presence of several friends, and after having had a good deal to drink, that he was playing "an important political role". And he had immediately added that it was he who had constructed the infernal machines which had been sent to the reactionary Ministers. When one of his friends remarked that the bombs had not exploded, he answered mysteriously: "One day or another they'll do good work." To give himself still more importance, he added that he had not committed this act on his own initiative, but that the mission had been confided to him by the president of the departmental executive committee of the Communist Party of Olomouc, Deputy Cepicka (today Minister of Justice).

The Honzak couple, who were respectable people, declared that they had hesitated to communicate Sosnar's words to the authorities because they did not want to be responsible for his arrest. For the rest, they avoided seeing him because he had a bad reputation and had been condemned for fraud before the war. He was suspected in addition of having collaborated with the Gestapo.

It was in the midst of all this that a Communist Deputy questioned the Ministers of the Interior and of Justice on the results of the investigation. While Nosek limited himself to stating that he had no direct information on the progress of the judicial inquiry, Drtina's answer caused a sensation. Rarely had there been so dramatic a session of the Parliament of Prague as that of January 21, 1948. For the first time on that day the public learned from the mouth of the competent Minister that the organizations of the security police had tried to stifle the investigation of the assassination attempts and that a Communist deputy had hidden in his home arms destined for political action.

After a brief exposition in which he reported certain details established by the investigation, Drtina declared that Sosnar was accused of possessing hidden arms, of threats of violence and of armed conspiracy. For these reasons the departmental court of Olomouc asked Parliament to waive Sosnar's immunity and to put him at the disposal of the judicial authorities.

At the end of his explanation Drtina stressed the fact that though all the accused belonged to the Communist Party, he did not attribute to the party, as such, nor to its leaders, the responsibility for the crimes committed; everything depended, he concluded, on the attitude that a party and its leaders adopted towards guilty persons, of whatever group they were.

Drtina's statement had been delivered with much calm and dignity. Because of the restraint which he had imposed upon himself, his revelations only impressed his audience all the more deeply. Several non-Communist deputies demanded that the officials of the services of the security police who had prevented the investigation from following its course should be relieved of their duties and that the guilty should be punished with the greatest rigour.

The Communists were beside themselves. Their secretary-general, Slansky, shouted this challenge at our Deputies: "You will pay for this provocation! We won't take this sort of treatment." Some of the Communist Ministers, in their anger, threatened to "drive us out of the Government". One of them said to me: "Your Drtina is rushing straight to his doom." Drtina was perfectly conscious of that fact. That very evening he said to friends with whom he was dining: "I know that I staked my life today."

The Communists, convinced now that we were decided to push on to the end, feared that the courts would reveal other facts which the police were trying to hide and which would compromise them still further. Cepicka, Minister of Domestic Trade and Deputy for Olomouc, showed himself particularly nervous. A trial held under normal conditions against the authors of the crime would have constituted a grave threat to the Communist Party, especially on the eve of the elections. In that fact must be seen, without any doubt, one of the reasons which precipitated the *coup d'état*: the Communists had no better way of freeing themselves from all checks than by putting an end to the independence of the courts.

The day after this memorable session, Mme. Hodinova-Spurna, in the name of the Communist parliamentary group, answered the Minister of Justice by a declaration in which she said, among other things: "This is the first time that a member of the Czechoslovak Government has used the tribune of Parliament in so unworthy and coarse a manner to besmear with gratuitous and unfounded calumny another party of the

National Front, the strongest party, with the single end of making electoral propaganda."

On the same day the central steering committee of the Communist Party published a declaration which betrayed a certain embarrassment. "The communication of the Minister of Justice," said this statement, "played the game of foreign reaction. . . . The Communist Party does not recognize the methods which Drtina seeks to impute to it. . . . It is the reaction which, having lost all hope of reaching its ends by legal means, seeks to provoke disorders to realize its designs."

The Communists were to repeat the same arguments a month later to justify their *coup d'état.* The Communist manifesto asserted that the party would not defend any of its members convicted of having hidden arms, on condition that their guilt was proved. So far as Sosnar was concerned, the charges brought against him were too overwhelming, and the party asked him to put himself at the disposal of the courts without waiting for the decision of Parliament. Before giving himself up, Sosnar hid himself for three days more; on the last day he even appeared in the streets of Olomouc in a police car to make certain arrangements before his arrest. Four weeks later, after the *coup d'état,* he was again free. And when, on February 25, Gottwald read the names of his new Cabinet to the delirious Communists assembled in Saint Venceslas Square, his voice broke with joy when he announced that the new Minister of Justice was Alexej Cepicka.

The first act of the successor to Drtina was to quash the measures taken against Sosnar. On leaving the prison he was acclaimed by a mob of Communists, who formed a solemn procession with a band at its head. All the persons indicted in the case of the attempted assassinations also benefited by a dismissal of the charges. On the other hand, the authorities had the officials and magistrates who had been charged with the investigation arrested. The first victims were Marjanko, a high official of the Ministry of Justice and chief prosecutor Dolezal, who had directed the inquiry. Some of them were beaten and tortured by the police.

On March 18 the police filed a charge against Drtina "for abuse of power in the exercise of his functions as Minister of Justice". On May 26 Cepicka announced that they would open a case against Drtina, Zenkl, Krajina and other personages accused of having imputed to the Communist Party responsi-

bility for the assassination attempt against the three Ministe[illegible]he with the help of false witnesses who had been bribed by a payment of 100,000 crowns each.

The new Minister of Justice had proved one thing: that he knew how to put into practice the principle he had proclaimed openly as early as 1945—that is, that one must never pay any attention to the law when political interests demand that it be disregarded.

CHAPTER XXII

CANDAL OF THE FALSE SPIES

A STORMY session of Parliament at which Drtina, by his revelations on the assassination attempts, had warned a public opinion which was already considerably worried, the breach between the Communists and non-Communists became such that a political crisis seemed inevitable. We fully realized the gravity of the situation; in order not to leave the Communists a free hand, in order not to permit them to institute a police regime, admitted or camouflaged, without firing a shot, it was necessary for us to continue the struggle to the bitter end—to take the offensive. We did not hide from ourselves the risks we were running in engaging battle against an enemy much stronger than ourselves, but we knew at the same time that we had hardly any choice.

Hence our decision to take the initiative concerning a case which the Communists had staged against us. It was a question of a fantastic yarn of espionage, without any foundation, invented, with the complicity of the police, to compromise us.

In November 1947 the Minister of the Interior announced the discovery of an espionage network whose headquarters had been found at Most, a small city of Western Bohemia. The police of Prague alleged that a certain Pravomil Reichel had entered into relations with two unknown persons of foreign nationality named "Eddy" and "Tony", who were supposed to have asked him to introduce them to dependable persons, particularly high-ranking officers, able to furnish them with political and military information. Reichel, it seemed, had agreed. In addition, the two "foreigners" had entrusted a certain Joseph Kirska, a captain in the reserves, with building up an organization which would be prepared, at the appropriate time, to start an armed uprising. Thus, according to the police version, it was a matter of a double crime: a plot against the Republic and espionage for the benefit of a foreign Power.

But during the judicial inquiry, which was begun in December 1947, a series of quite unexpected facts was disclosed. This is what happened:

Two months earlier two officials of the Ministry of the

Interior, named Muller and Vlastimil Kroupa, had asked the departmental court of Prague to put a prisoner named Vladislav Podivin at their disposal for questioning. The tribunal agreed to their request, specifying that the organizations of the Ministry of the Interior should take all measures necessary to prevent the prisoner from escaping. On October 20 Podivin was taken, not to the police station, but to a private apartment. A few days before—on October 15, to be exact—while he was still being questioned by the examining magistrate, Muller had promised him that he would be acquitted if he was disposed to "render certain services"; should he refuse, his brother and mother would be arrested. After having "prepared" him for a week in the apartment in which he was kept, officials of the Ministry of the Interior took him to Teplice-Sanov. There they put him in touch with a certain Pravomil Reichel, whose acquaintance he had already made in prison; both men had been accused of having maintained relations with General Prchala,* but Reichel had subsequently been freed.

Podivin reached Reichel's home accompanied by two of the Ministry officials who had escorted him to Teplice-Sanov. These he introduced to Reichel under the names of "Eddy" and "Tony". One of them passed himself off as a former Czechoslovak officer who had served in the Royal Air Force, the other as an American of Czech origin living in Prague.

Podivin reproached Reichel for having taken no action at a time when the Communist Party was preparing a putsch, and explained to him that an anti-Communist organization must be created which would rely especially on military officers, particularly those who had been in the Czechoslovak forces built up in England during the war. "Eddy" pretended that with "Tony" he represented the central headquarters of a secret anti-Communist organization to which, among others, Zenkl, Drtina and Krajina belonged. Both of them emphasized that it was necessary to choose collaborators for this secret organization from the National Socialists and the Populists especially.

On the following days Reichel, still accompanied by "Eddy" and "Tony", went to see several persons of his acquaintance,

* General Prchala had been degraded from his rank by the Czechoslovak Government during the war for having abandoned the unit he commanded while it was fighting in Poland. Prchala had adopted a definitely hostile attitude towards President Benes and the Czechoslovak Government in exile. After the war he remained in London. The Communists made him famous by alleging that he had hatched a plot against the Republic abroad.

both civilians and officers, from whom they requested economic and political information, particularly military secrets. Finally Reichel went to Prague—of course, with "Eddy" and "Tony"—to visit two persons named Poherliljak and Strouhal. At this point "Eddy" and "Tony" left and, taking with them a key to the apartment, told the other three that they would return in the evening. Instead it was police officers who burst into the room where they were gathered and arrested them.

During this time Podivin had been brought back to Prague, to the same private apartment, where he spent a further two weeks under the surveillance of the police. He was not questioned. On the contrary, two of the officials with whom he had gone to see Reichel took him to other persons, whom he was told to incite to commit acts directed against the State. They told him one day that Reichel was "an imbecile who had walked into the trap" by putting them in touch with a considerable number of persons willing to undertake subversive action. On November 20, 1947, Podivin finally re-entered the prison of Prague. It was at this moment that the Ministry of the Interior announced the discovery of an important case of espionage.

When Reichel, after his arrest, was questioned by members of the Security Police, the interrogators asked him if he had organized a conspiracy directed against the State with the consent of certain important politicians, particularly Drtina and Krajina, and if the National Socialist deputies Klatil and Bartos had taken part in this conspiracy. Reichel denied it. The offer was then made to him that he would be released immediately if he made a complete confession and consented to declare that Zenkl, Drtina, Krajina and other political personages had prepared to take forcible action against the State, or at least against the Communist Party. Reichel refused.

Reichel was not the only prisoner from whom the police sought to obtain false statements against certain leaders of the National Socialist Party. They made several other similar attempts, sometimes with apparent success. Apparent, because all the witnesses from whom the police had wrested false testimony against Zenkl, Drtina and Krajina, sometimes by beating them, admitted to the examining magistrate that they had been forced by the police to testify as they had.

Once all these facts had been established by the judicial inquiry, we decided to foil the Communist plot by revealing the

scandal in its full scope. At the Cabinet meeting of January 27, 1948, the Minister of Justice read a detailed report to which everyone listened in complete silence.

It was already known that the Communists used *agents provocateurs*. The case of the Slovak conspiracy in the autumn of 1947 had thrown light on certain disturbing facts of the same kind. But never yet had it been possible to prove it in such indisputable fashion. Thus the effect produced by Drtina's revelations was considerable. The Minister of the Interior, who had several times assured us that no political personage was implicated in this business, was unable to furnish the least explanation. We demanded the immediate setting up of a special commission composed of Ministers charged to look into this affair. The Communists refused. The Cabinet, on our proposal, finally agreed that the Minister of Justice should prosecute members of the police force suspected of having committed illegal actions.

The next day a case was opened against Muller and Vlastimil Kroupa, both officials of the Ministry of the Interior. But when the examining magistrate sent for these two persons to question them, the political police contended that they belonged to the services of the Corps of the National Security Police, a military organization, and for this reason only the military courts were competent to try them. The excuse could not have been more barefaced, since it was common knowledge that Muller and Kroupa were members of the intelligence services responsible to the civil authorities.

When the judge requested the Ministry of the Interior to give him the names of the officials who had accompanied Podivin to see Reichel in Teplice-Sanov, the political police, instead of answering, asked for complete details on the case, saying that it touched on "matters concerning which it was preferable to maintain professional secrecy". This answer was a confession; the Ministry of the Interior did not deny having had Podivin escorted to Teplice-Sanov, therefore it admitted that the eminent "foreigners", "Eddy" and "Tony", were nothing but police agents. For that matter the law authorized the violation of professional secrecy when the interests of justice demanded it. But, in spite of his insistence, the examining magistrate could never obtain any answer from the Ministry of the Interior on this point.

The farther the inquiry advanced, the more it appeared that

this whole affair, of which the Ministry of the Interior had desired to make "an important conspiracy of high treason and of espionage", was in reality only a plot cooked up by the police and its instigators themselves—that is to say, by the officials of the Security Police—and had only one aim: to incriminate the National Socialist Party. During a particularly violent argument with the Communist Ministers, Stransky, Minister of National Education, cried: "I don't know whether this is the Gestapo or the G.P.U.; what I do know, in any case, is that it is not the Czech police!"

But the scandal of the false spies, like so many others, was to be stifled by the February *coup d'état.*

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIGHT FOR A DEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTION

BEGINNING WITH THE second fortnight of January 1948, no meeting of Parliament, of the National Front or of the Cabinet took place without bitter arguments and even violent clashes between Communists and non-Communists.

Scarcely four months separated us from the elections; nevertheless the Communists were proposing one law after the other, generally on economic or financial questions which might have been discussed in an atmosphere of calm and confidence. The haste of the Communists betrayed their desire to take advantage of the interval before the elections to impose their will on the other parties.

It goes without saying that these projected laws were, above all, electoral weapons, and the extreme Left hoped that the other parties would hesitate to oppose the proposed reforms for fear of making themselves unpopular.

During the debates on the Constitution the Communists followed exactly the same tactics, which consisted in postponing indefinitely decisions on all questions which embarrassed them, in order the more easily to impose their own projects by submitting them at the last moment. The Premier had also waited until the last days of January to convoke the National Front to discuss the new Constitution; if in this debate, which would necessarily be very brief, we failed to reach a decision, he counted on attributing to the non-Communist parties the responsibility for the check.

The discussions on the Constitution were extremely laborious. There was not a single important question on which the totalitarian conceptions of the Communists did not clash head on with the democratic principles of the other parties.

Clauses concerning civil liberties figured in the project for the new Constitution, as in all other Constitutions, that of the U.S.S.R. included. Now, experience has proved that if these liberties are not guaranteed by providing punishment for those who violate them, a simple listing of them is devoid of all practical value. We proposed that the Constitution authorize

any citizen to claim damages from persons infringing civi liberties and to take his case before the Constitutional Tribunal, of which the approximate equivalent in the United States is the Supreme Court—the tribunal of last resort. We demanded, in addition, that a special parliamentary committee be entrusted with ensuring that these liberties were respected.

The new Constitution was to establish the principle that the national economy should be managed according to a preconceived plan. In this case the citizen in his relations with the State would have at least as many obligations as rights. That was why it was indispensable to provide measures guaranteeing civil liberties. But the Communists, who wished to avoid any penalties which might strike at executive departments, opposed our proposals with all their energy.

In the same category of ideas, it was not surprising to see the Communists reject our project to introduce into the Constitution a series of measures protecting citizens against all forms of oppression—guarantees described by the Anglo-Saxons under the general heading of "freedom from fear". I will not go into the argument of the Communists, according to whom no one in a "popular democracy" had to fear political or social oppression —an "instrument of capitalistic regimes". The two conceptions which faced each other could be summed up in this simple question: Should the State serve its citizens, or should citizens serve the State?

Faithful to their totalitarian views, the Communists demanded that the National Committees should be invested with all the powers, executive, legislative and judicial. As for us, we defended the thesis that the National Committees should have only administrative functions. The Communists favoured the concentration and merging of powers, which intensified centralization and made all checks difficult; the democrats desired, on the contrary, to separate and limit powers, which would make for decentralization and would permit more effective control.

While the democrats logically defended the principle of the independence and integrity of the courts, the Communists, being unable to oppose it openly, demanded, with the help of very vague and very flexible formulas, that parties outside the judiciary should have their say in matters of jurisprudence, which obviously would limit the independence of the judges. They sought thus to reduce the jurisdiction of the Administra-

tive Supreme Court, and when the democrats demanded the enlarging of the powers of the Constitutional Tribunal, the Communists went so far as to oppose the creation of this institution, proposing that the presiding officers of the Chamber of Deputies—which is to say a body composed of representatives of political parties and responsible to them—should be charged with these functions; according to their plan, only the presiding officers of the Chamber would be competent to interpret the laws.

The same difficulty arose when it was necessary to reach an agreement on fundamental questions concerning economic life. All parties were in agreement about guaranteeing in the Constitution those nationalizations of enterprises which had been carried out up to that time. But while we demanded that any new regulation destined to extend nationalization be based upon a constitutional law—that is to say, that it should be adopted by a two-thirds majority—the Communists contended that a simple majority ought to be sufficient. Nor did they wish to admit that the Constitution should protect private businesses by granting them the same rights as were accorded to others. The final aim which they pursued was the total nationalization of the economy, while we wished to parry that danger by having a mixed economic system guaranteed by the Constitution.

These were the questions which remained in suspense.

Moreover, no solution had yet been found to the delicate problem of relations between Czechs and Slovaks. On this point even among the different parties differences still remained. It was generally recognized that a centralized system subordinating Slovakia to Prague was impossible. On the other hand, no one had any illusions about the inconveniences resulting from the regime established in 1945 by which Slovakia constituted, so to speak, a State within a State. In short, we favoured neither a Czechoslovak unification nor a Czechoslovak dualism.

The commission of experts, after long and laborious discussions, had finally adopted a formula according to which Czechoslovakia constituted a State, one and indivisible, formed of two inseparable nations of equal rights. This complicated formula reflected faithfully the difficulties we had encountered when we sought to conciliate the two points of view. It was still more difficult to trace the exact limits between the jurisdiction of the central organizations of Prague and the autonomous

Slovak organizations—to wit, the Slovak National Council, which represented a kind of Parliament, and the Council of Commissioners, an executive organization similar to a Cabinet.

The Communists tried to overcome these difficulties by proposing that the most important problems concerning the status of Slovakia should be solved later by special laws, after the Constitution had been accepted. We could not take this suggestion seriously, for it seemed to attribute only a very relative importance to the Constitution.

At the end of January and the beginning of February the National Front held only two meetings at which the examination of the Constitution appeared on the agenda. The questions on which there was disagreement seemed much more numerous than those which might perhaps allow room for an understanding. And political tension was too great to permit envisaging a solution in the near future.

Under these conditions the National Front could not even reach a compromise on the date of the elections. The Communists, who were determined to complete the communization of the police and to secure the passage of a certain number of laws which would help their electoral propaganda, proposed, in agreement with the Social Democrats, the end of May; the National Socialists, the Populists and the Slovak Democrats would have preferred the month of April.

The mutual distrust between the two camps continued to increase, and the struggle became more and more passionate. At the end of January, Gottwald made a short visit to the Tatras for reasons of health. We knew that he was ill. Nevertheless, we were more than a little surprised to learn that he had left Prague at the moment when the political battle was at its height and when we were constantly on the verge of a Government crisis.

In the Tatras the police had taken the necessary measures to keep all undesirable visitors away from the Premier. We were never able to learn whether Gottwald consecrated his mountain sojourn to his recovery or if he profited by it to hold secret political conferences. The Communist Ministers exploited his absence by demanding that discussion of all questions which embarrassed them should be postponed, particularly those on the reorganization of the services of the security police.

During Gottwald's absence a Communist politician who was playing an important role visited me. He told me frankly that

the tension between our two parties had reached such a point that he feared "the worst". If more thoughtful and reflective persons on both sides did not immediately take the lead to seek to bring the opposing theories together by compromise solutions the inevitable result would be an open conflict and an appeal to force. I asked him what he meant by "the worst". He did not answer. I insisted: "Do you mean a forcible coup, a revolution?" After a certain hesitation, he answered: "It might go that far!" He suggested that I should see the Premier as soon as possible to arrange a confidential conversation between the representatives of our two parties: Gottwald and Slansky on one side, Zenkl and myself on the other. On leaving he said with a very concerned air: "Let us hope it is not too late."

I attributed the greatest importance to this conversation. I had only made the acquaintance of this man since the war, and in spite of the divergence of fundamental views which separated us, I had a great deal of respect for him. He occupied an important position in the party and, being in constant contact with Gottwald, should have been well informed. I knew him well enough not to doubt the sincerity of his words. It was difficult, moreover, to believe that he had taken this step behind the backs of the directors of his central steering committee. That is why I concluded that these words were a warning designed to intimidate us and to lead us to yield, especially on the matter of the reorganization of the security police. Friends to whom I reported this conversation were of the same opinion.

I took care not to ask for a special interview with Gottwald, in order not to give him the impression that his manœuvre had succeeded. But as it was necessary for me to talk over with him several matters concerning my Ministry, I met him on February 9, four days after his return to Prague, in the presence of a few officials. After we had settled all the concrete questions on which I had come to see him, we remained alone. It was Gottwald who brought up the subject: "I should very much like to know where you National Socialists think you are heading. I ask you once again—and I have put the same question to Drtina and to Stransky—what aim are you pursuing in continuing to make Van der Lubbes out of us?" (Gottwald often compared the affair of the assassination attempts with the Reichstag fire case.) Then he added: "The monstrous fable which you are staging against the Communists will end in a scandal for you, and will cover you with ridicule. We have

proofs showing that the boxes which were used for the crime were not manufactured at Krcman by Kopka, but at Prague by Pilar. But so much the worse for you. Drtina has walked into the trap, and he will pay for it. You have all had a finger in this pie, now get out of it as best you can. It is not up to us to help you."

I answered Gottwald: "The Pilar story was invented by the police for you. What can we do if you don't take seriously what the judicial authorities discovered at Olomouc? What is the good of arguing about it? The trial will take place soon."

Gottwald interrupted me brusquely: "I understand you are set on holding it before the elections."

"The trial will take place," I said, "when the investigation has been finished."

"Do as you please," Gottwald continued. "You will see where it gets you. But forget about that. I want to ask you something else. I have not forgotten what you said with so much insistence at the National Front meeting; you declared that you could not count on free elections if the police force was Communized." And with an ironic smile he added: "I understand your trick very well; you know that you will be beaten at the elections, and that is why you announce so loudly in advance that the elections will be rigged, that the Communists will employ terrorism, and God knows what! You are looking for an alibi, and at the same time you are giving the Western Powers arguments against our popular democracy. We know your methods: let me inform you that you are wasting your time. Now, tell me, what did you really mean when you claimed that the elections would not be honest?"

I answered him with the greatest calm: "You talk as if you did not understand; at the Popular Front meeting I simply said what I meant; you are surely not going to claim that once the machinery of the security police is in your hands you will not profit by it to bring pressure to bear on the voters?"

Gottwald began to lose his temper: "Oh, we have heard all that before! You make believe you are afraid of a police regime, when you are really afraid of the working masses."

I interrupted him: "You know better than I do what are the predictions of the elections. I wonder why Kopecky [who was Minister of Information] has not permitted the publication of the result of your testing of opinion. Was it not because it predicted that the Communists would lose from eight to ten per

cent of the votes they received last time? And as president of the Communist Party you ought to know that all your trusted men have noted that the National Socialists are gaining ground everywhere."

Gottwald could not avoid a gesture of surprise on discovering that I was so well informed; and he was certainly not happy to find me aware of facts that were supposed to be confidential. But he recovered himself rapidly enough to resume the eternal theme: it was fear of the elections which drove us to act in this fashion.

I interrupted him once more: "If the elections are held normally, before the eyes of the whole country and of foreign nations, it will do us no good to pretend the opposite."

Gottwald then reproached us for being more and more attached to the former agrarians and the big capitalists: "You are defending the collaborationists; you are asking amnesty for notorious traitors; you are afraid of Socialism. Does not Zenkl encourage reaction not only by obtaining positive results, but also by causing many Communist projects to fail? You oppose the formation of a Socialist bloc, while you try to create an anti-Communist bloc which strangely resembles the anti-Bolshevik League of the Nazi epoch. We know very well where you are heading: you want to exclude the Communists from the Government, but if the French reactionaries succeeded in doing it, you will not."

To which I retorted that obviously he was not saying what he really thought: "We are not defending collaborationists, but innocent persons who are the victims of political or personal denunciations or revenge. We are not against Socialism, but we are opposed with all our strength to totalitarian nationalization. Moreover, if we had a Marxian concept of Socialism there would be no reason for the existence of our party; all that would remain for us to do would be to join your party. We are not encouraging reaction, but we are opposing everything in Communist policy which is incompatible with democracy. Finally, we are not naïve enough to believe that our country can be governed without the Communists. But what we try to prevent by every means is a government which would govern against us."

Gottwald had listened to my outburst with occasional peevish or sarcastic remarks. He did not even spare me the reproach, which the Press and the radio incessantly reiterated, that our

policy was anti-Soviet and anti-Slav. I did not take the trouble to refute this absurdity. I contented myself with reminding him that we had given enough proofs of our loyalty towards the U.S.S.R. Gottwald showed himself much irritated when I added: "We have no desire to make concessions to Poland or to Hungary for the sole reason that it is Communists who govern those countries. And it seems to me that we went beyond our obligations as an ally in abandoning the treaty with France solely because the Soviets wanted us to do so."

"That is not true," Gottwald said angrily. "We do not want a treaty which would be useless to us. You, on the contrary, are set on your treaty with France in order to have a means of undermining our alliance with the Soviet Union. That is where the reactionary tendencies of your policy show up. I say again: you are afraid of the elections, and that is why you sound the alarm by harping on the theme of a terrorist police regime."

"Would not the Communists be worried," I returned, "if a National Socialist Minister of the Interior dismissed all the Communist officials from his Ministry to replace them by militant members of his own party a few weeks before the elections?"

The only answer Gottwald found to that was that he knew nothing about it and that without any doubt we were exaggerating the extent of the changes in the security police.

I objected that on this last point it would be easy for him to be enlightened by deciding to appoint the special committee the setting up of which we had long been demanding, which, after having examined all the complaints, would make proposals for suppressing abuses and reorganizing the services of the security police. Thereupon Gottwald rose suddenly and angrily cried:

"No, we will never permit that! We will defend Nosek, and in this case we will not give way an inch. Do what you want, but I repeat: on this point we will never give way!"

"If that is your last word," I said, rising in my turn, "I see no means of reaching an understanding. I want to make it plain to you that we will not allow ourselves to be intimidated. We also will not give way, no matter what happens."

I informed all my friends of this conversation without delay. By chance the same day (February 9), Kusy, an official of my Ministry who was a member of our reparations commission in Budapest, and who had an admirable acquaintance with Hungarian affairs, sent me a piece of news of the greatest

importance: the Hungarian Communists were predicting that towards the end of the month a change of government would occur in Czechoslovakia as a result of which the Communists would become absolute masters of the country. Our ambassador at Budapest, Frantisek Cerny, had obtained the same information at the same time, but I did not learn that until much later.

The obstinacy of Gottwald and his bellicose temper proved that the Communists were trying to terrorize us, that they had decided to create a political situation which would give them the means to avoid a defeat which they knew would be inevitable if the elections took place in normal conditions. The news from Budapest confirmed the pessimistic predictions of the Communist leader who had come to see me before my interview with Gottwald, and who feared "the worst".

All the leaders of the National Socialist Party were in agreement on one point: to allow ourselves to be intimidated by the Communist threats and to retreat would be equivalent to suicide. It was necessary to resist, whatever the risks.

The attitude of the public which followed us, whose resistance was stiffening, was well designed to inspire us. The population showed more courage and confidence than during the first year after the liberation. Among the students the Communists were in a minority and their numbers continued to decrease. The influence of the Czech Youth Union, a para-Communist organization, was weakening. The Boy Scouts had shown themselves impervious to Marxist ideology, the Sokols likewise. The majority of the rural population had become anti-Communist. In the cities the extreme Left had alienated the sympathies of the middle classes more and more. Most of the Civil Servants were anti-Communist. Even at the U.R.O. (the General Confederation of Labour) a certain discontent with the Muscovite leaders was beginning to show itself.

In these circumstances the non-Communist parties had no need to fear the result of the elections. Even if the Communists remained relatively the strongest party—which was to be expected—they realized that they would come out of the elections much weakened. For that matter, they did not in private contest the fact that the National Socialist Party and the Populist Party were gaining ground. If in Slovakia losses for the democrats might be feared, it could be affirmed with certainty that it would not be the Communist Party, but the

"Liberty Party", which would profit by them, all the more so since this new Slovak movement was directed by a group of very active young Catholics of incontestable political strength.

As for our party, it was drawing nearer and nearer to the Populists, the Slovak Democrats and the Liberty Party. We decided to make a truce with them and to reduce as much as possible political polemics among us.

It was the interference of Stalin concerning the Marshall Plan that had brought about this profound change: before the mortal danger which threatened our democratic regime and our national independence, we understood the necessity of closing our ranks and uniting against the Communists.

Since the defeat of Fierlinger at Brno our relations with the Social Democrats had improved; nevertheless co-operation with them proved very difficult, in spite of our efforts and the good will of Majer and his friends.

When, in January 1948, the political crisis suddenly took a grave turn, we did not find ourselves, everything considered, in an unfavourable situation.

While the struggle for control of the services of the security police was at its height in the meetings of the Cabinet and the National Front, another conflict of the first importance broke out at the end of January: it concerned the salaries of Civil Servants, and once again the Communists, isolated, suffered a defeat.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DEFEAT OF THE TRADE UNIONS

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS a revision of the wage scales for Civil Servants had been the subject of discussions within the Government. We had not managed to agree either on the reduction of the number of Civil Servants, whose effectives had increased considerably after the liberation, although the number of inhabitants after the transfer of the Germans had fallen from 15,000,000 to 12,000,000, or on the increase of their salaries. Their situation was certainly more difficult than that of the workers, but nevertheless the Communists showed little interest in them, the immense majority of the Civil Servants being non-Communists.

It was only after much hesitation that, at the beginning of October, the Communists agreed to promise, together with the other parties of the Government, that the Civil Servants would receive a new status commencing on January 1, 1948. On the date fixed this promise had not been kept.

At the beginning of 1948 the National Socialists, returning to this matter, proposed an increase of 25 per cent in the salaries and pensions of Civil Servants. The Communists objected that carrying out this project would bring on inflation. This argument did not bear even the most superficial examination. To soothe public opinion, which was insistently demanding an improvement in the lot of State employees, the Communists suddenly proposed a monthly indemnity of 300 crowns (about $3 purchasing power) for all grades of Civil Servants. This project had been worked out by the U.R.O. (the General Confederation of Labour), which was entirely in the hands of the Communists. They alleged that it met the demands of all the Civil Servants' unions represented in the U.R.O. and once again they opposed a more radical reform by invoking the spectre of inflation. They maintained, in addition, that if the salaries of Civil Servants were increased to any great extent the U.R.O. would no longer be able to prevent the workers from demanding in turn a revision of their wages.

The Communist project was so clearly tainted by prejudice that the Civil Servants reacted violently, and began to ask

themselves whether they would not do well to withdraw from the U.R.O., since their unions were not taking their interests into account. The Communists, for their part, knew that they were strong enough to overcome this resistance by threats emanating, they claimed, from the workers' organizations, but in reality from the Communist Party.

The Minister of Finance, a Communist, transmitted the proposal of the U.R.O. to the Government on January 21. Representatives of the unions, admitted to take part in the discussion, sought by every means to persuade the Ministers that their plan was the only practicable one. Then, as their arguments did not carry conviction, they threatened to provoke demonstrations by the workers. In spite of all their efforts, they were unable to secure a majority in favour of their project. The Communists thereupon were unable to repress their fury. Vaclav Kopecky, Minister of Information, who was known for the liveliness of his reactions, cried with disarming innocence, addressing us National Socialists, "How do you dare to vote against the U.R.O.?" Without any doubt, the Communists were impressed by the fact that the Social Democrats had also "dared to vote against the U.R.O.", an organization which they regarded as a power soaring above the Government and the laws.

After this unexpected defeat the representatives of the U.R.O. left the room, proclaiming on a pathetic note that they disclaimed all responsibility for the consequences of our refusal.

On the following day, Zapotocky, president of the U.R.O., commented on events during a plenary meeting of the Confederation. He declared that if the status of the Civil Servants was improved "in an unconsidered manner" it would no longer be possible to hold back an avalanche of new demands from all social classes, and inflation would be inevitable. He concluded with a warning which was at the same time a threat: "The discussions in the Cabinet," he said, "have proved that an attempt is being made to put an end to the epoch of normal negotiations. In certain circles it seems to be believed that the time has come to have recourse to battle. In that case, in order not to be beaten, we must mobilize. We have a duty to do so towards the two million members of our unions."

That is how a debate which began on a social and financial question assumed more and more the form of a grave political conflict. The Communists knew that the prestige of the U.R.O.

was at stake; they knew that their influence in this organization would be appreciably diminished if the Government rejected a project which the Communist Party and the executive committee of the U.R.O. had defended with all their authority. On their side, the National Socialists and the other parties, the Social Democrats included, realized that the authority of the Government was in the balance: if it had accepted the anti-social proposals of the U.R.O., not only the Civil Servants but public opinion as a whole would have had the impression that the U.R.O. was imposing its own will on the Government and on all the non-Communist parties, although the latter were in a majority in the Cabinet and in the Chamber. In reality, the question of Civil Servants' salaries had receded into the background; what was to be determined was whether the Communist minority, supported by the U.R.O., was all-powerful, or if the principles of parliamentary democracy, according to which decision rested with the majority of the representatives elected by the people, remained valid.

From this time on the Communists issued slogans which became increasingly aggressive: they demanded that "the army of two million Unionists be mobilized", and they announced that to that end they would "convoke a congress of the unit committees and of the trade unions". If at first they had alleged that they wished to call this congress to discuss the status of the Civil Servants, they were not slow in admitting that it was necessary to "mobilize the working classes to spring the traps of the reaction".

On February 3 the question of the Civil Servants once more appeared on the agenda of the Cabinet meeting. Once more the discussion led to no result. The efforts of the ministerial committee charged with studying all aspects of the problem had been in vain. And it was without success that Majer, Minister of Food, submitted a new project to the Government which approached that of the U.R.O. The Communists obstinately refused to give way on any point; the resistance of the other parties was only strengthened by this fact.

Soon no further doubt was possible: the Communists had convoked the congress of unit committees* for purely political reasons. On February 8 a militant Communist, Jiri Sila, editor-in-chief of *Prace* (Labour), the official organ of the

* The unit committees were the union organizations in individual factories, businesses and governmental services.

U.R.O., declared openly what were the intentions of the extreme Left: "If the Trade Unions are to be obliged to accept a project inspired by the spirit of outbidding one another on the part of the political parties, they will risk being dragged into much deeper waters. They will be led to revise the policies which they have carried on up to now. To force an army of two million unionists to change their policy is no trifle. That is why the unions have decided to mobilize their troops. On the day when the foundations of our system are threatened there will no longer be any possible solution except one: to dip into the great private fortunes to maintain economic equilibrium. In other words, we must accelerate the speed of socialization."

Zapotocky used even clearer language at the meetings of the executive committee of the U.R.O., as well as in his private conversations: "We will not tolerate these procedures; we will make those reactionaries see plainly that we have had enough of them. We are going to do something about it!"

On February 6 important news reached me from a reliable source: the U.R.O. had called the congress of unit committees in accordance with a plan worked out at the end of January at the secretariat of the Communist Party, under the direction of Rudolf Slansky, secretary-general of the party. According to this plan a complete change in the National Front, designed to upset the present political system, was in preparation. According to this confidential information, as well as to the public declaration of the Communists, it was more and more evident that the debates on the Civil Servants' salaries were only the pretext, and by no means the cause, of the convocation of the congress of unit committees.

In these circumstances our line of conduct was clearly laid out for us: if we accepted the proposal of the U.R.O. on the status of the Civil Servants we should assume responsibility for a defeat of the democratic cause. The Populists and the Slovak Democrats thought as we did; the Social Democrats themselves did not approve of the Communist manœuvre.

It was on February 10 that the Cabinet had to take a definite decision on the question. Zapotocky was present at the meeting together with a large number of representatives of the union, of Civil Servants, and of U.R.O. experts. The debate began in a tense atmosphere. We had not forgotten the fit of anger of Gottwald at the previous meeting, who, contrary to all the rules, had flatly refused to put Majer's project on the agenda,

and when the non-Communist Ministers protested, had cried: "You are wasting your breath, I will not put that project to a vote; I am running this show!"

After a long speech by Zapotocky it was no longer possible to entertain any doubts on the intentions of the Communists. They were firmly decided not to retreat. The arguments continued until the end of the day. Drtina, Zenkl, Majer and other Ministers refuted without difficulty all the theories defended by the Communist Ministers and the U.R.O. delegates. From the manner in which Gottwald conducted the debate it was obvious that he was trying above all to win over the Social Democrats to his side. Tymes, Vice-President of the Cabinet, was beginning to show a certain hesitation. Mme. Jankovcova, Minister of Industry, asked nothing better than to agree with the Communists. If Tymes, in the name of his party, should withdraw the plan submitted by Majer, the latter would risk finding himself isolated.

Conscious of this danger, I proposed to my colleagues, Zenkl, Stransky and Drtina, that we should declare that if our project was rejected we would vote for that of Majer. In this way we hoped to induce our other Social Democratic colleagues to support Majer, instead of joining the Communists.

Our proposal provoked great surprise. Tymes, who was on the point of giving way, could not hide his embarrassment. Gottwald, on whom the meaning of this manœuvre was not lost, was red with anger. He could no longer, as at the previous meeting, refuse to put the project to a vote. In the end only the Communist minority voted for the plan of the U.R.O., and the Majer project was adopted by a majority composed of the Social Democrats, the National Socialists, the Populists and the Slovak Democrats.

Thereupon Zapotocky read to us a vehement protest against this decision of the Government. He declared that the U.R.O. would answer it through the congress of the unit committees, and reproached the Social Democrats for having joined the "reactionaries". As for Gottwald, he threw at us as he went out: "You will pay us back for that!"

Only the purely political character of this conflict explained the irritation of the Communists at their defeat, for on the whole the Majer plan approached very closely to theirs. It is easy to imagine also that Gottwald and his friends were exasperated to find facing them a coalition of persons who no longer

seemed disposed to submit to the Communist minority or to the "*Diktat*" of the U.R.O. Moreover, our victory strengthened the democratic elements of the unions, among whom the will to get rid of the Communist tutelage was making itself felt with growing force.

Our success had the most favourable repercussions on public opinion. The proof had been given that the Communists were not invincible; the resistance to them was considerably reinforced by that fact.

As for our party, it was more than ever determined to concentrate its efforts on solving the primordial problem: we must at any cost force the hand of the Communists, who were still refusing to reorganize the services of the security police.

BOOK FIVE
THE CRISIS

CHAPTER XXV
A COMMUNIST CHECK ON THE POLICE

HARDLY HAD THE argument on the Civil Servants' wage scale ended when the problem of the services of the ordinary and security police again demanded the attention of the Government. It was at the Cabinet meeting of February 13 that the discussion of this subject reached its culminating point.

In the morning the Ministers of the National Socialist Party met in Zenkl's office to agree on the tactics to follow in order to secure a governmental decision against the communization of the police. Every day disturbing information reached us, sent by deputies of the different parties, by members of the police force, and even by private citizens to put us on our guard against dangerous manœuvres of the Communist Party. Everywhere police officials who did not belong to the Muscovite Party were being dismissed and replaced by militant Communists who, more often than not, had neither the ability nor the qualities requisite for their functions. Once again all these appointments had a purely political character. Moreover, we had detailed information proving that these new officials were not chosen by the Ministry of the Interior, but directly by the secretariats of the Communist Party.

The Minister of Justice, who compiled all this information, showed us a report he had prepared, using this plentiful documentation, in which he demonstrated that it was a case of a carefully worked out Communist plan to acquire control of the police before the May elections. We no longer had any time to lose. The Communists, on the contrary, sought by every means to drag things out. Hence their insistence in putting on the agenda for the February 13 meeting other less important questions. To be sure of evading the problem of prime importance, they had added to the agenda a draft for a law on "national insurance" which was capable of engaging the atten-

tion of the Cabinet for several weeks. Consequently before the beginning of the meeting we agreed to bring up the police question as soon as the Government had entrusted a special Committee with studying the project on insurance.

On entering the Cabinet room we were surprised to find a regular battery of moving-picture cameras and sound-recording apparatus ready to register the speech of the Premier. These preparations were incomprehensible, considering the tension which had been making itself felt for weeks between the Communists and the other Ministers. As we were wondering what this setting of the stage signified, we were informed that it was a question of preserving for the public and for posterity records of the historic meeting during which the law granting social security to all citizens would be presented.

No one disputed the exceptional importance of the new law. But the use the Communists were making of it merely for electoral propaganda was clearly out of place. The committee of experts had finished its work in December. But the Premier was submitting the project to the Cabinet only two months later, in order more greatly to impress the public mind on the eve of the elections.

In the interval the financial data concerning this problem, without which the institution had no basis, had been entirely neglected.

Masaryk, addressing his colleagues with that sense of fitness which characterized him, said to them: "I beg of you, do not become involved in disputes while the lights are on you and the machines are recording your words."

The opening of the meeting went off as had been foreseen. But once the plan for a law on social insurance had been solemnly presented by Gottwald and, after a few brief speeches, handed over to a special committee of Ministers, the Ministers of the National Socialist Party asked that the question of the police should be put on the agenda. In spite of Communist protests, our proposal was accepted. Drtina then read, with great calm and dignity, a report rich in facts and perfectly objective. The Cabinet listened to him in complete silence, very much impressed by the revelations of the Minister of Justice.

His colleagues were already up to date on certain incidents which had come up during previous meetings. Drtina supplemented their knowledge by important details and fresh informa-

tion. To the stupefaction of all, the Minister of Justice told how Communist officials of the Ministry of the Interior had tried to persuade certain prisoners charged with espionage to make false depositions to incriminate politicians of the National Socialist Party. Freedom was promised to these prisoners if they would consent to declare that they had been drawn into subversive activity by Ministers Zenkl and Drtina and by Deputies Krajina, Klatil and Bartos, all members of our party. At the end of his exposition Drtina cited a series of facts concerning the systematic communization of the services of the security police.

All the important posts in the Ministry of the Interior were occupied by Communists; in the division of the security police, of nine departmental heads, five were Communists. At the head of the three branches of the Corps of National Security Police (S.N.B.) there were only militant Communists: Colonel Krystof, Dr. Hora and Dr. Goerner. In one of the particularly important sections of the security police (Section III-2), of nineteen officers, fourteen were Communists. In the directing office of the Corps of the National Security Police, of thirteen officers, nine were Communists. At Central headquarters of the political police, the three chief posts were in Communist hands. In the intelligence services the Communists dominated, even in the lower ranks. In the Prague headquarters of the provincial S.N.B., of five high officers, four were members of the Communist Party. Of seventeen regional directors of the S.N.B. in Bohemia, twelve were Communists. Of a total of seventy high officers of the S.N.B., about sixty were members of the Communist Party.

The Ministers knew most of these facts. But as they listened to these figures marshalled together in a precise statistical report, though still an incomplete one, they were seized with consternation.

To conclude his statement, the Minister of Justice repeated the proposal which we had already made several times to the Cabinet: he requested the setting up of a special commission which would make an investigation of all complaints concerning the proceedings of the Ministry of the Interior and of its organizations; the commission should then present to the Cabinet concrete proposals for restoring order to all the services of the security police.

The debate which followed the *exposé* of the Minister of Justice was even more excited than those of the preceding

meetings. At the moment when the argument took a particularly dramatic turn a piece of information came to us which we had not previously known.

A deputy of our party, Hora, who had been charged with ferreting out and revealing Communist abuses in the services of the security police, had Drtina and myself called from the meeting and, very anxiously, gave us a really alarming report: the Ministry of the Interior, or, more exactly, the command of the S.N.B., had ordered the replacement of eight non-Communist divisional police commissioners of Prague by trusted Communists. Hora explained to us that this was a case of exceptional gravity, because only the divisional commissioners had the right to distribute arms and ammunition to the police.

This news, which Drtina at once passed on to the Cabinet, had the effect of a bomb. Nothing more was necessary to make all the democratic Ministers understand that if they wanted to prevent the Communists from getting unshakable control of the security police machinery it was necessary to act without losing a second. It was also our duty to support officials who without our help would be at the mercy of the Communists. We knew also that public opinion was demanding radical measures to put an end to the abuses of a party which was trying to dominate, if not to eliminate, all the others. Consequently we all declared ourselves in favour of a proposal of Drtina which called on the Minister of the Interior to annul the changes of the eight divisional commissioners and to suspend all nominations in the services of the security police until February 24, the date on which the Government was to take a decision on this subject. In the interval the presiding officers of the Cabinet, including the representatives of all the parties, would be entrusted with examining the criticism and all the demands relating to the services of the security police.

The same investigation was to be made in the judicial administration for which Drtina, as Minister of Justice, was personally responsible. He thus hoped to facilitate Communist acceptance of the proposal by underlining the objective nature of an inquiry which would involve his services as well as those of the Minister of the Interior.

The Communists obstinately refused to fall in with the views of Drtina. They reproached us with bringing up this subject in the absence of the Minister of the Interior, Nosek, who was ill. They claimed that the Constitution did not give the

Cabinet the right to intervene in a Minister's management of his department.

This argument could not be maintained. The absence of a Minister had never been regarded as a reason for postponing an urgent debate, every absent Minister being replaced by one of his colleagues designated by the President of the Republic. Moreover, according to the Constitution, the Cabinet, when it judged it fitting to do so, was authorized to consider any question relevant to any Ministry. Every Minister is required to comply with the decisions of the Cabinet. If he does not approve of them, the only thing left for him to do is to resign.

In spite of the bitter opposition of the Communists the proposals of Drtina were approved by a majority composed of the Ministers of all the non-Communist parties, including the Social Democrats. The Communists voted only for the motion entrusting the Premier with proceeding to an inquiry.

The Communists had not in any way expected the new defeat which they had just experienced. They were particularly astonished to see the Social Democrats joining with the other democratic parties. Thus their anger fell particularly on Majer, Food Minister, who led the anti-Communist struggle in the party.

The Cabinet decision on the police forces was to take on later an importance which could not be suspected at the moment: it was that in fact which was the immediate cause of the governmental crisis which occurred eight days later.

For the democratic parties the meeting of February 13 marked a great success. After long discussions, after numerous debates, many of them dramatic, the Government had finally taken the step of stopping, by energetic measures, the progressive communization of the police and of putting an end to the use of illegal methods too reminiscent of the procedures of the Gestapo. It was all the more certain that the public would greet the energetic attitude of the Government with satisfaction because on this matter the Social Democrats had followed the same line as we had.

The Communists took the defeat which had just been inflicted upon them badly; twice in one week the largest party had been defeated in the Cabinet on important questions; twice it had found itself isolated.

It was evident that the extreme Left could not hope to get its own way by democratic methods, and that it risked con-

siderable losses at the coming elections. To forestall this danger it decided to have recourse to more draconian measures. The congress of the unit committees called for February 22 and the congress of peasant committees called for February 29 were to furnish it with the awaited occasion.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTIES TAKE THE OFFENSIVE

DURING THE DAYS that followed, the Communists loosed a violent campaign against their adversaries in the Press and at public meetings. It was always a case of variations on the same theme: "The reaction, which has infiltrated the democratic parties, is trying to overthrow the popular democracy". The Communist newspapers and magazines concealed less and less the fact that the congress of the unit committees and the congress of the peasant committees had been called not for economic reasons, but for purely political reasons: by speeding up the rhythm of socialization and agrarian reform "the snares and the plots of the reaction would be foiled", to safeguard and strengthen the "popular democracy"—that is to say, the Communist regime. They were silent on the conflict which had broken out within the Cabinet on the subject of the services of the security police; the campaign directed against us was meant to turn public attention from this thorny question. They were especially careful not to reveal the fact that the governmental decree of February 13, by which the non-Communist parties were trying to prevent the complete bolshevization of the police, had also been approved by the Social Democrats.

The non-Communist parties reacted without losing time. It was clear that the political crisis would not take long to degenerate into an open conflict between them and the Communists.

On February 18, *Prace* (Labour), the official organ of the U.R.O., declared that the economic stability of the State was in danger and that the congress of unit committees announced for the following Sunday would "save the Republic". In the *Rude Pravo*, a Communist Party daily, editor-in-chief Vilem Novy sounded the alarm: "We have warned the reaction more than once. It continues none the less to carry on its policy of greed and destruction. It counts on profiting by the benefits of true democracy to undermine the foundations of the State which the people have raised by their struggles and their toil. For the reactionaries, the time has come to learn that the patience of the

working classes has its limits". The president of the U.R.O., Zapotocky, Nosek, Minister of the Interior, and the other Communist chiefs kept to approximately the same line.

The non-Communist Press was not slow in answering the challenge. *Prave-Lidu*, the principal publication of the Social Democratic Party, put public opinion on its guard against the congress of the unit committees, which "is playing with fire and risks destroying the unity of the Trade Union movement".

Lidova Democracie, spokesman for the Catholic Party, also unmasked the Communists by declaring that "the policy of the steering committee of the U.R.O. is nothing other than a frontal attack directed against all non-Communists and an an attempt to use the syndicates to achieve the projects of the Communist Party".

On Monday, February 16, a piece of news of the greatest importance reached me from a Communist source, news which was to be confirmed later.

According to a plan worked out at the secretariat of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, in conformity with the instructions of the Cominform, a programme of radical socialization was to be voted by the congress of unit committees. According to this plan, all businesses employing more than fifty persons were to be nationalized. All foreign trade was to be taken over by the State—that is, it would become a monopoly after the Soviet model. Once these demands had been approved by the congress, they would be submitted to the Cabinet.

The Communists, who had come to an understanding with Fierlinger, were convinced that the Social Democrats would not dare to oppose this programme. If the other parties rejected it, a government crisis would result, which Gottwald would resolve by forming a new government composed of Communists, Social Democratic fellow-travellers and representatives of the U.R.O. The new Government would then organize elections, which would take place under conditions which could not fail to give the Communists more than 50 per cent of the votes.

My informant added that Slansky, secretary-general of the Communist Party, had assured the Communists, as well as Fierlinger's followers, that "everything" had been cleared with the Cominform: Zhdanov had agreed to the replacement of the National Front by another "renovated" National Front.

I knew my informant well enough not to doubt the authenticity of the news he brought me. What he told me was, for

that matter, confirmed by the more or less clear allusions in the Communist Press.

From the end of January 1948 we knew that a crisis was imminent. The question then before us was to decide what were the best tactics to follow. Should we take the initiative and provoke the crisis? Or was it to our interest to act in such a fashion that it would be Communists who would provoke it? The problem presented special urgency when the Communists announced the convocation of the congress of unit committees: was it more advantageous for us to bring on the crisis before the meeting of the congress or after it?

So long as we were not informed of the exact aim which the Communists had in mind in calling the congress and the precise details of their plan, I thought that we would commit a grave error in leaving the initiative to the Communists, who asked nothing better than to exclude us from the Government.

We knew, and our friends of the other non-Communist parties were not unaware of it, that our struggle against the communization of the police and the army had won us the sympathy of the immense majority of the population. If the general public did not always understand the Muscovite manœuvres on economic matters, because it was possible to put over a good many things in the name of social "justice", it had not forgotten in the slightest the methods of the Hitlerite police and army, and became alarmed, with good reason, at the changes brought about by the Ministry of the Interior in the services charged with maintaining order.

All this was of evil omen. We had, moreover, a foretaste of what a new totalitarian regime would mean to the country: in the factories and in the governmental bureaus the Communists were already hounding non-Communist workers and employees, whom they deprived of certain advantages (supplementary rations, for instance), or whom they threatened with "lock-outs" if they refused to join the Communist Party. In the rural districts the arbitrary manner in which they applied the agrarian reform gave them an excellent means for intimidating the peasants, whom they terrorized also by making continual searches of their homes on the pretext of combating the black market. This persecution, illegal from every point of view, was never exercised except against the non-Communist population, which appreciated all the more, by contrast, the liberty

and personal security guaranteed solely by democratic regimes. It goes without saying that no one had any desire to see the Gestapo reborn under a scarcely different form.

The Social Democrats had drawn the same conclusions as we had, and showed as much aggressiveness in this conflict as the other parties. Several times their president, Lausman, protested against acts of terrorism of which Social Democrats had been victims. The followers of Fierlinger themselves—that is to say, the fellow-travellers' wing of the party—could not support the Communist Party in this delicate matter.

On the contrary, it was to be expected that in the economic questions placed on the agenda of the congress of unit committees under the appetizing title of "acceleration of Socialization", it would be difficult even for the moderate elements of the Social Democratic Party to oppose Communists, especially since the electoral campaign was in full blast.

Putting all these factors together, I sought to acquire an exact idea of the complicated situation in which our country found itself and to deduce from it the necessary conclusions, and the tactics to be followed.

News from my informant, according to which the Communists would attempt to solve the crisis by violence if we did not cease attacking them; the inflexibility and obstinacy which Gottwald had shown in his private conversation with me; the message from Budapest informing me that the Hungarian Communists were expecting a change in government in Prague at the end of February; finally, what I had learned of the aims of the congress of unit committees, plus the provocative attitude of the Communists in the Cabinet, in their Press and in public meetings: what could all these facts indicate if not that the Communists were on the point of upsetting the political structure of our country to seize power before the elections which they feared?

After having thought it over at length, I convinced myself that the only means of parrying the Communist danger was to assume the offensive.

On the evening of Monday, February 16, all the Ministers of our party—Zenkl, Stransky, Drtina and myself—met with Deputies Krajina and Firt to exchange opinions on these matters. The more we considered the tactics to be followed, the more the idea forced itself upon us that we must not hesitate in transforming the latent crisis into open crisis.

I therefore proposed to my friends that we hand in our resignations before the meeting of the congress, in case the Communists did not accede to our demands concerning the services of the security police. "It is the only way", I said to them, "to counteract the plan of the Communists, who count on provoking a crisis after the congress. It is necessary that the public should know that the stake of the battle which we are waging is not a more or less radical socialization, but the very existence of our democratic regime. There is not a single citizen who will not understand that when he sees that with all our strength we are opposing a Communist attempt to make the police a docile instrument of their party. If it is on this question that we bring about the crisis, the Social Democrats cannot dissociate themselves from us. Once the crisis is upon us we shall without doubt have to hold immediate elections. If the date of the elections is moved forward, the Communists will no longer have the necessary time to gain control of the police and the army and to have certain laws voted which they need for their electoral propaganda."

My colleagues had arrived at the same conclusions. Stransky wondered if Moscow would not intervene to help the Communists. Professor Krajina remarked that the Communists counted on the Soviet army garrisoned in Germany and Austria, and he stated that according to certain reports troop movement had been observed along our frontiers.

"I am sure", I answered, "that Moscow will help them politically. We know that Slansky is acting according to instructions sent by Zhdanov in the name of the Cominform. But I do not believe in an armed intervention by the Soviets, because that would cause too dangerous an international tension. But even if we admit that possibility, it would not constitute a reason for retreating. A defeat, it is true, is always possible. What matters is that we should act in such a way as to make everyone understand that a Communist regime cannot be instituted in our country except by violence."

However, it was necessary not to precipitate matters. Before taking the decisive step it was important to assure ourselves of the agreement of the Populists (the Czech Catholic party) and of the Slovak Democrats, and to inform the loyal friends we had among the Social Democrats of our project. It was necessary for us above all to know the opinion of the President of the Republic. In any case, we were decided not to bring about a crisis until

after we had proved that the Communists were refusing to yield on the police question.

When the Cabinet met on Tuesday, February 17, the National Socialist Ministers asked at the opening of the session if the governmental decision of February 13 had been carried out. The Premier answered that in the absence of the Minister of the Interior he could not give any information on a point which was in the domain of his colleague. Zenkl then asked Kopecky, Minister of Information, who was acting as substitute for Nosek, to make an inquiry by telephone from the Ministry of the Interior to obtain an answer to the question which had been asked.

The Premier objected to this. A fresh argument ensued, during which the Communists showed themselves particularly violent, and even less courteous than usual.

The meeting was adjourned at noon. We decided not to take up any problem so long as the affair of the police had not been settled. Before the afternoon session I informed Majer, the Minister of Food, representing the right wing of the Social Democratic Party, of our decision, as well as my colleagues of the Populist and Slovak Democratic parties. They promised to adopt the same attitude as ourselves.

When the meeting resumed, Gottwald announced that Minister of the Interior Nosek would make a report on the police question when the Cabinet met again on February 20. Then he proposed to pass on to the next business.

Now, what we expected from the Minister of the Interior was not a report on a question which had already been discussed at length and on which the Government had taken a decision. What we asked him to do was to translate that decision into acts. We were not deceived by this manœuvre. So Zenkl asked once more if Nosek had annulled the replacement of the eight divisional police Commissioners of Prague. He added that he had it from a reliable source that not only had Nosek not done this, but that, disregarding the desires of the Cabinet, his Ministry was continuing to make changes in the services of the security police and other important changes to the benefit of the Communists and the detriment of other parties. Gottwald answered that he was not informed on this matter, and in spite of the energetic protests of Msgr. Sramek and other Ministers, he adjourned the meeting abruptly.

Meanwhile we had learned that Gottwald, during an inter-

view which he had asked of the President of the Republic, had accused the National Socialists, as well as the other non-Communist Ministers, of systematically paralysing the work of the Government, of preventing Parliament from debating the acts submitted to it and of trying to create an anti-Communist bloc to exclude the Communists from the Government and to institute a Cabinet of technicians.

The President immediately had his conversation with Gottwald reported to us, making it clear that he gave no credence to this absurd idea.

We had never considered the idea of forming a Cabinet of technicians: at a period when political passions were running high and when the struggle between parties had reached its zenith, a government which did not reflect the political structure of the country was inconceivable. The Communists attributed this fantastic intention to us to enable them the more readily to launch their campaign against the "subversive activities of the reaction" and to explain why they were "mobilizing the army of two million workers" entrusted with defending the "popular democracy".

The same evening Masaryk was giving a dinner in honour of the Polish and Yugoslav Foreign Ministers, who had come to Prague for a conference, Moscow having expressed the desire to see Prague, Warsaw and Belgrade line up beside her on the solution of the German problem.

After the dinner personal conversations concerned themselves much more with our domestic crisis than with the future of Germany. The Yugoslav and Polish delegates, nearly all Communists, seemed to believe that we really had the intention of driving their comrades out of the Government in order to replace them by a Cabinet of technicians. A Polish delegate, to whom I declared that those who imputed this project to us took us for innocents or fools, returned this sceptical answer: "Who would have believed that Fierlinger would be excluded from your Cabinet? Yet you succeeded in driving him out." I explained to him that the exclusion of Fierlinger had not been our work, but that of the Social Democratic congress of Brno. This argument did not seem to convince him. "No," he said to me, "it was certainly the result of your policy, the policy of the National Socialists. You were wrong. You should have taken into account the fact that Fierlinger enjoyed the confidence of our Soviet friends and that his exclusion from the

Government would inevitably be interpreted as an act of provocation towards the Russians and the other Slavic nations. It was not reasonable of you. How can they trust you? You are carrying on a clearly anti-Communist policy. You do not like the Soviets and you have a hostile attitude towards Poland."

This confirmed our impression that the Czechoslovak Communists were acting in full agreement with Moscow and that Fierlinger was only a tool in the hands of the Cominform.

During the dinner I had also had several very revealing conversations with some of our politicians of the Communist Party. When I told them that we were not deceived by their manœuvres and that we had very well understood that they had invented the story of a Cabinet of technicians solely to have an argument against us, they did not even take the trouble to dispute my assertion. One of them was sincere enough to say to me: "It is possible that you really have no intention of forming a Cabinet of technicians, but it is to our interest to say so".

While in private conversations the Communists did not hide the fact that for them it was a question only of a cynical trick, the executive committee of the Communist Party published on February 17 a statement in which, with the greatest seriousness, it warned the public against the "ambushes of the reaction". The representatives of the other parties, this statement said, "are carrying on systematic obstruction within the Cabinet with a view to provoking a ministerial crisis. They intend thus to create in our domestic politics a chaotic situation which will prevent the putting into effect of the new Constitution and important new laws, and which will make impossible free and democratic elections, of which they fear the results. The executive committee of the Communist Party deduces from this that the methods of certain parties are inspired by the desire to institute, before the elections and by anti-constitutional means, a Cabinet of technicians in the service of the reaction, which will try to wrest the power from the hands of the people and to prepare anti-democratic elections in an atmosphere of political and economic confusion."

A little later the Communists appealed to "all democratic and progressive elements, without distinction of party", to hold themselves "ready to nip in the bud" the subversive manœuvres of the reaction. In spite of all the attempts of the reaction, "which wants to undermine the foundation of the National Front and the unity of the people, a true National Front,

composed of all the working classes of city and country, will hold itself ready, under the leadership of Klement Gottwald, to defend the popular democracy".

The Communists ended by declaring that it was upon the congress of the unit committees and the congress of the peasant committees that the task devolved "not only of defending the work of our national revolution, but still more of developing it in the spirit of the popular democracy and of Socialism".

That same evening Zapotocky publicly announced that "the acceleration of socialization will be discussed at the congress of unit committees".

This *communiqué* is a most interesting document: it summarizes, in fact, the policy which the Communists were then pursuing and the methods which they were using to bring it about. It consisted, as one sees, in imputing their own intentions to their adversaries. For it was undeniably they who were creating chaos in domestic politics; they who were trying to provoke a crisis; they who were preparing, according to the Yugoslav model, a new National Front; they, finally, who wanted to impose upon the country, before the elections, a new government composed of Communists, Social Democratic fellow-travellers, representatives of the U.R.O. and renegades from the other parties, a government which would organize really anti-democratic elections because they feared genuinely free elections. A resolution in the form of a manifesto voted by the congresses of unit committees and peasant committees was to serve as the starting point for the *coup d'état* which they were preparing.

Events have proved that this analysis was correct. During the days which followed, all the actions of the Communists were in conformity with the plan outlined in the manifesto of February 17. The events of that day precipitated a crisis which thereafter was inevitable: the obstinacy of the Communists, which was equivalent to provocation; new dramatic conflicts between Communists and their opponents within the Cabinet; the action of Gottwald in denouncing the intentions of the non-Communist parties to the President of the Republic; the statement of the executive committee of the Communist Party, appealing to "the working classes" against "the reaction"; the unshakable decision of the non-Communist parties to act in unity and to demand emphatically that the decisions of the Cabinet be respected—all these facts marked that memorable Tuesday which was to prove a fateful day.

CHAPTER XXVII

WE CONSULT BENES

THE FEBRUARY 17 meeting of the Cabinet ended about four in the afternoon. Because of the gravity of the situation, I proposed to my three colleagues of the National Socialist Party, as well as to the Ministers of the Populist and Slovak Democratic Parties, that we should go to Msgr. Sramek's office to come to an agreement on the tactics we were to follow.

The meeting had been stormy—that is the least that can be said of it; we knew that developments were speeding up and that we would soon have to make decisions of the highest importance. Msgr. Sramek, indignant at the brusque manner in which Gottwald had adjourned the meeting to escape our questions, declared that the situation could not continue and that only immediate elections could resolve the deadlock. We all agreed with him. Zenkl, whose fighting spirit accommodated itself badly to the state of cold war which had existed for some weeks between the Communists and ourselves, received with special satisfaction the declaration of Msgr. Sramek, who, as a calm and thoughtful man, never decided to act except after mature reflection. I knew Sramek better than most of my colleagues, and I at once concluded that he was ready to assume the offensive. I believed, therefore, that the moment had come to put the key question to him bluntly: "Do you not think that we would do best to resign at once?" He answered without a second's hesitation: "I see no other course." There was not one of the Ministers present who was not impressed by the fact that a politician of his age and experience, known for his prudence and wariness, was pronouncing himself with so much resolution for an open fight. We had no difficulty in convincing our colleagues of the necessity for taking the offensive—that is to say of causing a governmental crisis by our resignation. They well knew that the Communists had everything to gain by dragging out matters.

At this point Zenkl told the Populist and Slovak Democratic Ministers what we already knew—that early in the afternoon the President had informed him, through his political counsellor, Jina, that Gottwald had demanded an urgent interview and

that he was just leaving the Hradcany. The object of his visit had greatly surprised the President: Gottwald had come to announce the sensational news that the National Socialists intended to propose the constitution of a Cabinet of technicians. Benes desired at the same time to let us know that he did not believe a word of it.

We had not expected so naïve a manœuvre from the Communists. The most elementary common sense was enough to enable one to understand that a Cabinet of technicians was inconceivable in so electric a political atmosphere, with elections approaching. It was easy to see that the Communists had invented this news for purely demagogic reasons. But because it was ridiculous, the manœuvre was none the less dangerous, owing to the repercussions that it might have on the general public.

While we were talking I was warned by telephone that the Communists had decided to reveal in their newspaper the following day the plan they attributed to us—a plan by which, according to them, we counted on getting them out of the Government. I immediately communicated this information to my colleagues, and several of them were of the opinion that from now on we had one more reason for acting quickly.

Nothing further remained for us to do except to choose the most propitious moment for our offensive and determine all the details of our tactics.

The crisis being thus inevitable, it was of supreme importance that we should be informed of the attitude of the President of the Republic, upon whom the Constitution conferred the right of accepting the resignation of Ministers and of forming a new Cabinet. Moreover, his personal authority and his prestige with all parties, the Communists included, were such that no unalterable decision could be taken without consulting him.

In principle we were not obliged to inform the President of our intention in advance, but we would surely have been lacking in foresight and political intelligence if we had faced him with a *fait accompli*. In addition, the co-operation between President Benes and the leaders of our party was so close, it had always assumed so friendly a character, that the idea would never have entered our heads of taking a decision of such gravity without warning him of it. We all thought that it was more important than anything else to know whether Benes regarded the situation in the same way as we did; thus we would not risk being caught off base in the approaching crisis.

Zenkl at once telephoned to Hradcany to ask the President to receive us as soon as possible. During the whole crisis we had regularly informed him of our decisions and intentions. But the interview which we were requesting that day had a special character, owing to the fact that it represented the first official exchange of views between the President of the Republic and the Ministers of the National Socialist Party, which had played the most active role in the struggle against the Communists.

It had at first been agreed that Zenkl, in his role of president of our party, should go to place before the President the point of view of the National Socialists. Knowing that this interview would have exceptional importance, I proposed to Zenkl that I should accompany him. He accepted, remarking that as I knew the President better than he did, I would interpret his reactions more accurately, and that between the two of us we would be more certain of avoiding any misunderstanding. We did not then suspect the importance of this last detail. False reports were circulated later to propagate the belief that our plan had failed because we had not spoken of it in advance to Benes. Today the testimony of two friends and close collaborators of the President exists to prove, first that we informed the President of our projects in time, and secondly that he approved of our tactics without reservation.

Benes received us the following morning, February 18, at ten o'clock. He was in excellent form and very good humour. I had last seen him in December 1947, immediately after my return from Moscow. Benes seemed in better health than then; only a certain weakness of the vocal cords still recalled his illness. That did not prevent him, in accordance with his custom of talking volubly and at length, from dwelling upon certain points which seemed to him particularly important. He was clear and precise in his judgments, and what he said to us showed that he had lost nothing of his combative ardour.

When Zenkl, entering at once into the heart of the matter, announced to him the grave decisions we were on the point of taking, and about which we desired to consult him, the President interrupted him: "I know," he said, "and I must tell you what Gottwald came to tell me yesterday."

This reaction pleased me. I knew that whenever the President began a conversation with so much vivacity it was a sign that he was in good humour and felt himself in his element. When he kept silent, letting his visitors do the talking, it was

generally because he was hesitant and did not want to make his point of view known immediately. So I was certain from the beginning of our conversation that we should have no trouble in agreeing.

Benes thereupon repeated for us the list of the charges Gottwald had formulated against us, and the conversation which they had had, the gist of which he had communicated to us through his counsellor.

Zenkl expressed to the President the surprise which had been caused in our ranks by the report of this interview. "At no time did we consider a Cabinet of technicians," he said. "On the contrary, we remembered that last autumn, during the Slovak crisis, the Communists themselves had had this idea. Knowing that we would never agree to a widening of the National Front by the admittance of non-parliamentary groups (unions, resistance movements, etc.), as they desired, they envisaged the possibility of provoking a governmental crisis and of proposing to you a Cabinet of technicians."

I confirmed this statement, and reminded the President that at this time the Communists had thought of Sychrava* as representative of the Union of Legionnaires, and of Zapotocky,† who was to figure in the Government as a "non-political technician", representing the unions, while the National Socialist Emanuel Slechta‡ was to come in as a specialist on economic matters. Gottwald's manœuvre thus consisted in imputing to us a project which the Communists had themselves developed and which had failed.

The President listened to us with a smile. "I asked Gottwald what Ministers you had chosen for your Cabinet of technicians," he said. "After a little hesitation, he revealed to me that Jina, for instance, would be offered the portfolio of the Interior. I saw through his tactics. Jina is my political counsellor, and is a

* Lev Sychrava, a devoted friend of President Benes and his collaborator since the First World War, had been since 1919 president of the Union of Czechoslovak Legionnaires, which was made up of volunteers of the First World War. An eminent publicist, he enjoyed the respect of all the political parties.

† Zapotocky was then president of the U.R.O. When, in June 1948, Gottwald was elected President of the Republic, Zapotocky was nominated Premier, a position he still occupies at the time of writing.

‡ Slechta, an engineer, was professor of political economy at the Technical School of Prague and president of the economic committee of the National Socialist Party. He had always been on good terms with the Communists. After the putsch of February 25, 1948, he entered the new Gottwald Government.

member of the National Socialist Party. Gottwald, by naming him as one of the potential Ministers, meant to insinuate that the Cabinet of technicians was being prepared with my approval or tacit consent."

I supplemented this news by relating that during a banquet at Masaryk's the night before certain Communist Ministers had also predicted that Sychrava would become Premier, and General Pika* Minister of National Defence.

As a matter of fact, in his conversation of the day before with Benes, Gottwald had spoken of these same persons. "I told Gottwald," the President informed us, "that the whole thing did not hold water. I pointed out to him that if a government of this kind were being prepared, I should already have been informed of it, and that it would be natural that I should learn the news from the National Socialists, represented as the instigators of this plan, and not from the Communists. I told him that naturally I would not accept a Cabinet of technicians, any more than I would accept a Cabinet without Communists. I then advised him to do what every Premier does when his Government finds itself in a difficult situation—that is to say, to consult the different parties to find a satisfactory solution. I insisted that, like myself, he abide strictly by constitutional rules and democratic customs. Gottwald did not seem satisfied. He kept returning endlessly to the accusations made against you and, for my part, I was obliged to repeat to him what I had already said."

To check on certain news which I had received, I asked the President if he thought that Gottwald really believed the report which the Communists were circulating about our plan for a Cabinet of technicians. The day before, speaking about this false rumour to the Minister of Information, Kopecky, and to other Communists, I had the impression that not for an instant did they take seriously the false report which they themselves had disseminated, and that it was nothing but a deceptive tactic on their part. I quoted to the President the cynical words which one of them had uttered to me: "It is possible that you do not really have any intention of forming a Cabinet of technicians,

* General Pika, a legionnaire of the First World War, was one of the first officers to organize resistance to the Nazis after Munich; during the Second World War he was the head of a Czechoslovak military mission to Moscow. He was arrested after the *coup d'état* of February and, in January 1949, sentenced to death by hanging. The sentence has not been carried out at the time of writing.

but as for us, we have every interest in pretending that you have."

"However, I had the impression," the President resumed, "that Gottwald, to a certain extent, believed that these rumours had some basis," and he added: "It seemed evident to me that the Communists are not sure of themselves—that they are afraid. The attack which Gottwald made against you yesterday denotes a certain weakness on their part. They come to seek me to defend them. That is the first victory due to your firmness. Now everything—really everything—depends on your perseverance. It is necessary to hold fast, and not give way."

The President's interpretation somewhat surprised me. I did not believe, as he did, that Gottwald's aggressive attitude towards us was a sign of weakness. I saw in it, rather, a well-calculated manœuvre. By cynically launching the report, entirely without foundation, that we intended to eliminate the Communists from the Government, they were preparing, among the working masses and in the general public, an offensive against a party which was beginning to prove a serious obstacle to their plans. The same manœuvre would serve to turn the Social Democrats away from us and push them into the Communist camp.

But I did not judge it opportune to engage with the President upon a discussion of the meaning which must be attached to the tactics of the Communist Party. For the moment my chief object was to ascertain his personal attitude. Now, after what he had just said to us, there could not be the least doubt: he clearly disapproved of the Communist procedure.

Zenkl then gave the President an account of the latest political talks, which had resulted in the ministerial decision of February 13 concerning the replacement of the eight divisional commissioners, and he brought out the point that the Minister of the Interior had still not executed the order of the Cabinet. Finally he summarized the result of our deliberations thus: "In agreement with the Populists and the Slovak Democrats, we have adopted a clear, firm attitude: we cannot accept the Government's failure to execute its own decisions. We shall lose everyone's respect if we permit the Communist minority to sabotage the decisions approved by the majority. On this point the Social Democrats are in agreement with us. Moreover, if it is desired to guarantee the honesty of the elections, it is absolutely necessary to stop the communization of the police. That is why

we cannot and will not give way on this point. So we shall refuse to take part in the work of the Government as long as the governmental decree of February 13 has not been put into effect."

The President had listened to Zenkl with the greatest attention. He declared himself in entire agreement with us. "You must in no circumstances give way," he repeated to us. "You are right; it is absolutely necessary that the decree of February 13 should be carried out. I said to Gottwald yesterday: 'The Communist theory according to which this decree is illegal and anti-Constitutional is not defensible. You do not have to be an expert in constitutional law to know that every Minister is obliged to submit to the decisions of the Cabinet and to apply them. If he does not want to conform to them because he does not approve them, he has the option of handing in his resignation. It is the only right he has. Otherwise he is obliged to do what the Cabinet has decided.' The Communists know that very well, but because they do not wish to conform to a decision which upsets their plans, they are looking for a pretext to avoid doing their duty. They know the weakness of their position. All the more reason for you to stand your ground. It is evident that the Communists are apprehensive about the elections. That is one more reason for speeding them. Remain firm, as you have been up to now. Do not let yourselves be intimidated. As for me, I won't give way. You can count on me."

We thanked the President. "We are happy to see," I said to him, "that we look at the situation in the same way; like you, we are convinced that at the present time only an attitude of firmness towards the Communists can bring about a satisfactory solution of the crisis."

"You are right, be firm," the President repeated. "You would commit an irreparable fault if you gave way. That would mean defeat for you."

We had every reason to be satisfied. We knew now that there was a perfect identity of views between the President and ourselves. That was of supreme importance.

But that was not all. It remained to find out if the President had come to the same conclusions as ourselves about the manner in which the battle had to be engaged.

So far we had discussed with the other parties the eventuality of our resignation and its consequences, but it was essential to

know the opinion of the President of the Republic on this matter. Zenkl put the question: "You have often said to us—to us and to the delegates of other parties—that you would never accept a government in which two parties of the National Front were unrepresented. May we ask you if you still hold that point of view?"

The President answered without hesitating: "It goes without saying that I could never accept a government from which two parties of the National Front were absent. In a situation so unstable as ours, with so many things still in process of formation, we need the co-operation of all parties."

Zenkl wanted to be still more precise: "It is no longer a question of two parties, but of three parties, which are opposing the dictatorial attitude of the Communists. If I understand correctly, you would be even less willing to accept a government deprived of three parties than a government deprived of two."

The President, somewhat irritated by the insistence of Zenkl, confirmed the fact that this was indeed his meaning: "I have told you that; I will not accept a government from which two or three parties are excluded. On this point you can count upon me completely. For that matter, Gottwald knows it—I have never hidden from him that I would oppose a government thus mutilated, and all the more a government within which the Communists might try to assure themselves of a majority by incorporating non-parliamentary representatives of the unions, the resistance movements or other groups. That would be contrary to the Constitution and to parliamentary principles."

It was impossible to be more explicit. In complicated situations the President often expressed himself prudently, taking care to leave the door open for solutions which he had not yet mentioned. In the present case he had expressed himself with a precision which did not permit of the least doubt.

After these categorical declarations we had a right to be completely reassured as to the attitude which the President of the Republic would adopt. But, since we desired to take every precaution before engaging battle, there remained one further point to elucidate.

I knew the importance which Benes attributed to the Social Democrats, who in fact occupied a key position, since, with the Communists, they had a majority in Parliament.

"We want to act in such a way as not to have the Social Democrats against us," I explained to him. "I am not forgetting that Majer is still threatened by Fierlinger, and that the latter is only waiting for the opportunity to revenge himself. I know that he has for colleagues in the Cabinet Ministers Tymes, who is weak, and Mme. Jankovcova, who sympathizes with Fierlinger and who, consequently, is not a reliable ally for us. In the debates on the wages of Civil Servants we did everything to prevent the Social Democrats from associating themselves with the Communists. So far we have managed to keep up their distrust about the U.R.O. congress which the Communists are preparing. On the question of the police the Socialists will back us to the limit. So we are trying to keep this question in the foreground—a question which is of vital importance for all the non-Communist parties and on which the Social Democrats cannot break away from us."

I noticed that the President was listening to me with growing interest. I had touched upon a particularly delicate and complex problem: the governmental crisis was in fact paralleled by a crisis within the Social Democratic Party and, according to the issue of the former, the balance could turn in one way or the other for the latter.

"You do well to be particularly vigilant on that point," Benes answered me vivaciously. "I hope Lausman has evolved far enough not to align himself any longer with Fierlinger against you. I have observed that since the congress of Brno, where he replaced Fierlinger as president of the party, he knows that he is regarded as a deserter by the Communists and that he will never again be able to win their confidence. I hardly recognize him now. He is violent against them."

The future was to demonstrate that the hopes Benes had founded on Lausman were exaggerated. But at that moment we all shared his impression.

I also reported to the President the violent argument that I had had with Gottwald about the police. In spite of the uncompromising attitude of the Premier, I still hoped that at the last moment the Communists would give way.

Benes was not of my opinion. "Do not deceive yourself," he said. "The Communists will never retreat in any field unless they are forced to do so. You are asking for certain reforms in the ordinary police and the services of the security police to guarantee free elections. But the Communists, precisely, do not

want free elections. They will not give way until they are convinced that you will maintain your positions and will not hesitate to provoke a ministerial crisis." After a pause he added, with a grave air: "Have no illusions. The fight will be hard. The Communists will not recoil before any methods." We were sufficiently familiar with the lack of scruples and brutality of our adversaries to realize that we must expect anything from them.

After this survey of the domestic political horizon, I hastened to come to the international aspects of the situation. There were, for that matter, close links between the two fields: everything which happened in our country could be understood only as a function of Russo-American relations: if our position was becoming more and more difficult, it was because the tension between Moscow and Washington continued to increase.

The President became animated as soon as I raised this subject. International politics was his favourite domain, and it was questions of foreign policy which I had talked over most often with him.

"For quite a long time now I have been of the opinion that the Western Powers and Soviet Russia will not succeed in coming to an understanding," Benes said to me, in a worried tone. "International tension will increase. It is the Soviets who are responsible for it. It is true that the Westerners are committing grave errors. But it is the Russians who are driving towards war. Their attitude is as provocative as that of Hitler. Hardly a month passes that they do not find a new means of irritating and exasperating their adversaries. Even now they are engaged in publishing documents on the co-operation of the Westerners and Germany before the war. They can accumulate documents as much as they please, two facts still remain. The first is that, whatever the errors committed by the Westerners before the war, it was not Russia, but Great Britain and France, who declared war to stop the drive of Hitler. The second fact is that it was at that very moment that Molotov concluded his notorious pact with Ribbentrop. They fall tooth and nail upon the United States, Great Britain and France because their consciences are uneasy when they think of what they have done and what they are doing. They shriek against Western imperialism to distract attention from their own aggressive expansionism."

Benes continued: "You will recall some day what I am about to tell you. The Soviets will pay dearly for the cynical policy they are carrying on at this moment. They will provoke war, but they will end up as badly as the Nazis, perhaps worse. War, I fear, will have still more disastrous consequences for them than those which Germany is now suffering. The responsibility of the agitators of Moscow is immense."

The dire prophecies of this man, who was nevertheless usually optimistic, made a deep impression upon us. It was in the conversations which I had had with M. Benes in 1947 that he criticized the policy of the Kremlin with ever-mounting severity. The painful experiences which he had undergone in the spring of 1945 in Moscow and Kosice had shaken the confidence he had formerly felt in his Soviet ally. In 1947 he had regarded as an offence the brutal manner in which the Soviets had intervened to prevent our participation in the Marshall Plan and the conclusion of a treaty of alliance with France. I knew his feelings in regard to the U.S.S.R., but I was surprised at the indignation with which he condemned the Muscovite attitude. I remember in this connection the vehemence with which, a few weeks earlier, he had spoken of the Soviets in a conversation with Jan Masaryk. Masaryk had recounted to me the words of the President:

"Moscow and its Communists," Benes had said, "are provoking the whole world by everything they are doing. One of these days all the nations will rise against them to crush them." And Masaryk had added: "The indignation of Benes does not surprise me. No one has defended the necessity of an honest co-operation with Moscow with more ardour; no one has been so shamelessly deceived by the Bolsheviks as he."

A silence had fallen after the violent and gloomy outburst of the President. After a moment I asked him what the consequences of this development would be for our country.

"Though our position becomes more and more difficult," he said, "our duty is to fight to safeguard our liberty and our independence, in spite of all the obstacles that stand in our way."

Returning to the domestic crisis I stressed to the President that the situation was all the more untenable since all administrative and governmental activity was paralysed. "It is necessary that this latent crisis," I said, "should be transformed as soon as possible into an official open crisis. But it is extremely

important to choose the right moment for our resignation. I have thought over this point carefully, and I have worked out a plan on which I am anxious to know your opinion. The Communists have called a union congress for next Sunday, February 22. This congress, without any doubt, will be the starting-point for a full-scale offensive which they intend to launch against us, and the plan of this offensive, according to information which has just reached me, is worked out in its most minute details. The union congress will proclaim a programme for radical socialization which the Communists will try to impose on the Government immediately after. They foresee that the Social Democrats will not be able to reject this programme. They know, on the other hand, that we shall reject it. Thus, if the crisis breaks out on this point, they are sure of having the Social Democrats with them. By the same measures, they count on distracting public attention from the delicate problem of the security police, on which all the non-Communist parties are agreed.

"To torpedo this manœuvre it is to our interest to provoke the crisis before next Sunday's congress. It goes without saying that we shall not take this decisive step unless the Communists still refuse to give way on the police question when it is put once more, next Friday, at the Cabinet meeting. What do you think?"

"I believe you are right," the President answered, after having listened to me attentively. "What you tell me about the congress is indeed very important. It must be taken into account. But, above all, remain firm. You will see that the Communists will not give way except at the cost of a governmental crisis. Go ahead, but take care to make no blunders."

Before leaving the President I repeated that the crisis would without doubt occur within the next fortnight, but that it was not out of question that he would receive our resignations within forty-eight hours.

"You say your resignations," the President asked me. "Do you mean your resignations only, or that of the other Ministers as well?"

"Not only our resignations," I made it clear, "but also the resignations of the Populists and Slovak Democratic Ministers. And everything leads us to believe that those of the Social Democrats will follow closely after ours."

Whereupon Benes said with a satisfied air: "That is very important, and it is well. The sooner the better, for it is essential that the elections shall take place at as early a date as possible."

It was on these words that we took leave of the President of the Republic.

CHAPTER XI

TWELVE MINISTE

NOW THAT WE knew that the President of the Republic had approved of our policy and our tactics, we resolved to hand in our resignations on Friday, February 20, if at that date the Minister of the Interior had still not executed the governmental decree of February 13.

The same day—that is, February 18—the National Socialist Ministers informed their parliamentary group of the decision which they had just taken. All the Deputies greeted our project with enthusiasm, including Alois Neuman, who after the *coup d'état* turned against us to enter the new Gottwald Government.

Immediately afterwards we also informed the executive committee of our party of our interview with the President and of our intention of resigning. It was with especial satisfaction that the members of our committee learned that the President was entirely in agreement with us and that he was advising us not to give way. They approved unanimously our attitude in the Cabinet and gave us a free hand for the future to take whatever decisions should be necessary.

To avoid any misunderstanding, a *communiqué* was published stating that "the executive committee of the National Socialist Party charges its representatives in the Government with declining all responsibility concerning the communization of the services of the regular police and the security police—an action which is rendering impossible the collaboration of the parties of the National Front and is paralysing the work of the Government—and of deducing the necessary consequences from this state of things."

I had taken care to draft this passage myself, because I was determined publicly to announce our intention of resigning and of proving that we were acting in full agreement with the directing organizations of our party.

Not a dissentient voice was raised against our attitude. All the members of the executive committee recognized that the time had come to oppose the acts of the Communist Party in a resolute manner, and all without exception voted for the resolution approving our resignation. Emanuel Slechta, who

wnter Gottwald's new combination
.1 no qualms at publicly declaring
ied of our intention of resigning, was
e did not raise the least objection to
our formulate the least criticism of our policy.

Our decision to take the offensive aroused such enthusiasm among the members of the executive committee and the delegates of our party that we found ourselves obliged to exhort them to remain calm, rather than to encourage them for the struggle.

The Populist and Slovak Democratic parties had assured us of their complete solidarity. As for the leaders of the Social Democratic Party, whom we had also informed, they avoided making a definite declaration.

The conflict between Communists and non-Communists was hourly growing worse. On February 18 a meeting of the National Front called to discuss certain articles of the Constitution had to break off its work, Stransky and Drtina having refused to take part in the discussions so long as the question of the police services remained unsolved.

The Communist Press was foaming at the mouth. The longer the list of accusing witnesses grew, the more the evidence proving their guilt accumulated, the more violent became the Communists' attacks. They remained faithful to their methods—in other words, they persisted in imputing to others the misdeeds of which they were guilty. In their choice of language they no longer imposed the slightest restraint upon themselves. They accused the Ministers and deputies of the democratic parties of "allowing themselves to be led astray by their class hatred and of slipping closer and closer to high treason, which will put them in conflict with the laws of the Republic". They did not hesitate to declare that "these defenders of the great landowners, the rich merchants and the industrialists walk hand in hand with the enemies of the Republic at home and abroad".

Two days later Gottwald echoed the same theme by denouncing us as the "lackeys of domestic and foreign reaction, traitors to the nation", who ought to be excluded from the Government.

In all the countries in the Russian sphere the process had been identical: when certain politicians became obstacles, whether it was Mikolajczyk in Poland, Maniu in Roumania or Petkov in Bulgaria, they were simply accused of being traitors for the

benefit of foreign reaction. Those who were no longer able to flee were "liquidated" after trials for high treason staged on the celebrated pattern of the Moscow trials. The Czechoslovak Communists followed closely the model of their Russian masters. We knew exactly what awaited us, and were determined to defend ourselves.

We accepted the challenge by replying firmly, but without ever demeaning ourselves by employing the demagogic language of our adversaries. Criticizing the Communist project for total socialization during a public meeting on the 19th, I proclaimed "our inflexible opposition to a project which will entail the ruin of our whole economy and a considerable fall in the standard of living of the population. We do not admit," I said, in concluding my speech, "that the Communists should construct their totalitarian regime on the ruins of our economy and the misery of our people, and that they should transform free Czechoslovakia into a labour camp of proletarianized slaves."

On the same evening Drtina, speaking at a public meeting in Prague, violently attacked the methods used by the Communists in the services of the security and regular police.

On the following day, *Svobodne Slovo*, the official organ of the National Socialist Party, published a documented article entitled: "We Will Not Permit a Police Regime". It caused tremendous excitement, for it was the first time the public had been informed of the abuses committed by the Communist officials of the Ministry of the Interior, notably the manner in which they had used *agents provocateurs*. The revelations, crushing for the Communist Party, which Drtina had made to the Cabinet on January 27, as well as the details of the debate concerning the service of the security police, were spread before all eyes. It was for us a question of mobilizing our partisans, as the Communists had sounded the alarm for theirs.

To say that public opinion was very much impressed by these revelations is to give only a feeble idea of their effect. The facts which we had just disclosed recalled exactly the methods of terror and intimidation, of violence and provocation, by which the Gestapo had sought to break the resistance of the Czech people to the tyranny of Hitler. With the exception of those who were completely under the spell of the secretariat of the Communist Party, all citizens, without distinction of party, even many members of the Communist Party, understood that to avoid a second totalitarian experience it was time to erect a

bulwark against the methods in use in the security police and other public services.

The Communists knew that we had touched the sore spot, and that our campaign against the police regime imposed by them could have profound repercussions on the elections, if these took place in normal circumstances. Hence their decision to prevent free elections by any means. Obviously they could succeed in this only by stifling by violence the democratic forces of the nation and eliminating from political life the men who had made themselves the defenders of those forces.

In this desperate struggle for the destruction of Czechoslovak democracy the Communists were powerfully supported by the Government of the U.S.S.R.

It was with a certain amount of surprise that we learned about three o'clock on Thursday, February 19, that V. A. Zorin, Soviet Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, who had been Ambassador of the U.S.S.R. to the Czechoslovak Government up to the autumn of 1947, had arrived in Prague. An official *communiqué* stated that Zorin had come to check on the imports of Russian wheat, and that he would take part in a celebration in honour of Russo-Czechoslovak friendship fixed for Sunday, February 22.

The reason given to justify the presence in Prague at so critical a moment of a high official of the U.S.S.R. who had been following Czechoslovak political life closely since 1943 was even more surprising than his arrival. The deliveries of Russian wheat were being made normally, there was no reason to make any special check on them, and especially none for calling in the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs for that purpose.

What was more probable, even obvious, was that Zorin had been sent to Prague to intervene in the internal crisis of the country—in other words, to help the Communists in their struggle against the democrats. There was no other possible interpretation. Jan Masaryk thought as we did: he was all the more convinced that Zorin's arrival was connected with our domestic situation because in the course of an official visit the former ambassador had limited himself to a vague allusion to our crisis in a remark made in a joking tone: "I know you Czechoslovaks very well," he had said. "You often get into arguments, and you always end by agreeing."

But if there was agreement everywhere in seeing a direct connection between the coming of Zorin and the crisis, there was as yet little information on the exact meaning and scope of

his mission. On the evening of the 19th the National Socialist, Populist and Slovak Democratic Ministers, who had met for a conference, also raised this question. Some thought that the Communists did not feel themselves strong enough, since they needed Russian help; others supposed that the presence of Zorin was intended especially to intimidate the democratic camp. On one point we were unanimous: the spectacular intervention of the Soviet Government made our position more difficult.

For me the arrival of Zorin was one more reason for not giving way. It was true that even if the Russians did not go so far as a military intervention, their political support considerably reinforced the position of the Communists, especially if one remembered that we democrats were not supported by any great Power. But in spite of the increasing danger I persisted in believing that it was preferable to be beaten than to permit the Communists to seize the power legally and without encountering any resistance.

Msgr. Sramek believed as I did that the Red Army would not intervene, and he was more than ever determined not to give way to the Communist pressure. The firm attitude of this old man, who had long political experience behind him and who was known for his thoughtful character, greatly impressed all our friends.

On the following day, February 20, the Ministers of the three non-Communist parties met at ten o'clock in Zenkl's room in the quarters of the Cabinet officers. When Gottwald sent to inform them that he was about to open the meeting of the Cabinet, Zenkl, Sramek and Kocvara, the three vice-Presidents of the Cabinet, answered that the Ministers of their parties could not take part in the meeting until they had been informed whether the governmental decision of February 13 had been executed. The Social Democratic Minister Majer had persuaded his colleagues to abstain also if the other three non-Communist parties did so. The Communists being alone, the meeting could not be held.

In the meantime the Social Democrats had informed us that their efforts to persuade the Communists to give way on the police question had been in vain. Gottwald had answered only by threats, and had shouted at them in an outbrust of rage: "If you do not march with us, you will be liquidated like the others."

Having learned of our refusal to participate in the meeting, Gottwald advised the vice-presidents of the three refractory parties by letter that the Minister of the Interior was to make a report to the Cabinet on the police question, but he still did not say whether the decision of February 13 had been put into effect. In the same letter he announced to us, probably to intimidate us, that during the session the Ministers of the Interior and of National Defence would make an important declaration in connection with the Most espionage case. The Communists, judging by all the signs, were seeking to create a diversion.

We replied that we were not disposed to discuss any problem so long as the decision of the Government on the police had not been respected. As for the declaration on the alleged story of espionage, knowing that we had nothing to fear, we asked that it be published.

Then, having obviously lost our last hope of leading the Communists into a more conciliatory attitude, we decided to hand in our resignations.

Before submitting it in writing, Zenkl informed the President of the Republic of our intention by telephone. Benes answered: "At last! And now, careful—no blunders!"

My party, as well as the Populists and Social Democrats, entrusted me with informing the Social Democratic Ministers of our decision to hand our resignation to the President of the Republic on the afternoon of that same day, Friday, February 20, and to request them to join us. Indeed, only a common front of all the non-Communist parties for the defence of civil liberties could induce the Communists to give way.

The Social Democratic Ministers promised at once to convoke the executive committee of their party to determine their attitude. This was natural. I knew, for that matter, that Majer, in spite of the prudence with which he expressed himself in the presence of Mme. Jankovcova—still a great sympathizer of Fierlinger—was decidedly favourable to our step. Vice-President Tymes, without daring to commit himself, complained of Gottwald, with whom it remained impossible to deal, and affirmed that he had done everything in his power to persuade the Communists to compromise. Before we parted I once more insisted on the necessity of acting together, for the unity of all the non-Communist parties was the best guarantee of our victory.

At four o'clock in the afternoon we handed our written resignation to the President of the Republic. At the same time we informed the Premier of our action. Our resignation was followed by that of the Slovak Democrats, and at six in the evening Hala verbally informed the President of the Republic of the resignation of the Populist Ministers. Benes instructed Hala to thank Msgr. Sramek for the firm and courageous attitude of the members of his party and for their solidarity with the National Socialists. "It was the only decision to take," he said to Hala. "Naturally, I shall not accept your resignation; the Communists must give in. This time they have miscalculated. Now it is important to hurry on the elections. The Communist losses will exceed all their forecasts. You can count on me completely. I will not compromise."

The President's words were all the more encouraging because they were uttered after a conversation he had had with Gottwald and Nosek at the very moment when we were resigning. During this conversation the two Ministers had insisted that the President should consent to the formation of a new Government on an entirely new basis without us. Judging from the answer he had just made to Hala, the President had not allowed himself to be influenced in any way by the insistence of the Communists.

In the evening the executive committee of the National Socialist Party once more approved, by a show of hands, the decisions of its Ministers; Emanuel Slechta was among their number.

The feeling of relief caused by our resignation was general; public reaction was satisfactory in the highest degree. Thousands of telegrams reached us, not only from members of our party, expressing the extreme joy of the population. One had the impression of emerging at last from a period of confusion and intrigue from which only the Communists had profited. No one was unaware of the fact that the struggle would be a hard one, and that the Communists would not refrain from any action that would assure their victory. Perhaps the terrible risk we were incurring was not always realized. The feeling which prevailed everywhere was one of confidence and hope. If the elections which were being awaited with impatience were really free, the Communist Party would, without any doubt, emerge from them greatly weakened.

The Communists knew this, and were consequently prepared

to do everything to avert this danger. When we had decided to resign we had not left out of consideration the possibility of acts of terrorism directed against all non-Communists. But we had the firm hope of seeing this wave of terror broken against our firmness and that of the President. No one imagined that five days later Czechoslovakia would find herself subjected to a Communist regime.

BOOK SIX

THE *COUP D'ÉTAT*

CHAPTER XXIX

THREATS FROM GOTTWALD

THE COMMUNISTS HAD counted on a crisis, but one which they intended to cause themselves, which was to have as its starting point the demands of the congress of unity committees. The resignation of the twelve Ministers cut the ground from beneath their feet; their plans had to be re-made.

They were not long in adapting themselves to the new situation. During the night of February 20–21 they worked out the details of the manœuvre which was to permit them to breast the current. They hoped to intimidate the public and to bring pressure on the President of the Republic by organizing big demonstrations and concentrating special detachments of police in Prague. They also set themselves the task of bringing the Social Democrats into their camp by alternating flattery and threats, and of paralysing the activity of the other parties by all sorts of police measures.

If the plan for the *coup d'état* had not been prepared in outline long before, the Communists would not have been able to put it into effect so rapidly. It was, besides, sufficiently flexible to permit modifications of it to be applied according to the necessities of the moment.

On the very day of our resignation—February 20—the President of the Republic received Gottwald, as well as Nosek, Minister of the Interior, and General Svoboda, Minister of National Defence, who were to make a report to him on the Most espionage affair. We learned that during this interview Gottwald asked the President to accept our resignations.

Beginning on this Friday afternoon the Communists commenced a purge of the radio employees. They forbade a large number of officials to enter their offices, later removing them from their posts. The Minister of Information, Kopecky, a Communist, even refused the use of the microphone to his

Social Democratic colleague, the Minister Majer. The radio and the Czechoslovak Press Agency no longer had the right to send out news which had not been approved by the Communist censorship. The Ministry of the Interior designated officials of its own to go to the headquarters of the administration of the mails, telephones and telegraphs in Prague to control all these services. The Postmaster General, Hala, succeeded, as the result of an energetic protest, in having them recalled, but next day they were back again.

The radio was venomously attacking the twelve "reactionary" Ministers without a moment's cessation. The executive committees of the Czech and Slovak Parties published an aggressive and alarming declaration, in which they said, among other things:

"The domestic crisis unexpectedly provoked by politicians of certain parties exposes us not only to the danger of an internal upset, but also to that of seeing the Republic threatened by agents of foreign reaction. . . . The anti-democratic, anti-popular and anti-Socialist bloc has taken as a goal the upsetting of the regime of the popular democracy and the bringing about of a shift of forces in favour of all the reactionary elements. . . . By their resignations the political leaders of the parties in question have taken their position outside the National Front and outside the programme of action of the Government, to play the role of a subversive opposition. In this grave situation the executive committees of the Czech and Slovak Communist Parties appeal to all the working classes of city and country, to workmen, peasants, artisans, merchants, intellectuals, to all good Czechs and Slovaks, to group themselves in a National Front which will support in a resolute manner the Government of Klement Gottwald and which will give satisfaction to all claims demanded by the interests of the Republic, which is to say that it will ensure the safeguarding of the great work of the national revolution and will guarantee orderly development, as well as the maintenance of the engagements which bind us to our allies, the U.S.S.R. and the other Slavic States."

This declaration summarized all the calumnies which the Communists had been heaping upon us, the democratic opposition, for a considerable time. But by referring to us systematically as "agents of foreign reaction", by emphasizing particularly the necessity of "mobilizing the working classes" to maintain the engagements which we had undertaken towards our ally,

the U.S.S.R., they confessed that their *coup d'état* would be carried out also in the interests of Soviet policy.

In the evening of February 20 the radio invited all workers to meet next morning, Saturday, in the Old City Square in Prague, where Gottwald, Premier and president of the Communist Party, would speak. The invitation was broadcast at regular intervals. The radio also announced that open-air mass meetings, similar to that of Prague, would take place in all the other important cities. Urgent instructions were sent to trusted men and secretaries of the Communist Party everywhere to request them to do whatever was necessary in factories, business concerns and administrative offices to ensure mass participation in these meetings. The Communist propagandists set to work early on Saturday morning. Workers who for any reason refused to join the demonstrators were threatened with lock-outs; and those who, in spite of everything, persisted in their refusals were actually put out, not without having first been beaten up.

On Saturday morning many wounded workers and employees sought refuge at the secretariats of our party. Maltreated for having had the courage to resist Communist pressure, they had asked the police to protect them, but in vain. In some cities the Communist policemen themselves had abused them in the coarsest fashion. The fact that these democratic workers and employees had been brutally treated by the Communists clearly proved that the demonstrations were not a "spontaneous movement of the working classes"—that they were, on the contrary, the result of artificial agitation.

At the Old City Square, Gottwald delivered a malevolent and provocative speech, unworthy of a Premier. He repeated, of course, the customary *leit-motif* against the "servitors of domestic and foreign reaction". Alleging that a coalition of reactionary forces was trying to overthrow the popular democracy and break the alliance with the Soviet Union, he declared: "The reaction in our country and abroad fears free and democratic elections. That is why it is making a desperate effort to bring about a shift of forces in its favour before them, in order to be able to terrorize our popular Commonwealth with impunity.

"But that is not all. The reaction in our country and abroad wants to make of our Republic a paradise for all the spies and saboteurs sent among us from abroad against our Republic and our allies, particularly against the Soviet Union."

After a long series of slanders of the same kind, which it is

useless either to repeat or to refute, since they were all without the least foundation, Gottwald turned to threats: "Never, in any circumstances, will we put the National Security Police in your hands", he said, addressing his adversaries. "The Corps of National Security Police will never march against the people, but always with the people against reactionary and subversive elements, against black marketeers, against spies and enemies of the Republic."

Having thus stigmatized reaction, Gottwald repeated the demands published the same day in the Communist Press: he called for the acceptance of the resignation of the twelve Ministers and the formation of a new National Front "unhampered by subversive reactionary elements", which would serve as a basis for a new government supported by the confidence of the progressive democratic forces in all the political parties and the national organizations.

In concluding, the Premier invited "workers, peasants, artisans, merchants and intellectuals to form in the communities, the departments and the provinces 'Committees of Action' of the National Front, composed of democratic progressive representatives of all the parties and all national organizations".

The "Committees of Action" were a new institution, hitherto unknown in the country. The Communists were later to make them an important instrument of their policy: it was an imitation of the "Workers' and Peasants' Soviets" with the aid of which the Bolsheviks had organized their revolutionary movement in Russia and to which they owed their victory. The members of the Committees of Action were not elected: they were designated and "approved" under the direct or indirect control of the local secretariats of the Communist Party and of their trusted men.

In spite of all the efforts of the Muscovite agitators, who, by shouting aggressive slogans, sought to stir up the crowd to enthusiastic applause, Gottwald's speech did not produce the expected effect. The attitude of the immense majority of the listeners was passive. Many of them left before the end of the speech. Others did not hide the aversion and disgust which this performance evoked in them. "That is how Frank organized meetings during the war", members of the audience were heard to say. The unregimented public indignantly condemned this unseemly demonstration, but it refused to attach any practical

importance to it, although it had been announced with so much drum-beating. On that day and the morrow, Sunday, the people remained optimistic, believing that the crisis had occurred in time to check the Communist offensive and to speed the elections, from which it expected, together with a weakening of the Communists, a general relaxation of tension.

The Communists themselves were under no illusions about the effect produced by their demonstrations.

One of my friends who was working in a factory in Prague told me of the admission of a Communist who occupied an important position in this business that the meeting "had not succeeded". They had expected a larger crowd, and especially a more enthusiastic atmosphere, a more combative spirit. "So much the worse for them," he had concluded, "if they don't want to understand our meetings, they will all understand our militia when they turn out." Two days later this threat had become a reality.

After his speech Gottwald went with Nosek to the Hradcany to see the President of the Republic. Having talked with him about the "spontaneous movement of the people", Gottwald asked the President to accept our resignations without delay and demanded the formation of a government without "reactionary" Ministers. This Cabinet would be completed by new members "who have remained faithful to the programme of the National Front and are ready to serve with devotion the interests of the people and of the popular democracy", as a resolution approved at the meeting in the Old City Square had phrased it.

The President refused. On leaving Hradcany, Gottwald did not hide his anger. "We'll make them sing another tune", he said, without specifying whether by that he meant the resigning Ministers or the President of the Republic and his advisers.

A little later Benes received a committee of five, chosen from fifty-five delegates sent by the factories of Prague, Kladno and Plzen—that is, by the Communist Party—to support the demands put by Gottwald. The delegation asked the President to accede to the desire of all workers by accepting the resignation of the "reactionary" Ministers.

Benes' answer was published in the newspapers, so that the public for the first time was informed on the attitude of the chief of State. The President declared that he would accept neither a Cabinet of technicians nor a government without Communists. "We have a parliament and a parliamentary

regime, that does not permit a Cabinet of technicians." He explained to the committee that his duty was to persuade the different parties of the necessity of co-operation; then he added:

"The exclusion of anybody, of anything, is a method which is not possible. If someone presented a peremptory argument, I should not be authorized to reply to it. . . . I cannot say either that one person or another should be included in it. That is the role of the Premier, who will submit to me a list of the members of the new Cabinet. I repeat that I do not wish to oppose a peremptory argument to a peremptory argument. I want to say to you only that we must examine the problem with all impartiality. My duty is to persuade the parties to mutual collaboration, and not to oppose them to one another."

The democrats received the declaration of the President with satisfaction. They saw in it the proof that if, for tactical reasons and through regard for the party of the Premier, Benes had stressed that he would not accept a Cabinet of technicians or a government without Communists, he had refused to exclude from power those upon whom the Communists had pronounced anathema or to approve a government composed solely of men chosen by the central Communist committee. His formal promise not to accept any but a parliamentary government was also remarked. Benes was resisting the pressure of the Communists, he was remaining the vigilant defender of democracy: that is how the answer of the President of the Republic was interpreted.

During the afternoon of Saturday it was learned that the Communists, in order to sway the President, were flooding his chancellory with letters and telegrams. The non-Communists, on their side, did not fail to address individual and collective telegrams to the President to beseech him to maintain a parliamentary government composed, as had been the case up to the present, of authorized representatives of all the political parties, to make all the members of the Government respect the decisions of the Cabinet, to restore order to the services of the security police and to reject the demands of the Communists. Resistance grew throughout the whole country. Everywhere immediate elections were being demanded.

However, a certain anxiety mingled with our hope. While Benes had received Gottwald and Nosek twice in succession—on February 20 and 21—as well as the leaders of the Social

Democrats, the representatives of the National Socialist, Populist and Slovak Democratic parties had not obtained an interview. Since the morning of February 21 we had asked several times to see the President of the Republic, but the chancellory had answered that Benes was tired, that he was going to spend Sunday in his chateau at Lany and would receive us after Monday morning.

Moreover, the answer that the President had made to the Communist delegates did not entirely satisfy us. He was certainly right in rejecting the idea of a Cabinet of technicians. But we regretted that he had not ended the false reports which were being circulated by proclaiming that no political party wanted a government of that kind. We wondered finally why, after the resignation of twelve Ministers representing half the Cabinet and the Parliament, he had not demanded the resignation of the entire Cabinet. Gottwald did not want a resignation of the Cabinet, but simply its reshuffling. By this sleight-of-hand trick he placed himself in a better position than that of a resigning Premier, even if the President of the Republic entrusted him with the formation of the new Government.

We could not remain passive before this new Communist offensive. We did not wish to degrade ourselves to the point of defending ourselves against the insulting accusations they were heaping upon us, calling us traitors to the fatherland and putting us on the same level as traffickers in the black market and common criminals. But it was necessary to inform the public of the real cause of the crisis, to put it on guard against the slogan of a "Renovated National Front", and against the institution of the Committees of Action, which contained the seeds of a dangerous manœuvre. At our public meetings and in our newspapers we explained, by recalling what had happened in Yugoslavia, in Bulgaria and in Hungary, that the "Renovated National Front" would include, besides the Communists, only those representatives of the other parties chosen by them, and consequently obedient to them, plus delegations from so-called non-political organisations like the trade unions and groups of former resistance fighters which were in reality completely dominated by the Communist Party.

In addition, the executive committee of the National Socialist Party rigorously opposed the Committees of Action announced by Gottwald. It made it known that those of its members who adhered to the Committees would be automatically dismissed

from the party. The Populists adopted the same attitude. *Pravo-Lidu*, the organ of the Social Democratic Party, pronounced itself in its turn against the Committees of Action.

On the fringe of the open campaign being conducted against us the Communists were taking secret measures designed to prepare for their putsch. Since the services of the security police were not yet entirely in their hands, they demanded from police officials a declaration of allegiance, of which this is the text:

"I declare on my honour and conscience that I will be loyal to the Government of Klement Gottwald and that I will obey all the orders of the Minister of the Interior, Vaclav Nosek, and of my chiefs. I am conscious of the consequences which disobedience to these orders will entail."

We immediately published the text of this declaration, which was in flagrant contradiction with the laws and which constituted a grave abuse of power on the part of the Communists.

Other information, no less disturbing, reached us both from members of our own party and from Social Democratic friends: in several places arms had been distributed to the workers' militia. On February 17, for instance, three days before our resignation, the president of the unit committee of the Bata concern in Sezimovo Usti, near Tabor, had received an important consignment of arms from the Strakonice armaments works. In Plzen, Moravska Ostrava and Mlada Boleskav, Communist officials of the local police, had distributed arms to the workers' militia in the police stations themselves. Without any doubt similar measures were taken in many other places. We did not fail to report all the cases of which we had knowledge, to protest to the Ministry of the Interior against these illegal acts and to warn public opinion by articles and news stories in the Press.

We decided finally, in agreement with the Populists, to organize public mass meetings in Prague and the provincial cities on February 24 to 26. We chose these dates because we thought those days would be decisive in the formation of a new government. Our theory proved incorrect: on February 23 the Communists had recourse to direct action, and the new Government was formed without consulting the parties of the resigning Ministers.

CHAPTER XXX

"THE END OF YOUR INDEPENDENCE IS NEAR"

IT WAS ON Sunday, February 22, that the congress of unit committees which had been so ceremoniously announced opened. Although official propaganda represented it as a national organization placed above the parties, everything pointed to Communist domination. To save appearances, a minority of one thousand non-Communist delegates had been admitted out of a total of eight thousand delegates. All the details had been worked out minutely: the seating of the delegations, the sympathetic demonstrations, the cries of indignation about reaction, the voting methods. What had not been foreseen was that there would be found among the delegates some courageous individuals, all members of the National Socialist Party, who would openly discuss the official theories proclaimed by Zapotocky, president of the U.R.O. So these polemics provoked vehement protests, but as the opponents were not numerous, nothing was changed as the result of the debates as prepared in advance by the secretariat of the Communist Party.

Gottwald and Zapotocky were greeted with deafening ovations, shouted in disciplined rhythm by the crowd. Applause interrupted the speeches of the two principal orators with monotonousr egularity. How could one avoid recalling on this occasion the Nazi mass meetings, organized with the same care for the stage setting? Democratic Czechs who had been present at demonstrations of this kind during the German occupation could not fail to be struck by the resemblance.

The congress produced no surprises: it simply confirmed the impression which had been registered at the earlier meetings. Gottwald in his speech repeated what he had said the day before in the Old City Square. He spoke in a still more aggressive fashion. At a certain moment he cried in a terrible voice:

"If anyone thinks that our people, in proclaiming spontaneously that agents of domestic and foreign reaction must no longer be admitted into the Government, have pronounced only

an empty slogan, he is badly deceived. I want that to be realized in all circles.... It is the only—I repeat it and I stress it again—it is the only way to avoid disorder and chaos!"

It would have been difficult to make it clearer that the threat contained in that last phrase was addressed to the President of the Republic.

Zapotocky's speech was almost the same. But he fell upon Drtina particularly. To understand fully the reason for his attitude it will doubtless be well to look back a little.

A short time before these events the Administrative Supreme Court had annulled the decree of nationalization for the Orion factory. This was not, for that matter, the first time that the Court had ruled that a nationalization had been carried out under conditions contrary to the law. Every time this happened, the Communists, through the U.R.O., protested vehemently, and even ordered strikes against the decisions of the principal jurists of the nation, and they were nearly always successful in getting execution of the decrees suspended or cancelled. It was to incidents of this kind that Zapotocky was alluding when he established this dumbfounding comparison:

"When production bogs down, when it turns out merely waste, we ask the workers to find the reasons for this deficiency and to propose remedies. We must ask the same thing of the judges, for their verdicts can be compared to the waste products of industry, of which we have no need at a time when our popular democracy is on the march towards Socialism. They have already given a number of verdicts which are so much waste, but the workers will not accept them and they will not submit to them, in order not to do harm to the general interest. Workers, it is true, have difficulty in making good products when the factory manager is good for nothing, and it is difficult for the judges to pronounce verdicts in the spirit of the popular democracy when the manager—which is to say the Minister of Justice—sabotages this same popular democracy. I hope our justice will receive a new manager genuinely devoted to the regime of the popular democracy."

How is it possible to reach an understanding with a party which publicly professes principles completely opposed to the universal conception of the law? The remedy proposed by M. Zapotocky was the simplest possible: it was enough, according to him, to replace a Minister of Justice who defended the integrity and independence of the Magistracy by a Communist

Minister who would adapt the law to the needs of the "popular democracy".

After the speeches of Gottwald and Zapotocky and a very brief discussion, the congress adopted a resolution, drafted in advance, which listed its claims for the solution of the crisis and demanded the radical socialization of the economy in these terms:

"Whereas the private section of our economy has become the centre of economic and political traps set for the Republic, and whereas at a time when the harvest is bad and want reigns, it is absorbing, in the form of disproportionate profits, billions of the national income, billions which could be consecrated to the necessary revision of salaries of State employees, to the improvement of National Insurance and to the redressing of other social injustices and inequalities; therefore the congress demands further nationalizations: to wit, the nationalization of all domestic wholesale commerce, of all foreign commerce and of the great commercial houses, of pharmaceutical production and of all capitalistic enterprises employing more than fifty persons. We demand that these nationalizations apply also to construction companies, printing establishments, thermal resorts, sanatoriums and hospitals.

"The congress rejects energetically all attempts to make breaches in the nationalizations, in any branch of production, of distribution, of the film industry, etc. We demand that the decrees of the Administrative Supreme Court be suspended—decrees which constitute attempts to return nationalized enterprises to the capitalists—and that confiscated businesses be added immediately to the nationalized enterprises, etc."

To assure the carrying out of this programme, the resolution declared:

"We give mandate to the Trades Unions Council to submit these demands to the Government and to all the political parties. Let the parties make it known whether they are ready, not only to recognize these demands, but also to support them."

The resolution also pronounced in favour of a new agrarian reform and rejected all the attacks against the Corps of the National Security Police. Finally the congress announced that a token strike of one hour would take place on Tuesday, February 24, in all establishments.

According to the official *communiqué*, only ten delegates voted against the resolution. In reality the number of those who, in

this fanatic and over-excited atmosphere, had the courage to vote against the resolution amounted to seven hundred.

On the following day one of the National Socialist delegates gave me an account of what had happened: "Zapotocky seemed very much excited when he saw that the delegates who had voted against his resolution were so numerous. He had certainly not expected it, since his agents had, in a way, hand-picked the participants. We union members know the opinions of the workers and office employees very well: if the delegates had been elected by secret ballot, the Communists would have run up against a considerable opposition which might have upset their plans."

Zapotocky himself, in a conversation I had had with him some months before, had told me that according to his personal estimate the U.R.O. included 50 to 60 per cent of Communists, 25 to 30 per cent of National Socialists, and that the rest were divided between the Social Democrats and the Populists. That was a sufficient reason for not permitting either secret elections or proportional representation in the union organizations.

On the same day (February 22) the congress of the Union of Soviet-Czechoslovak Friendship was being held in Prague on the occasion of the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the Red Army. This manifestation had been arranged long before, but the Communists showed admirable ability to derive advantage from it at a moment when the crisis was approaching its climax.

The ceremony had an official character. Members of the diplomatic corps and other official personages, as well as the representatives of all the political parties, were present. In the presence of Zorin, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of the U.S.S.R., and of all the personnel of the Soviet Embassy, the Premier delivered a most aggressive speech in which he gave full rein to his partisan passions. Never had he uttered more virulent and more wounding insults against "the reaction".

"Today more than ever," he said, "we are tightening the bonds which unite us to the Soviet Union. The destiny of our popular democracy, the very existence of the nation and the liberty of our State are closely linked to our alliance with the U.S.S.R. . . .

"All attempts to upset the new order and to bring back the capitalist order as it existed before the Munich crisis are the result of the plans and plots of the Western imperialists, without

which they could not succeed. The fact that Western reaction is trying to revive capitalism and Nazi imperialism, the fact that it encourages the irredentism of the Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia and Poland, the fact that it is our security, our independence, our very existence which are at stake—these facts do not stop the subversive activities of our reactionaries. Today, as during the Munich crisis, they are ready to sacrifice everything to their class interests. . . .

"The engagements we have undertaken towards our ally, Soviet Russia, are sacred; always and for everything we will be at the side of the Soviet Union, and not elsewhere. . . .

"It is necessary that the law should strike all those who undermine the basis of our foreign policy and, beginning with that, of our State."

The meaning of this speech was as clear as crystal: it was a matter of subjecting Czechoslovakia completely to the influence of Moscow. At the close of the ceremony a Western diplomat said to Stransky: "The end of your independence is near."

All the demonstrations of Saturday and Sunday constituted only a prelude to the *coup d'état.* Yet on Sunday the democratic camp still retained its confidence: we persisted in believing on our side that the Communist manœuvre would not succeed. In several cities of Bohemia and Moravia the National Socialists and the Populists organized public mass meetings. Everywhere the halls were packed. The Communists who tried to sabotage the meetings were reduced to silence; in some cities the public succeeded in driving them out of the halls.

I shall never forget the atmosphere of those decisive days, the ardour, the courage and the enthusiasm of the non-Communists, who were ready for every sacrifice. On that day in Northern Bohemia I visited two districts in my constituency: Hostinne and Vrchlabi. The day before, trusted men of our party had phoned to inform me that the Communist presidents of the National Committees, entrusted among other things with watching over public order, had declared that they were unable to guarantee my personal safety. This attempt at intimidation had, it is hardly necessary to say, no chance of success; I had hastened to visit my party comrades, who, distant from the capital, were always able to understand what was going on and were exposed to the constant pressure of the Communists.

In both cities the meeting-halls were full; in spite of snow and bad weather many peasants had come from their villages.

Among the audience were many members of the Corps of National Security Police, as well as officers and soldiers in uniforms, who demonstrated their sympathy for us as openly as the other citizens. Every time the Communists tried to interrupt me they provoked a storm of protests. The public did not hesitate to engage in polemics with them. The women and young men were particularly combative. At times it was difficult to calm the emotions of these persons fiercely determined to defend democracy. When during my speech I said that the Communists were trying to get hold of all the police and the army because they dared not begin their electoral campaign without being assured of the control of these two organizations, a worker interrupted me to shout at one of the Communists present: "I dare you to repeat in public what you have insisted to me several times: 'If you do not vote for the Communist Party, we will have you arrested'. You are afraid of the elections; that is why you are threatening us; you are like the Gestapo". By way of answer, the Communists began to raise a deafening racket.

The courage and fire of my audience comforted me a great deal. However, I did not hide from them the gravity of the situation, and I told them we must expect a very hard fight. "But whatever happens", I added, "we must remain faithful to the democracy of Masaryk." It is difficult to describe the profound emotion caused by these words, which expressed simply what was in the minds and hearts of our men and women. The darker the horizon, the more threatening the future, the more ardent their faith became.

The experience which I had just had was not an exception. All the public meetings organized at that time by our party and by the Populists were animated by the same spirit.

These two demonstrations had greatly encouraged me. When I returned to Prague that evening I felt reassured, and convinced that the people were thoroughly determined to resist the Communists.

In the capital, however, the atmosphere was different. People were beginning to be discouraged. The Congress of the unit committees, by its threatening attitude, had sowed anxiety. Worry only increased when police armed to the teeth began to move through the city. Prague, like every metropolis, was more nervous than the provincial cities; that is why I did not allow myself to be too much impressed by its temperamental ups and

downs. I hoped that the confident and determined attitude of the provinces would, in turn, produce repercussions in the capital.

However, I began to be really alarmed when, during the same evening, I learned that President Benes was beginning to show signs of uncertainty.

CHAPTER XXXI

PRAGUE IS OCCUPIED

I WAS ENGAGED in telling my wife of the encouraging impressions I had brought back from my trip to the provinces when we saw Jina, the President's political counsellor, arrive. He asked me to accompany him at once to the home of my colleague Drtina because he had important news to communicate to us. As I still had several telephone calls to make, I promised to meet him in a few minutes.

The grave and preoccupied expression of Jina betokened no good. I had known him for many years. We were intimate friends. He had understood how to win everyone's sympathy by his charming character, his gaiety, his sparkling wit. But, in spite of all this, he had a tendency to sadness, comprehensible enough when it is remembered that this fragile and sensitive man had spent five years in German prisons and concentration camps, two years in solitary confinement. Jina was certainly a great patriot and a convinced democrat, a product of the school of Masaryk. In 1938, after having fulfilled various diplomatic missions, he had been office chief to the Foreign Minister, Kamil Krofta. After Munich he participated most actively in the resistance organizations. He was in his fifties at the time of his arrest in 1940. On his liberation in 1945 he was taken back into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was then offered the post of Ambassador to Paris. Jina, who was one of Benes' most devoted friends, preferred to remain in the immediate circle of the President and accepted the post of his political counsellor, succeeding Drtina, who had been made Minister of Justice. Jina, though he was a member of our party, enjoyed the confidence of all political groups. His loyal and conciliatory character facilitated the task of mediator which was inseparable from his functions. He had a gift for finding compromise solutions, but he had a tendency to be discouraged before too violent a conflict. He served Benes with exemplary devotion, and handed in his resignation only after the abdication of the President of the Republic in June 1948.

As I was leaving the house a telephone call from my constituency informed me that three important members of our

party, who had done a great deal of work in peasant circles, had just been arrested. Hardly had I reached Drtina when I was approached by Vladimir Krajina, secretary-general of our party. He told me that two hours after the end of the public meetings over which I had presided in the provinces several persons who had taken part in those moving demonstrations had also been arrested. We immediately protested to the Ministry of the Interior against these arbitrary and illegal measures. We were answered in an evasive and hardly courteous manner. We could no longer have any doubts about it: the Communists were resorting to direct action.

At Drtina's house, to my surprise, I found many persons: besides the comrades of my own party, Minister Stransky, Deputy Julius Firt, and Vladimir Krajina, I saw two friends of the Populist Party, Postmaster-General Hala and Deputy Ivo Duchacek. Zenkl was still on a lecture tour in Moravia. I at once felt that events of the greatest gravity were occurring. Drtina received me with a bitter smile: "You won't be pleased when you know the message the President has sent us," he said.

Indeed, the news which Jina had brought us surprised as much as it pained us.

The President had passed a very bad day at Lany. The conversations of the day before with Gottwald and Nosek and especially a long interview which he had granted to a delegation sent to him after the mass meeting in the Old City Square, had greatly tired him. He was rather depressed. In view of the aggressive attitude and brutal methods of the Communists, he was wondering if he might not "appease" them by accepting our resignations, and thus facilitating his talks with them. Perhaps he could bring them to consent to discuss the formation of a new government with the other parties. The President desired in this fashion to facilitate a retreat by Gottwald after the violent speeches he had just delivered. He asked us to consent to his acceptance of our resignations.

We were thunderstruck. One of my colleagues cried: "I no longer understand. Only the day before yesterday he was thanking us for having acted as we did!"

There was a silence.

After a moment I could not restrain myself from reacting violently:

"The President can accept our resignations. We have no way

of preventing him. But to ask us to consent to it, that is demanding too much of us. We will never agree to capitulate!"

Everyone agreed with me. When the first surprise had passed, we set to work to analyse the situation. Perhaps the President was badly informed and did not know what was going on in the country. Did he know that the mass demonstrations of the day before in the Old City Square had been artificially organized and that many persons attended only because they feared reprisals? Had he been informed about the hundreds of meetings the National Socialists and the Populists had held throughout Bohemia and Moravia? All the halls were packed, the audiences were violent against the Communists and resolved to defend themselves.

Only in a few rare cases had the Muscovites been able to interrupt the sessions, and in nearly all the meetings they had tried to sabotage they had been reduced to silence.

The morale of our people, therefore, was excellent; it was certainly even better in the provinces than in Prague. Everywhere we were being called upon to stand firm, not to give way. The partisans of Social Democracy, inspired by the same spirit, demanded of their chiefs that they hold out. If the President was listening to the blaring propaganda the Communists were putting out over the radio, had he not also a duty to listen to the more discreet but no less determined voice of the enormous majority of the people? It was necessary that he should know that almost the whole nation was following him, it was necessary that he should realize that in this critical hour it was putting its confidence in him, and that it expected of him that he would intervene with all his authority to prevent a manœuvre aimed at overthrowing democracy in our country.

Jina seemed astonished: "What you tell me is very important. I will report it to the President without delay."

I stressed to Jina that it was essential that the President should hear both sides of the case. "Tell him from us," I said, "that in spite of the uproar which the Communists are making, we are not losing our heads and we are continuing to act according to a well-defined plan. There is no reason for giving way. If we have decided to impose a reserved and disciplined attitude upon ourselves until the one-hour token strike which the Communists have announced for next Tuesday, it is solely in order not to furnish them with an opportunity for spectacular action on the pretext of maintaining order. I

believe that we are thus following the advice which Mr. Benes gave us during our last interview, when he advised us to make 'no blunders'. But once the strike is over, we will organize, together with the Populists, public mass meetings at Prague and in the provinces, for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, which should be decisive days for the formation of the new Government. If the Communists have been dashing about wildly these last few days, we have preferred to wait for the climatic moment of the crisis to mobilize our public opinion.

"It is precisely for this reason," I continued, "that it is essential not to give way now to Communist pressure at any cost, even if it becomes stronger. These tactics correspond exactly to what the President warned us of on February 18, through Zenkl and myself. If the President accepts our resignations at the very beginning of the crisis, everyone will be led to believe that he has given way to Communist pressure. He will thus verify their propaganda, which seeks to make it believed that the President identifies himself with them, that he is abandoning us and, with us, the democratic cause. Public opinion will be thrown off balance; as for the Communists, they will not be 'appeased' in the least; exactly to the contrary, they will be encouraged.

"If, on the other hand, the President refuses to accept our resignations, he will strengthen not only our position but also his own. He would commit an irreparable error if he gave way, all the more since the crisis is only in its opening phase. If the Communists threaten us with workers' strikes, we will answer them with strikes of peasants, artisans and merchants."

Such were the arguments which I asked Jina to lay before the President. Benes' counsellor, however, judged that in view of the gravity of the situation it would be better if this exposition were set down on paper: a note signed by us would certainly have more weight than a verbal message. This was done.

We took the same opportunity to ask Jina to urge the President to receive us the following morning, for we were anxious to see him before his next interview with Gottwald.

After Jina's departure we continued our conversation; we did not hide from each other the anxiety which Benes' hesitant attitude had aroused in us. Drtina, who had been the most optimistic of us all, saw in the President's way of acting only the temporary effect of great fatigue and prolonged nervous tension, and he supposed that Jina, of whose almost morbid sensitivity we were aware, was also overburdened.

Hala was extremely depressed. "It is impossible that the President should abandon us," he declared.

As for me, I was extremely worried, but I refrained from saying everything I thought in order not to increase the discouragement which had seized upon my friends. I assured them that what mattered was to remain resolved ourselves not to show the least hesitation, and I expressed the hope that during the interview which we had asked for the following day I could persuade the President that the only correct and reasonable policy consisted in holding out at any cost in a spirit of complete unity.

Stransky, who was hiding deep emotion behind an apparent calm, took me aside for a few minutes and, alone with me, said: "I hope that you at least no longer have any illusions, and that you realize that all is lost." I answered him that indeed I had no illusions, but that I was far from losing courage. "We must continue our talks with the Social Democrats," I added. "We must look for still other means of action, and not give way at any cost."

Stransky shared my opinion, but I did not succeed in dissipating his doubts. While I was conversing with Stransky, Firt and Krajina were talking about the mass meetings which we were organizing for the following days. From different secretariats of our party with which we were in telephonic contact news which augured ill was reaching us: "Formations of mobile police", constituted by the Ministry of the Interior on the model of the S.S. troops, had been concentrated in Prague; several officials and secretaries of our party had been arrested.

It was late at night when we separated. We were very much preoccupied, and more resolved than ever to hold out at all costs, more convinced than ever that the least sign of weakness would cause the violence of Communist terrorism to be redoubled.

In spite of the late hour, I went with Drtina to the home of Lausman, president of the Social Democratic Party, for we knew that the following morning he was to preside over a meeting of the executive committee of his party. I reached home about five in the morning. At seven a phone call informed me of new arrests in my constituency. All my protests to the Ministry of the Interior were unavailing.

I went early to the editorial offices of our newspaper. As I left the house I saw two gendarmes armed with submachine

guns, flanked by two plain-clothes men, on guard before when house. The Minister of Transport, Ivan Pietor, who lives in a nearby apartment building, was being subjected to the same surveillance. On the way I noticed that detachments of mobile police were posted at all the bridges, cross-roads and main thoroughfares. Prague was occupied by the Communist forces.

The expression of passers-by revealed surprise, anguish and anger simultaneously. As I got out of my car I heard an old man saying: "The S.S. is back again."

The editorial office was in turmoil. The telephone was ringing continuously, announcing new arrests, searches and police occupations of several large provincial cities. It was reported from several places that arms were being distributed to the workers' militia. The protests of our deputies against these illegal measures were met with brutal refusals to do anything.

My party comrades, who had come to the editorial offices in large numbers, showed no signs of discouragement, and it was genuinely reassuring to see that our partisans—especially the women—maintained an exemplary morale. I regret not being able, in present circumstances, to render tribute to these men and women, of whom I think with a most special admiration.

Drtina and Stransky were also at the editorial offices of the *Svobodné Slovo*. After a moment Zenkl, just returned from his lecture tour in Moravia, came over to us to impart the encouraging impression he had brought back from the trip. In only one place had the Communists succeeded in preventing him from speaking. Everywhere else his fighting speeches had been received with enthusiasm. He also had not found anywhere the least sign of confusion. The same impressions emerged from the accounts of other deputies of our Party returning from their constituencies.

CHAPTER XXXII

BENES: "I WON'T BE AN ACCOMPLICE OF THE COMMUNISTS"

WE WAITED IMPATIENTLY for the telephone call which would summon us to the Hradcany. Twice Zenkl called the President's chancellory to ask when we would be received. It was only after his second call that we received an answer: the President was expecting us at four in the afternoon. Meantime we learned that he had seen Gottwald and Nosek during the morning.

It was not this delay of a few hours which worried us, but the fact that since Friday, February 20, the President had talked only with Communists and Social Democrats—but not with Majer, representing the right wing of the Social Democrats. He had also received Masaryk, whom we had not seen since the day of our resignation. We regretted all the more not being in daily contact with the President since the Communists had taken the offensive on that day. So it was not without a certain anxiety that we climbed to Hradcany.

Our pleasure on learning that in spite of the growing aggressiveness of the Communists and the heavy atmosphere which already reigned in the city the President remained firm and determined was therefore all the greater. Before taking us in to the President's office, Jina, in a few words, brought us up to date on the situation: in contrast to the day before, Benes was in excellent shape: the message which we had sent, which Jina had read to him, had reassured him greatly.

"You will see for yourselves", Jina told us. "The President is standing firm."

And in fact as soon as Zenkl, Stransky, Drtina and I had seated ourselves at Benes' work-table, the President opened the conversation by declaring energetically:

"I will not give way. I said to Gottwald plainly and clearly: what you are doing is a *coup d'état*, a putsch, but I won't let you put it over on me!"

Benes seemed more tired than on the day when I had seen him with Zenkl. For several days he had been living in a state of constant tension; and, by the fault of the Communists, his

nerves had been subjected to a heavy ordeal. On the day when he had received us interviews had followed one another the whole time; he had had, notably, a long conversation with Gottwald and Nosek. In spite of his fatigue, he was neither depressed nor hesitant; his eye was clear, his gestures forceful, his words calm and determined.

Even before listening to us, he related to us in detail the conversation he had a little earlier with Gottwald: "I said to him flatly: 'What you want is a second Munich.' "

The expression was apt. I suddenly remembered having heard the same comparison in the mouths of simple citizens on the day when Stalin had forbidden us to take part in the Marshall Plan. What could be clearer? The Communist policy was leading us step by step towards the end of our democracy and of our national independence. If Hitler, to undermine the foundations of the democratic regime, had used Henlein and the Sudeten Germans, Stalin, in his turn, was using the Communist Party to accomplish the same task.

Gottwald, Benes told us, had found the comparison out of place. "At the time of the Munich agreements", the Premier objected, "we had before us an enemy, Hitler's Germany, while today we have to do with an allied Power, the Soviet Union, which is defending our popular democracy and our national independence."

To which Benes answered:

"You know very well what I mean. As for me, I will act no different from what I did then. I want to have no part in this second Munich you are engaged in preparing."

When we asked the President what Gottwald's exact demands had been, he told us that he had asked nothing except what he had proclaimed publicly on Saturday and Sunday—to wit, immediate acceptance of our resignations, a recasting of the National Front, and the formation of a government by the addition of men "sincerely devoted to the popular democracy".

Thereupon the President had asked Gottwald to confine himself to democratic and parliamentary methods—that is to say, to enter upon negotiations with the three resigning parties to find a satisfactory solution to the crisis.

"Gottwald", Benes continued, "refused in a most emphatic fashion and answered only by accusing and insulting you in language I would rather not repeat; he attacked Zenkl especially."

When I asked Benes what he had answered to Gottwald, he replied: "Personally, I didn't answer back—it is up to you to defend yourselves. So far as I am concerned, I must remain above the battle, above the parties."

I then pointed out to the President that in the present circumstances it was difficult for us to defend ourselves, because the Communists, masters of the radio, were refusing the use of the microphone to everyone who did not follow them and, moreover, were doing all they could to prevent our newspapers from appearing.

Returning to his conversation with Gottwald, Benes specified: "I want you to know exactly what I said to Gottwald: 'If,' I said to him, 'you are not disposed to enter upon negotiations with the other parties, I will take it upon myself to do so.' Whereupon Gottwald answered in an irritated tone of voice: 'I cannot and I will not talk with Zenkl or with the other traitors. I will talk only with men who have always opposed the reactionary and anti-Soviet leaders of their parties.'

"It is very simple," Benes went on. "Gottwald refuses to talk with you or with those whom you appoint, because he intends to select puppets whom he will cause to act as he wishes. He has promised to submit a list for a new Cabinet to me, and he assured me that the Ministers of his choice will obtain a majority in Parliament."

The President became more and more animated:

"At that point I interrupted him to say: 'It is impossible for me to accept a proposal of that kind. I cannot be satisfied with a majority obtained artificially by intimidation or by the deliberate splitting of the present parties. Such a procedure is neither constitutional nor parliamentary. My duty is, precisely, to proceed in a strictly constitutional and democratic manner. That is why I must know how the Ministers you will present to me were chosen; I want to be sure that they were designated by their parties. I must know whom they represent. Thus I will talk only with the authorized representatives of the parties, and you should do the same.' As Gottwald continued to refuse, I ended by declaring that if a different method were adopted from that which in my view is the only possible one because it is the only one which conforms to our Constitution and our democratic traditions, I would never sign my name to a list which the Communists are trying to impose on us."

To this argument, the logic of which was irrefutable, Gottwald

opposed only invectives and demagogic commonplaces which were meant to intimidate and to flatter the President at the same time. So Benes smiled when he reported to us Gottwald's answer: "He begged me not to act contrary to the will of the people, which had been demonstrated in the public meeting on the Old City Square and during the U.R.O. congress. He told me how much the Communists appreciated the fact that in all circumstances I had taken into account the requirements and desires of the workers, that they had not forgotten that I had gained the confidence of labour by signing the decree on the nationalization of the factories, that he hoped that I would once more listen to the voice of the people, which had spoken clearly. He thus sought to insinuate that the people would not understand if I should take the part of 'reactionaries' and 'traitors'—that is to say, you.

"I answered that by saying that I would not permit a government without Communists, and that in a ministerial crisis I would confide to him, as president of the strongest party, the responsibility of forming a new Ministry. If he did not succeed, the present Cabinet would continue to handle the routine matters until the elections."

The attitude which Benes had expressed to the Premier completely satisfied us. However, I wondered why, faced by the resignation of twelve Ministers, or half the Cabinet, he had not asked Gottwald to hand in the resignation of the whole Government. I put the question to him, but he did not seem to attribute the same importance that I did to a gesture which, for my part, I considered the logical consequence of the crisis.

For him it was a question above all else of blocking the Communist manœuvre. "I refuse to debate with men who are not the authorized representatives of their parties. Whatever may be the result of the negotiations which are to take place, you can be sure that I will never accept the anti-democratic proposals of Gottwald, that I will not accept either your resignations or those of the other two parties. If the Communists persist in their threatening attitude, and if they insist that I bow to their demands, I shall refuse, and I shall resign myself rather than comply. I am firmly determined to proceed in this fashion and whatever happens I will not abandon that point of view. You can count on me."

At this point the President's face assumed a grave expression: "You know the Communists," he said to us—"you know that

they will not refrain from taking any action to realize their plans. It will be a very hard struggle. We must expect anything."

We had no illusions on that score. I was anxious that the President should know this. I told him that we were counting on the possibility of an open fight and that we knew very well that we were in constant danger of arrest. But I begged him not to let himself be influenced by consideration for our personal safety when the time came for him to make decisions. Zenkl emphasized the fact that I had expressed the feelings of all my colleagues; we were all thoroughly determined to risk everything to save democracy.

"We have no right," he said, "to betray those who have put their trust in us."

It was a dramatic moment. We felt that our words had impressed Benes strongly.

"I am relieved to see that you do not underestimate the personal risks you are running", the President said to us. "I also know what I am risking, but I will not give way. If we do not reach an understanding, I will abdicate. I will not be their accomplice."

If we had every reason to be happy at the firmness of Benes, we would nevertheless have liked to see him assume a less passive attitude. We had the feeling that all means of resistance had not yet been exhausted: in spite of the domination of the Communists, we could count on a considerable part of the police, and the larger part of the army was ready to follow the President. The people themselves, exasperated by the violence of the Communists, asked nothing better than to defend themselves actively. If the President's chancellory was flooded with letters and telegrams whose authors pretended to express the "will of the working masses" and asked him to bow to the will of Gottwald, other messages were reaching him *en masse* from persons who implored him to resist and declared themselves ready to follow him to the end in his fight for freedom and democracy.

The President pointed out that the messages in favour of the Communists were by far the most numerous. This fact scarcely surprised us: the Communists had always excelled in the art of organizing "spontaneous" demonstrations. Nevertheless I was not sure that the President was completely informed, and I suggested to him that he have all the messages which had been addressed to him shown to him. A few minutes later his

secretary brought them in. On examining the two sheaves of papers, the pro-Communist messages on the one hand and the non-Communist messages on the other, he could not hide his astonishment. He had been shown only a proportion of the messages from non-Communist sources. Could there be in the very chancellory of the President someone who secretly weighted matters in favour of the Communist Party? This thought did not fail to trouble us.

The President seemed encouraged by all we had told him about the atmosphere which reigned in the cities and in the country districts, on the division of strength in the police, the gendarmerie, the army, the Sokols organization, etc. He announced his intention of broadcasting a message to the nation on the following day or the day after.

He was, however, not sure that the Communists would not try to prevent him from doing so. We decided in that case that we would make his proclamation known through foreign radios. There was not an hour to lose: for three days now the people had been waiting for this message. To reassure the public I proposed publishing immediately, through the chancellory, a brief statement which would inform the nation of the point of view of the President. Benes declared himself in agreement, and asked me to draft its text. I did so at once, and the President approved it without making the least change in it. Here is the statement:

"*Prague, February* 23, 1948.

"The chancellory of the President of the Republic announces:

"In answer to the telegrams and letters which the President of the Republic is receiving from thousands of citizens on the subject of the governmental crisis, in which the most diverse wishes and demands concerning the solution of the crisis are expressed, the President of the Republic makes it known that he will address the public in a few days and will set forth his point of view clearly.

"For the moment the President of the Republic invites all citizens to remain calm and reflective; he assures them all that he will remain faithful, as always, to the principles of parliamentary democracy and will use his influence in order that all the parties of the National Front may seek an agreement in view of re-establishing co-operation within the entire National Front."

The statement was broadcast the same evening and appeared in the Press the following morning. The public understood its meaning very well; they saw in it the proof that the President was opposing the Communists in defence of the threatened democracy. It awaited with impatience the message which had been announced. But events were to take a different course, and the Czechoslovak people were never again to hear the voice of Benes.

Having drafted the statement, I drew the attention of the President to the rumours which the Communists were circulating to disturb public opinion and intimidate the population. They alleged among other things that the Russian army was massed on our borders, ready to intervene if we refused to bow to the will of the Communist Party. Personally, I put no faith in this report and said to the President that in my opinion Russia would content herself with giving Communists political support, but that, given the international complications which might follow, she would not go as far as a military intervention.

"They will continue, no doubt, to threaten us with an intervention by the Red Army," I continued, "but we would be wrong to let ourselves be intimidated. For the moment our crisis looks like a struggle between the Communists and the other political parties. But the situation would be changed on the day when a conflict breaks out between the Communists and you, Mr. President. Abroad it would be understood at once that it is a question not so much of a conflict among parties as of the fate of the democracy and the independence of the country. I still hope that in this case Moscow will hesitate to go to the limit and will advise our Communists to behave with more moderation. To induce the Soviets to change their tactics in this way it is necessary above all to resist the Communists and to carry on the struggle, with all the risks which that involves."

The President had listened to me with great attention. While I was expressing my views, he had approved several times by nodding his head. Then, after a pause, he said to me, with a certain hesitation: "In general I agree with you. I think as you do that Moscow will not run the risks which an armed intervention would involve. However, I cannot rule out the possibility of seeing their troops cross our frontiers. In that case, what could we do?"

The President appeared more and more moved and worried. As his nervous tension increased, his face flushed. At times his

voice broke; it could be seen that he still felt the effects of the apoplectic stroke which had almost proved fatal the year before. But his thinking remained perfectly lucid; not once did he loose the thread of his ideas.

"After that, what could we do?" he repeated, looking at us one after the other. "What could we do?"

"What could we do?" I answered. "In that case it is obvious that we shall be beaten. But the nation and the whole world will see that we succumbed to force. It will be known that the Communist regime was imposed upon us, that Czechoslovakia has been the victim of an aggression against which she was unable to defend herself alone. That defeat will lead us to a new victory."

There was a moment of silence. Then the President resumed speaking, without reacting, however, without returning directly to what I had just said.

"Perhaps," he said, "but it is not certain. No one will help us. Moscow knows that." Then, with growing emotion, he raised his voice: "I know them, those people in Moscow. I have had occasion to observe them more closely than you. You over-estimate their intelligence and their far-sightedness. I over-estimated them too. They understand nothing of other countries. They take themselves for realists; at bottom they are only fanatics. Their whole policy is a provocation to war. They will pay dearly for it. They are as blind as Hitler. They were against Munich, and now they are making another Munich against us. Like Hitler, they will suffer the consequences."

Stransky, who had never heard Benes judge and condemn the policy of the Soviets with so much vehemence, could not prevent himself from exclaiming: "You say that! you, who have done more than anyone else in the world to achieve honest co-operation with Soviet Russia?"

Benes smiled sadly. We all understood what his melancholy gaze concealed. Stransky had just revealed in a flash the tragedy of this great man. No other chief of State had deployed so much good will and ardour in the attempt to live on good terms with the Soviet Union. No one had agreed to so many political and personal sacrifices to realize this understanding. The disappointment which he felt was all the more bitter for that.

The powerful ally in whom he had put all his trust, who was to protect him against the German threat, had taken advantage

of his good faith to subjugate a people whose liberty and independence it had guaranteed by treaty. The new Munich which Benes was to suffer was, from the psychological point of view, infinitely more painful than the first.

As if he had understood the feelings which stirred us, the President declared in a most determined tone:

"I repeat what I have just said to you. I will act as I did in September 1938. I will not give way. Be sure of that."

It was with these words that our conversation with President Benes ended. None of us could then foresee that we should never set eyes upon him again.

CHAPTER XXXIII

POLICE TERRORISM WITHIN, SOVIET THREATS WITHOUT

WE WERE ALL the more impressed by the determination of President Benes, since our interview took place on the day when the Communists had already resorted to direct action. On Saturday, February 21, the Minister of the Interior had given the order to concentrate in Prague special detachments of the gendarmerie, a force created in 1945 and 1946 on the pretext of maintaining order in the frontier regions, where a certain number of Sudeten Germans were still to be found. In reality the Communists had thus constituted a personal guard which was entirely devoted to them and which they used to intimidate their adversaries. It was these special units, made up of picked young Communists, brought up to hate the "enemies of their class", who occupied all the main thoroughfares, the squares and the bridges of Prague during the night of Sunday to Monday. The regular troops were confined to their barracks.

Similar, though less strict, measures were taken in other large cities. Bratislava, the Slovak capital, was occupied in the same manner as Prague. Armed sentries guarded the public buildings as well as the houses of the leaders of the National Socialists, Populist and Slovak Democratic parties. Even certain Social Democrats were placed under surveillance. Throughout the country numerous arrests took place. Our protests were in vain.

On the morning of Monday, February 23, the police began searches in the secretariats and editorial offices of our three parties. Party secretaries and journalists were arrested even before there had been time to examine seized documents.

The secretariat of the National Socialist Party was occupied on Monday, February 23, by a large number of policemen. Some employees were at once arrested; the others were herded into a single room, which they were forbidden to leave. In violation of the law, documents were seized in the absence of the persons to whom they belonged. Large quantities of papers and folders from the files were carried away by the police without the secretariat of the party being able to make the slightest check on what was being taken.

I arrived at our party secretariat a few minutes after it had been occupied. I was allowed to enter the building, but when I asked the sentries what these illegal measures meant, they answered dryly, "We are carrying out the orders we have received." I did not succeed in learning anything more.

A plain-clothes man said to me in an arrogant tone: "You will know soon enough; besides, you won't be allowed to ask questions much longer."

Together with the other deputies of my party, I wasted my breath protesting against these measures, to no avail. The police left the building only at the end of the afternoon, after having seized everything they wanted.

While this operation was proceeding, Nosek, Minister of the Interior, had gone to the President of the Republic and handed him a report in which the organizations of the Security Police were purported to have discovered "a vast conspiracy" hatched by the National Socialists with a view to seizing power immediately after the resignation of the Ministers of their party. The President received this news with the greatest reserve, and demanded concrete proof.

In the evening the Ministry of the Interior published an official *communiqué* on the "plot":

> "According to *reports on the situation* seized in time, an armed attack directed against the State has been organized by the military committees of the National Socialist Party in conjunction with the responsible political leaders of that party; these committees were checking the state of the military units and of the S.N.B., were procuring arms for themselves in depots entrusted by the military authorities to the Centre for Military Preparations, were making preparations for the occupation of the buildings of the radio, etc. . . . We publish in full one of these reports on the situation:
>
> " 'Subject: Report on the situation up to 8 p.m., February 20, 1948.
>
> " 'Confidential.
>
> " 'Development of the situation in the sector of the military committee of the 12th Ward of Prague.
>
> " '1. Establishment of permanent contact with the president of the secretariat of the 12th Ward. Duties assumed at 10 a.m.
>
> " '2. Verified the nature of the measures taken by the

military authorities and the directives which have been given to them. Up to 5 p.m. the organization in Prague has not been put on an alarm basis. Passes have been partially limited (evening leave).

" '3. Verified the measures taken in the sector of the regional command of the S.N.B. It has not been possible so far to establish the assignment of the regiment of the National Security Police put on a war basis.

" '4. Established the measures essential for the defence of the secretariat of the 12th Ward. Section on an alarm basis attached to the Union for Military Preparation formed exclusively of absolutely trustworthy members of the party.

'Arms will be distributed in case of need.

" '5. Studied methods for preventing the occupation of the radio by the S.N.B. and of obtaining the return to their posts of seven discharged employees.

" '6. Studied the possibility of measures capable of damaging the most important installations of the radio in case of an occupation by the S.N.B. and the Communists.

" '7. All measures were taken in close agreement with the political direction of the secretariat of the 12th Ward.

" '8. For February 21, 1948, intensification of the alarm basis.

" '9. The different members have been informed by our liaison agents of the attitude of the party, according to the instructions of the direction of the secretariat of the 12th Ward.' "

Later the *communiqué* named two officers, members of the National Socialist Party, who had been arrested because "of illegally held arms and written documents found at their homes. The documents discovered prove that the responsible leaders of the National Socialist Party were preparing to carry out a forcible coup, to occupy the public buildings and to provoke a fratricidal combat." Finally, the *communiqué* announced that "the organizations of the security police have at the same time made other important discoveries which are subject of a judicial investigation. The complete facts will be reported to the public as soon as the progress of the inquiry permits."

This text constituted the only document published by the Ministry of the Interior to prove the existence of a National Socialist "plot". To allege that it permits the conclusion that

an armed coup was in preparation is ridiculous in the extreme. All it reveals is that we had judged it well to take certain defensive measures, in the eventuality of a Communist forcible coup. But the accusation made against us fitted into the general plan of the Communists, a plan which they did not even need to modify according to the country in which they were preparing to take over power. Whether it was a question of Petkov in Bulgaria, of Maniu in Roumania, of Mikolajczyk in Poland, or of Nagy in Hungary, the blueprint was always the same: to justify their flagrant violation of the Constitution, the Communists began by staging a trial for high treason which would permit them to liquidate their opponents.

The police, under the orders of the Communist Party, took the same measures against the Populists as against us: arrests, searches, seizure of documents, occupation of the secretariats of the party and of the editorial offices of its publications, etc.

In Slovakia, beginning on Saturday, February 21, the police had fallen upon the Democratic Party. Gustav Husak, president of the Council of Commissioners, alleged that "following the resignation of the Ministers of the Democratic Party and the passage of this party to the opposition, it was necessary to consider the representatives of the Democratic Party on the Council of Commissioners as having also resigned." Without any further formality he confided the direction of the various commissionerships held until then by the Democratic Party to representatives of other parties.

As in the Czech provinces, officials of the Democratic Party were arrested, their headquarters and newspaper offices were occupied—they were subjected, in short, to all kinds of persecution. An issue of *Cas*, official organ of the party, was confiscated on February 21, and as the printers, nearly all Communists, refused to continue to print it, its publication was discontinued. Officials of the Slovak radio who belonged to the Democratic Party were discharged, consequently after two days the Slovak Democrats no longer had any way of reaching public opinion to defend themselves against the violent attacks of the Communists.

To crown it all, a "plot" threatening the Republic, and organized by the Democratic Party, was of course discovered at Bratislava, as at Prague. The same day that it did likewise in Prague—that is, on February 23—the Ministry of the Interior published in Bratislava the following official *communiqué*:

"The National Security Police, by virtue of the law on the defence of the Republic, has opened a prosecution against Deputy Jan Ursiny. Ursiny is accused of having transmitted to the spy Obuch, agent of Durcansky, important secrets concerning the Army and the State, and of having informed him on debates which took place during secret meetings of the Government in which he participated as vice-president of the Cabinet, putting at his disposal the minutes of these meetings.

"Ursiny has also given other information to Obuch and facilitated the work of this spy. After the arrest of Obuch, with the members of his office and with Dr. F. Hodza, secretary-general of the Slovak Democratic Party, he got rid of all traces of the activity of the spy Obuch and hid in his safe letters and documents attesting to the relations of Obuch with Durcansky and with the liaison agents of the latter in Stockholm.

"These documents, which confounded the traitor, were discovered on September 27, 1947, in Ursiny's safe."

The Communist Press of Slovakia insulted the Democrats laily in the coarsest manner, the epithets "traitors", "spies" and 'conspirators" having become household words. The day had inally come when the Communist minority in Slovakia could mpose its will and its regime on the immense majority of the)opulation, a majority which was undeniably and resolutely ınti-Communist.

Besides the police measures I have just described, the Communists, in order to intimidate the population, resorted to a neans no less efficacious: throughout the country they raised he spectre of unemployment by discharging numerous Civil ervants, employees and workers who were members of the lemocratic parties.

The exact number of persons affected by this measure has ever been established. The Communists claimed that they umbered 5,000 or 6,000; the figure must actually have mounted to several tens of thousands. The victims of this proedure were all the more to be pitied since they literally risked ying of hunger. In fact, even before the *coup d'état* no one could nd employment without passing through the Labour Bureau. 'he Communists did not fail to take advantage of this terrible 'eapon.

A few days after the crisis I met in the street a minor Civil

Servant, a member of our party, who came towards me to express his sympathy. When I asked him what he was doing in the street at that time of day, he answered: "I am on vacation since a few days ago; and I am not the only one. In the big tenement where I live the only person who is not out of work is the concierge!" Everywhere, in factories, Government offices, schools, universities, businesses of all kinds, "committees of action" were being formed, though no one knew exactly how they must be organized or what would be their functions. It was quickly realized that what the Communists asked of them for the moment was to deprive of employment anyone who was obstructive.

In general, it was a question of completely paralysing the activity of the other parties. One of the most efficacious means consisted in striking first of all at the newspapers and publications. The Communists attributed all these measures to "spontaneous acts of the working classes". On February 24, *Prace*, official publication of the U.R.O., wrote:

> "The employees of the paper-mills of Ceska Kamenice have announced, in agreement with the management of the business, that they will not deliver rolls for the rotary presses to the *Svobodné Slovo* and the *Lidova Demokracie* [the official publications of the National Socialist and Populist parties], since these two newspapers in their articles support reactionary elements and attack the unions. Likewise the employees of the paper-mills of Vetrni, near Cesky Krumlov, unanimously decided during a meeting of the entire staff that they would not produce a single kilogram of newsprint for newspapers in which the progressive members of the Government were insulted. Deliveries of papers were immediately stopped. Likewise the employees of the paper-mills of Plzen have unanimously resolved to suspend their deliveries of paper to print-shops which conduct campaigns against the workers."

These skilfully co-ordinated measures contributed to create the atmosphere of terror on which the Communists' leaders counted to achieve their *coup d'état* in the best conditions possible. But this was only half of the psychological preparation, for while the population was being confronted with a *fait accompli* on the domestic plane, it was being systematically demoralized by the threat of foreign intervention.

Beginning on Saturday, February 21, the Communists spread everywhere the rumour that "Gottwald has Stalin's support", that Soviet troops were concentrated on the frontiers of Czechoslovakia, ready to intervene against the activities of the "reaction", that the Red Army could not permit a defeat of the working class or a victory of the reactionary force within the country and abroad. At the same time that they described in the darkest colours the intrigues and plots of the "imperialism of the United States", which, according to the Communists, was ready to show its hand in Czechoslovakia, people were warned: "Do not put any trust in American help", they were told. "They won't stir a finger for you, while we can count on the Red Army."

To complete the intimidation of the population, on Monday, February 23, the Communist Press reproduced, and the radio continuously repeated all day, an article from *Pravda* indicating that Moscow was openly taking sides with the Czechoslovak Communists against the democratic parties.

"On the eve of the parliamentary elections in Czechoslovakia," the publication of the Soviet Communist Party said, "the intrigues of international reaction against democracy have developed considerably. The elements which have introduced themselves into certain parties of the governmental coalition are the instruments of the reaction. The National Socialist, Populist and Slovak Democratic parties have become the strategic stamping grounds of those who are hiding their really anti-national convictions. It is a long time since the attacks of the leaders of these parties against nationalization, agrarian reform and the foreign policy of the government began.

"The choice of the moment for the provocative attack, on the eve of the elections, is not the result of chance. The National Front is strengthening, developing and transforming itself into a veritable union of all the democratic forces of the country. The authority of the Communist Party, which is fighting for the speedy increase of the well-being of the masses and for the realization of the Two-Year Plan, is increasing irresistibly. The Gottwald Government is struggling energetically against the traps set by foreign reaction, is unmasking terrorists, and is putting it out of the power of spies to cause harm.

"All this causes worry in the ranks of the admitted and secret defenders of the reaction. The Ministry of the Interior and the services of the Czechoslovak Security Police have unveiled the slanderous gossip of the reactionaries about 'the police regime' and 'the Communist plot against democracy'.

"It was not by chance that the resigning Ministers, at the time of the last meeting of the Cabinet, did not want to listen to the reports of Mr. Nosek and Mr. Svoboda on the discovery of an espionage organization at Most.

"The group of the three parties—the National Socialists, the Populists and the Slovak Democrats—has been conjured up against the National Front in Czechoslovakia. This group provoked a governmental crisis according to instructions from abroad and by its activities has placed the State in a dangerous situation. That is the meaning of the resignation of the reactionary Ministers of the three governmental parties.

"It is with their aid that foreign reaction is trying to divide the ranks of popular democracy. This attempt will not succeed. There cannot and will not be any compromise, when it is a question of a policy directed against the people. The Czechoslovak people have made that clearly known by demanding the elimination of the agents of the reaction and the enemies of the National Front from the Government. The unanimous agreement of the workers, peasants and Civil Servants with the policy of the Gottwald Government is striking proof of this.

"The difficult road which the Czechoslovak people has traversed in its struggle for liberty and independence constitutes a guarantee that it will once more be on its guard, ready to defend the democratic Republic against all the intrigues of the reaction."

The *Pravda* article, in short, did little except serve up again the arguments and reiterate the themes of the Czechoslovak Communists. But in spite of the identity of language, *Pravda* presented its argument not as that of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, but as its own—that is to say, that of the Soviet Communist Party. As no one was unaware of the fact that the latter, according to the Soviet Constitution, represented a constitutional organization directing and controlling the entire governmental policy of the country, it followed that the

Kremlin had given its blessing to the promoters of the *coup d'état*. Radio Moscow broadcast the same stereotyped views. In addition, according to our Communist Press, the *Pravda* article presented "the point of view of the U.S.S.R. on the Czechoslovak governmental crisis".

In the eyes of public opinion, therefore, there could no longer be doubt on the attitude of the Government of Moscow, and for the immense majority of the population to oppose the Czechoslovak Communists meant entering into conflict with the Soviet Union.

The interference of the U.S.S.R. in a Czechoslovak internal struggle made an impression even more profound than the spectacular interference of the communized police. The man in the street was seized with terror. From the moment that it was seconded by the Soviets he began to wonder if there were still any chances of stopping the Communist offensive. It was feared more and more that resistance to the Communists would be interpreted and punished as an unfriendly act towards Russia, whose severity and brutality had remained in all memories since the occupation of the country by the Red Army in 1945.

This impression was still further strengthened by a declaration which General Bocek, Czechoslovak Chief of Staff, made the same day in presenting a bronze statuette to Soviet General Leliuchenko on the occasion of a ceremony commemorating the liberation of Prague. General Bocek said notably:

"At the present time the question of the Soviet–Czechoslovak alliance takes on an exceptional importance and becomes for us a question of life or death in a world in which the anti-popular and imperialist forces are fighting against those of liberty, progress and the new democracy. We must rise resolutely against all tendencies which hide a desire to provoke a reactionary reversal of our foreign policy."

This declaration was at once a warning and a threat. No more was necessary to make many persons lose confidence. Discouragement increased when the radio announced that passports for abroad were no longer valid except on special authorization by the Ministry of the Interior. At any moment we might be cut off from the West and condemned to look only towards the East.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE STUDENTS IN THE VAN

IN SPITE OF all these evil omens the democrats had not lost hope. The illegal proceedings of the police certainly achieved their end of intimidating the public, but they also provoked its anger and indignation. The student youth was first to demonstrate openly against the violent acts of the Communists. In this it did nothing other than follow in the footsteps of its elders who in November 1939 revolted against the regime of terror of the Nazis. The remembrance of the price which their predecessors had paid for their heroic attitude did not frighten the students of 1948. Nine years earlier the affair had been liquidated by several executions and a hundred deportations to German concentration camps, and the colleges had been closed for the duration of the war. In February 1948 our students displayed the same courage, the same passionate love of liberty, the same aversion to tyranny.

On Monday afternoon they marched in single file through the streets of Prague. These demonstrations continued for two days: in the afternoon of February 25 they were brutally repressed by the police.

The example set by the students rekindled the courage of the population. On Monday evening an immense crowd assembled in a great square before the secretariat of the National Socialist Party and protested noisily against the searches the police had carried out in our headquarters and against the other terroristic acts of the Communists. It was at this moment that Zenkl, Drtina and I returned from the Hradcany, where we had conferred with the President of the Republic. We were greeted with enthusiastic cheers. Zenkl spoke a few words to the demonstrators. When he declared that President Benes remained firm in his decision to defend the principles of parliamentary democracy, the enthusiasm of the crowd reached its height. From all sides rose cries of "Long live President Benes!"

It was in vain that Communist agents tried to break up and prevent these spontaneous demonstrations. Far into the night bands were still marching through the centre of Prague, and several fights occurred between Communists and non-Communists.

That same evening, after a speech full of ardour delivered to them by the secretary-general of our party, Professor Krajina, several thousand students climbed in procession to the Hradcany, where they cheered the President of the Republic. Chancellor Smutny received a delegation of a few of them. Through him the President informed them that he was happy to see their devotion and fidelity to democratic ideas, and that he was convinced that a solution of the crisis would be reached by an understanding among all parties within the sacrosanct framework of the parliamentary regime.

The students, encouraged by the President's message, were more determined than ever not to yield.

Several hours later the National Federation of Czechoslovak Students published an appeal in which it asked its members to prevent "the diversion of the nation and to rise against all attacks threatening liberty and democracy".

After having proclaimed that everyone thereafter ought, without consideration of party, to support the President of the Republic, the principal guarantor of domestic peace, the students solemnly promised to remain faithful to the ideal of the heroes of November 1939 and, if necessary, to fight for liberty, even if that should cost them as dearly as it had cost the students of 1939.

CHAPTER XXXV

UNCERTAINTY AMONG THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

WHILE THE STUDENT demonstrations were taking place I went to the headquarters of the central committee of the Social Democratic Party to inform my friends there of the encouraging words which the President of the Republic had just said to us, and to hand to them the declaration we had drawn up in agreement with him. The attitude which the Social Democrats would take was no less important than that of the President of the Republic; for, although numerically weak, they were able to swing the balance one way or the other.

Thus in moments of crisis Communists and non-Communists alike tried to win their favour. The National Socialists in particular tried to assure themselves of their co-operation; on the questions of the security police and the status of Civil Servants, for instance, we had always sought to act in such a manner as to avoid pushing the Social Democrats into the Muscovite camp.

At the time when the governmental crisis began we did everything in our power to rally them to our cause. It was to win them to our side that we had decided to precipitate the crisis before the U.R.O. congress, for we knew that, so far as the police situation was concerned, they would oppose the totalitarian methods introduced by the Communists as vigorously as we would, while in the matter of nationalization brought up by the unionists of the Communist Party they would probably have hesitated to share our point of view. Our calculation proved correct: the fellow-traveller wing of Fierlinger did not gain the upper hand again until the problem of the security police had been relegated to the background, to leave the new socialization programme as the predominating question.

The leaders of the Social Democratic Party knew, from our public declarations and our private conversations, that we had decided to bring about a governmental crisis if the Communists persisted in flouting the common decision of February 13, and they were informed of our final decision to resign before that decision was officially announced.

In the afternoon of Friday, February 20, after we had resigned our posts, I went to see Lausman, president of the Social Democratic Party, to try to persuade the Ministers of his party to associate themselves with us. In the morning, with the same aim, I had undertaken an interview with the Social Democratic Ministers themselves.

I was more than a little surprised to hear Lausman reproach us for not having warned our Social Democratic colleagues in time and for having confronted them with a *fait accompli*. While he admitted that my colleagues, Zenkl and Drtina, had in fact told him the day before of our intention to resign, he claimed to have had no knowledge of the conversation I had had that morning with the Social Democratic Ministers. Finally, he assured me that the Social Democrats would support us, as was only right, on the question of the police and, what was still more important, that they would not accept as a basis for a new government anything other than the original National Front.

To avoid any misunderstanding, I asked him if the Social Democrats would refuse to take part in a government from which the other non-Communist parties were excluded, and if they would refuse to accept a Cabinet including non-parliamentary representatives of the unions, etc. Lausman was categorical: "That is obvious; we are not naïve enough to offer ourselves up as a sacrifice to the Communists." And he added: "This very day Zapotocky visited me to insist at length that we should not leave the Government, or, more exactly, that we should form a new Cabinet in which our two parties alone would be represented. He even declared in a pathetic tone that the destiny of the Republic was in the hands of two men: Gottwald and Lausman. I made him clearly understand that these seductive manœuvres had no effect on me."

In spite of the assurances of Lausman, I was worried by the fact that although he was the president of his party, he had not been informed of my conversation with the Social Democratic Ministers. Why did he maintain that we had confronted them with a *fait accompli*? Why did he hesitate to ask them to resign at the same time as us?

I attributed his hesitation on the one hand to his indecisive character and on the other to the existence in his party of the fellow-travellers' wing of Fierlinger, with whom Lausman doubtless wished to avoid a clash.

During a meeting of the steering committee of the Social Democratic Party which took place immediately after my conversation with Lausman, Majer, the Minister of Food, proposed to his colleagues that they resign immediately. Like us, he wanted to do this before the meeting of the congress of unit committees, in order to isolate the Communists and compel Gottwald to hand in the resignation of the whole Cabinet. Unfortunately only two or three members of the committee were of his opinion. Lausman did not agree with him. Since the question was not settled, the committee called a meeting of the central executive committee, which was to take a decision, for Monday, February 23.

A statement published late in the night of February 20–21 reflected the embarrassment of the Social Democrats. According to this statement the party was determined to maintain the National Front. But should the crisis grow more acute, the Social Democratic Ministers were ready to put their portfolios at the disposal of their party. The statement did not approve of our resignation, which it considered premature, but it nevertheless condemned the aggressive declarations of the Communist Party.

The Communists showed admirable skill in making capital of the perplexed attitude of the Social Democrats. Thus they gained the necessary time to work on opportunists like Lausman, whom they sought to draw towards themselves by visions of important gains in the elections at the expense of the National Socialists. In addition, this beating about the bush allowed Fierlinger and his friends to show great activity within the party. They pointed out to everybody that the Communists were certain of Soviet support, so that to oppose the Communist Party was not only useless, but very dangerous. "If we do not march with the Communists," they said, "we shall be crushed, like the National Socialists and the others."

The confusion was all the greater because, if the Social Democratic leaders were undecided, the *Pravo Lidu*, the party publication, followed the anti-Communist line which was that of the immense majority of its members: it condemned the manner in which the Communists were using the congress of the unit committees for party ends, it asked members of the Social Democratic Party not to join the committees of action, and it announced that Mme. Kousova, one of Fierlinger's aides, who had spoken at the Communist demonstrations of February 21,

would be expelled from the party. So far as the governmental crisis was concerned, the *Pravo Lidu* wrote in its issue of February 22:

> "The firm and calm attitude of the President of the Republic is entirely in conformity with the point of view of Czechoslovak Social Democracy. . . . If the three resigning parties maintain the resignation of their Ministers and if, contrary to what is desired, a reconstitution of the National Front Cabinet is not arrived at, it will be necessary to find another basis for the formation of a government; this government will certainly not be a Cabinet of technicians, nor the Cabinet of a bloc, nor the Cabinet of one party with outsiders from the other parties. We shall probably have a new Gottwald Cabinet or a reshuffled Gottwald government. . . . The most urgent task of the new Ministers will be the reorganization of the elections, which provide the only way out of the stifling labyrinth in which we find ourselves. It is being repeated over and over again: we must appeal to the people. Very well, let us appeal to the people. . . . But to all the people."

On the same day the French Press agency published a declaration of Lausman in which he said that "the Social Democratic Ministers will hand in their resignations if it proves to be impossible to reconstruct the National Front Government as it was constituted before the resignation of the National Socialist, Czech Catholic and Slovak Democratic Ministers."

These public declarations did not suffice to dissipate the fears which the attitude of certain of the Social Democratic leaders aroused in us. That is why I was anxious to have another talk with them before the meeting of their executive committees, fixed for the following day.

During the night of February 22–23 Drtina and I went to see Lausman at his home. We found there Vilim, secretary-general of the party, and Deputy Bernard, both of whom have since migrated to London. The conversation was hardly encouraging. Lausman was even more hesitant than at our previous interviews. All of them seemed discouraged, for they were convinced that the Communists would not give way. "If the Communists do not want to give way," I asked them, "does that mean that we have to give way? Why? And on what issue?" One of them proposed that we withdraw our resignations. But Lausman

himself recognized that we should make ourselves ridiculous if we did that, and, for that matter, a decision of that kind would bring little change in the situation. The Social Democrats then suggested that to facilitate the solution of the crisis our party might be asked not to renominate the departing Ministers. I answered that if a change of personalities could bring about an understanding we would declare ourselves in agreement, but on two conditions: first, that Drtina, who had led the fight against the communization of the police, should keep the portfolio of Justice; and second, that the Communists should also consent to replace certain of their representatives in the Cabinet —for instance, Minister of Agriculture D. Iuris. Lausman found that reasonable. He finally assured us that he would defend the principle of the National Front in its present make-up and that in his opinion the new Government, which would not be much different from the old one, should busy itself with arranging for elections without further delay.

Back home again, I began thinking over the conversation I had just had. Despite Lausman's declarations, I was not at ease. In the end there remained for me only the hope that in the executive committee, where Fierlinger's wing was in the minority, the point of view defended publicly by the representatives of the Social Democrats would triumph.

Unfortunately, that was not the case. The executive committee met on the day when the Communists had already resorted to direct action. The spectacular measures they had taken did not fail to produce their effect on the Social Democrats present at the meeting. Fierlinger's wing managed to take skilful advantage of this situation, which enabled them to apply pressure to those who were hesitant.

Towards the end of the afternoon, our conversation with the President over, I informed my Social Democratic friends of the assurance Benes had just given us. Majer, who had listened to me with much attention, tore from my hand the text of the statement we had drafted with Benes and hurried off at top speed to join his comrades of the executive committee, saying: "I must take this to the executive committee at once; they are just about to vote."

One of my friends explained that the meeting was evolving in Fierlinger's favour. "They are not Social Democrats," he added, "they are Communist Quislings." As I insisted that the President would remain firm, he exclaimed: "Either you are

lying or they are," and pointed to the door behind which the committee was sitting. I asked him how Lausman was behaving. "You know him," he said, with a bitter smile. Then, after a few seconds' thought: "Perhaps he will pull himself together at the last moment; it is not impossible that the news you bring from the President will give him courage."

This last hope melted away when the proposal of Majer, that the Social Democratic Ministers should immediately resign, was defeated. Fierlinger won by a narrow majority, due to the votes of Lausman and his friends.

As the result of a letter from the central steering committee of the Communist Party, the executive committee then decided to enter into talks with the Communist leaders and to take part in the conference called by the U.R.O. with a view to forming a "Central Committee of Action of the National Front". It declared itself, moreover, in agreement with the resolution of the congress of unit committees on the subject of a series of demands, always reserving the right to take a divergent stand concerning certain clauses. So far as the committees of action were concerned, it decided that Social Democrats could take part in them with the consent of the competent organizations of the party. Finally, it decreed that the Social Democratic Ministers who had put their portfolios at the disposal of the party should not leave the Government for the moment. The final decision was to be taken by the officers of the party.

In the evening of February 23, after the meeting of the executive committee, Lausman, the president, and Vilim, the secretary-general, were received by the President of the Republic. To this day I have not managed to obtain the least information concerning this interview.

It is probable that it was during this same night of February 23–24 that Fierlinger succeeded in persuading Lausman to abandon the attitude he had maintained up to then and rally to the fellow-travellers' wing.

Once Fierlinger's victory was assured, he took in hand, with the help of the Communists, the effective direction of the Social Democratic Party. On the following day he instructed his men to occupy the secretariat of the party, and the editorial rooms and print-shop of the *Pravo Lidu*, its official mouthpiece. The resistance put up by Majer, aided by a few comrades, was broken by a Communist mob supported by the police. A committee of action took charge of the paper.

On February 25 the *Pravo Lidu* published an appeal signed by Lausman and Fierlinger addressed to all members of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party.

This appeal declared:

> "The events which have lately occurred at an accelerated pace have provoked differences of opinion in our party which we have now succeeded in smoothing out, thanks to an agreement and a decision based on sincere Socialist co-operation. We have decided to approve the project for a new government and the creation on a broad basis of a new active National Front. We urge upon all our comrades, men and women, unity and mutual understanding, and we ask them to adopt a calm and reflective attitude in inviting them to group themselves closely about the party."

Against the will of the immense majority of its members, and in spite of the efforts of an energetic and courageous group led by Majer, the fellow-travelling minority, thanks to the manœuvres of Fierlinger, remained master of the field of battle.

The understanding between Fierlinger and Lausman, announced as "sincere Socialist co-operation", marked the end of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, which three months later was absorbed by the Communist Party.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE NATIONAL FRONT: REVISED EDITION

WITHOUT LOSING A moment, the Communists profited by the swing of Social Democratic policy in their favour to set up the new National Front at the same time as the Committees of Action.

On the evening of February 23 the U.R.O. had called a conference in Prague, during which the "Central Committee of Action of the National Front" was to be formed. Many of those invited were uninformed of the precise object of this meeting. The Communists lost no time in enlightening them: it was a question of replacing the former National Front, composed solely of political parties "into which reactionary elements aiming to destroy the popular democracy have infiltrated, by a new and true National Front, composed of all patriots, all democrats and all Socialists".

One hundred and twelve representatives of various organizations took part in the meeting, including representatives of the U.R.O., the Federations of Co-operatives, the Federations of Commerce and Trades, the Farmers' Union, the Writers' Union, the Youth Union, resistance organizations, partisans, political prisoners, veterans, cultural organizations, etc. In addition, according to the *Rude Pravo*, 175 personages from scientific, economic, agricultural, artistic, military and political circles were present.

So far as the political parties were concerned, only the Communists and Social Democrats had delegated members chosen by their Executive Committees. The Populists and National Socialists were represented only by five or six turncoats, with no authorization whatever from their parties, and who participated in the conference on a strictly personal basis.

After speeches by Zapotocky and Gottwald, several delegates attacked "the plot of the reaction against the popular democracy". They all pronounced themselves in favour of a "new National Front on firmer and more solid bases", along the lines of Gottwald's project.

Fierlinger, fresh from the meeting of the Social Democratic

Executive Committee, where he had just won a great victory, spoke with much assurance. He declared that it was not "the Progressive and Socialist elements which tried to break and undermine the unity of the Party. . . . For us no middle way exists: we have to range ourselves on the side of democracy and Socialism. I know Gottwald, I know that he has always worked honestly to find democratic solutions. I am sure of your sincerity," he said, turning towards Gottwald, "and all honest citizens of this State will assist you."

The Communists took care not to explain to the public what this "Renovated National Front" really represented. They knowingly promoted a confusion destined to facilitate their manœuvre. While retaining the name of "National Front", they actually created an entirely different institution: though the National Front before the crisis was composed only of the representatives of the eight political parties, the "Renovated National Front" was to include, besides the political parties, representatives of organizations which in principle were non-political (unions, resistance groups, etc.), but which for the most part were dominated by the Communists, and whose representatives in the Renovated National Front at least were chosen by them. So far as the political parties were concerned, they could only be admitted to the National Front, revised edition, "after a preliminary purge", which was equivalent to saying that their representatives would also be puppets at the orders of the Communist Party.

The Renovated National Front was therefore nothing more than a tool of the central organization of the Communist Party.

The general confusion increased still further when declarations which Army leaders had just made became known.

On February 23 General Svoboda, Minister of National Defence, and General Bocek, Chief of Staff, signed a special order of the day reading:

> "The present govermental crisis will be resolved by the responsible politicians in a constitutional and democratic manner which will respect the interests of the nation and the State. Close your ranks still more, in a spirit of discipline, of comradeship and of reciprocal confidence, about our supreme chief, the President of the Republic, Eduard Benes. By its unity, its discipline and its democratic and national conscience

and by its sense of responsibility, the Army must be a model for the other citizens. Our Army will remain always faithful to the people from whom it has issued, and will continue to defend the great national ideals and the conquests of the revolution. It stands today, and it will stand tomorrow, beside the U.S.S.R. and its other allies, to guarantee the security of our dear Czechoslovak Republic, united, democratic and independent."

One of my friends who had served in the Royal Air Force during the war came to see me that day, and said to me, with some emotion: "Have you read the order of the day of Svoboda and Bocek? I am almost impelled to ask them to excuse me for having suspected them of being in the pay of the Communists. They are patriots. It is not Gottwald, but Benes whom they recognize as their supreme chief and ours. Let the Communists try a dirty trick and Svoboda will be with us instantly."

I felt somewhat embarrassed. I did not want to discourage this sincere patriot, but neither could I leave him to his illusions. For answer I contented myself with handing him the Communist newspaper *Rude Pravo* and inviting him to read what Svoboda had said at the meeting at which the Central Committee of Action of the new National Front had been formed. Here is the report of the *Rude Pravo*:

"General Svoboda, Minister of National Defence, was received by a storm of applause when he rose to speak during the discussion. He declared that he had accepted the invitation only after thorough reflection and that he had not come alone, but with the Chief of Staff, General Bocek, and with General Klapalek. He affirmed that the Army would always be on the side of the people. 'The unity of the people', that is the slogan of the fighters for the liberation of the nation, and whoever attacks our unity, he said, whoever creates divisions and is unwilling to co-operate with the others, is an adversary of the Republic, a harmful element which should be eliminated. It is necessary to get rid of the trouble-makers and complete the carrying out of the governmental programme."

For a long time my friend read and re-read this declaration. Then he rose slowly from his chair and said in a low voice: "I should have understood at once. In his order of the day

Svoboda says that the Army will be faithful to the people and to the carrying out of the revolution, which means that he will march with the Communists. It is obvious. How could I have missed it? He says also that the Army will always remain by the side of the Soviets. Benes indeed! It is Stalin who is his chief!"

Did this aviator understand completely the great deception of which, like all the people, he had been a victim? What exactly was the attitude of the representatives of the Army?

Some persons close to Benes claimed after the crisis that if the President ended by giving way to Gottwald, it was because his conversations with Svoboda and Bocek had convinced him that he could no longer rely on the Army.

Yet persons who were considered to know General Svoboda well insisted that he would have executed every order of his Supreme Chief, the President of the Republic, even if he had had to disobey the instructions of Gottwald.

Among those who surrounded General Bocek, on the other hand, it was said that the Minister of Defence and the Chief of Staff had tried to influence Benes with a view to avoiding a clash with Gottwald, by drawing his attention to the fact that such a difference might end not only in civil war but also in an open conflict with Moscow.

According to others, whatever the attitude of the Minister of National Defence and of the Chief of Staff, the President could have counted on the majority of the Army, which would have obeyed him with loyalty and devotion.

During these critical days, moreover, a friend of mine who was a high officer told me that most of the officers as well as the enlisted men were ready to follow Benes in spite of all risks. But he was convinced that the Army would not answer a call from the political parties, because it would feel that it was serving the interests of these parties rather than those of the nation.

No doubt it will never be known which of these theories corresponds to the reality. For my part, I think—and I want to emphasize that here I express only my personal opinion—that there were in the Army forces on which those who were carrying on the fight for the independence of the nation could have relied.

In any case, the submissive attitude of General Svoboda at the conference during which the new National Front was constituted added considerable strength to the Communist policy.

The Renovated National Front was born. The meeting ended with a long proclamation containing all the accusations which the Communists had been making since the beginning of the crisis against the "reaction" and all the theses in favour of the creation of a new system which would quarantine the "agents of domestic and foreign reaction". Here is how this proclamation defined the structure of the Renovated National Front:

> "We invite all national forces to co-operate with us. Besides the political parties, are also grouped, for harmonious co-operation, all national organizations, all representatives of culture and of the Church, and all honest persons without considerations of party. We want the National Front in the future to be an organization much more solid, capable of drafting demands and of insuring the carrying out of its programme."

According to the official *communiqué*, three great tasks devolved upon the new National Front directed by the committees of action. They were to:

> "1. Bring about the purging of the political parties, whose responsible leaders have abandoned the principles of the National Front, in order thus to find the way to a frank co-operation.
>
> "2. Ensure the realization of the governmental programme before the elections, particularly on national insurance, the new agrarian reform and the revision of taxes on farmers, small merchants and artisans. . . . Discuss urgently and include in its programme the demands formulated by the Congress of the unit committees.
>
> "3. Tighten the alliance with the Soviet Union and the other Slav States."

Finally a preparatory Committee was formed charged with constituting the Central Committee of Action and the "enlarged and renewed" National Front. At the head of this Committee were Zatopocky, Fierlinger, Erban (then Secretary General of the U.R.O.), and the Communist Cepicka, who was then Minister of Domestic Trade, and was later to succeed Drtina at the Ministry of Justice. It was Cepicka who assumed the functions of secretary-general of the new National Front.

The preparatory committee included in addition representa-

tives of other organizations, chosen by the Communists. So far as the political parties were concerned, the Communists and Social Democrats had on it their duly designated representatives. Also on the list were two Populist deputies, Alois Petr and Father Josef Plojhar, who were expelled from the party the following day for having joined the new National Front without having been authorized to do so by their steering committee.

Twenty-four hours later they were members of the new Gottwald Cabinet. Two seats in the National Front were reserved for the National Socialist Party, no member of which had yet become a candidate for it.

February 23 had brought the Communists several new successes: they had secured a majority within the Social Democratic Party, they had formed the Central Committee of Action of the new National Front, and had thus established the basis for the formation of a government which would fully meet their desires. What was left for them to do finally to establish their regime? First, to paralyse completely the functioning of the democratic parties, then to induce the President of the Republic to accept their programme.

The last two stages were completed in the next forty-eight hours, which saw the achievement of the Communist *coup d'état.*

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PUTSCH

ARRESTS OF MEMBERS of the three democratic parties were assuming increasingly important proportions. On the initiative of the committees of action imposed upon the party organizations, the formerly trusted men—the secretaries and editors—were relieved of their posts and forbidden to enter their offices. At the least sign of resistance they were forcibly ejected or arrested. At the same time it was made impossible for the resigning ministers to attend to routine business. Searches of homes were made in a completely arbitrary manner; they involved persons who had never indulged in any political activity. For the authorities it was a question of intimidating the public by showing it that it would have to undergo all kinds of persecutions if it did not bow to Communist law. It was of course useless to appeal to the police, the administrative departments or the courts. To deprive the valiant of all hope, the Communists took care to spread the news on February 24 that several high officials of the Ministry of Justice had been arrested or suspended. Beginning on February 23, certain officers who had incurred the distrust of the Communists were shadowed or arrested; and it was not by chance that most of them were known for their devotion to President Benes.

From noon until one o'clock on the 24th the token strike organized by the U.R.O. in support of the demands of the Congress of unit committees took place. Only a few individuals and fewer groups refused to take part. The complete success of the strike proved that the Communists had succeeded in intimidating virtually all employees, workers and Civil Servants. The declarations made during this demonstration were simply a word-for-word repetition of the Communist demands. The speakers demanded, in short, the acceptance of the resignation of the twelve Ministers and the formation of a Government in conformity with the proposal of Gottwald. And they all added a threat: if these claims were not granted the working classes would call a general strike for an indefinite period.

After one o'clock groups of strikers continued to move through the streets insulting National Socialists in particular.

On their side, the students organized counter-demonstrations, in which other groups joined. Here and there fights occurred. When the police intervened it was always to support the Communists against the Democrats. A parade organized by the National Socialists on St. Wenceslas Place was quickly broken up by police armed with sub-machine-guns.

In the Prikopy quarter volunteers helped Fierlinger's followers to occupy the secretariat of his party. During the afternoon Majer and his friends succeeded in driving out the boisterous mob which was occupying the building, but the same evening the Social Democrats of the Left Wing, assisted by their Communist allies, again seized the secretariat and the editorial offices of the Social Democratic newspaper.

The Communists, furious against Majer, who had the audacity to resist them, attacked him on the following day. Sure of impunity, since Fierlinger had been victorious, about a hundred persons pushed into his private office at the Food Ministry and ordered him to leave. Majer, who, not having resigned, was still in office, telephoned to the Premier to ask him to protect him. Gottwald, in a rage, answered that he was no Tusa,* and that he would not allow the police to intervene against the workers. The demonstrators finally threw themselves on Majer, who was thus forced to leave. As he did so, amid catcalls and insults, an old woman shouted an obscene phrase at him. Majer stopped to say to her: "My mother died in a German concentration camp because my brothers and I, during the war, behaved in a manner of which she would not have been ashamed; I would not want to give her cause to be ashamed today any more than I did then. But some day your children will be ashamed of what you are doing." These words were followed by a moment's silence. Majer profited by it to leave the spot.

While Fierlinger's followers, with Communist help, were taking over the leading posts in the Social Democratic Party, the Populist deputies Petr and Plojha, also, with the aid of the Communists, were occupying the printing-shops and editorial offices of the *Lidova Demokracie*, the organ of their party, and they stopped the publication of their weeklies, *Obzory* and *Vyvoj*. At the editorial offices of the *Svobodne Noviny*, a liberal independent daily, Ferdinand Peroutka, one of the best Czech

* Tusa was a Social Democrat who, when he became Premier in 1920, did not hesitate to oppose the Communists energetically.

publicists of the Karel Capek school, was relieved of his post. He had spent five and a half years in German concentration camps, twenty-seven months of them in solitary confinement. He was replaced by a Communist writer, Jan Drda.

There still remained one position to occupy: Melantrich, the great publishing house of the National Socialist Party. Its employees, supported by comrades of their party, having refused to give way before the threats of the mob, the Minister of the Interior was compelled to take the matter in hand: he sent detachments of police to occupy the big building and prevent the publication of the *Svodobné Slovo* and other National Socialist periodicals. Several editors and a few employees were arrested. The general manager, Deputy Julius Firt, was prevented from entering his office.

The Communist Press mentioned these acts of unjustifiable violence to explain them in its own fashion. "Given the well-known tendencies of the *Svodobné Slovo*," it wrote in substance, "the Minister of the Interior has taken preventive measures in the print-shop of the Melantrich concern to prevent the *Svobodné Slovo* from disturbing public opinion by its lies and provocations. That is why he has appointed printer Frantisek Hracha manager of this enterprise and has notified the former manager, Deputy J. Firt, of the change."

The *Svobodné Slovo* did not appear again until two days later, after having been taken "in hand" by the new editorial staff of the National Socialist Party.

The non-Communist Press had disappeared. The newspapers and magazines which continued to appear under their old titles were no longer any different from the *Rude Pravo* and the other extreme Left publications. The *Mlade Fronta*, publication of the young Communists, announced the good news: "For the first time in the history of the Third Czechoslovak Republic, newspapers which undermine the confidence of the people in their Government and incite them to commit acts of high treason cannot be published. We must hail with joy these measures, which, at last, have freed our Press from traitors to the nation."

Beginning with February 25, all the newspapers had been brought into line. The suppression of the "unwholesome elements" put an end to freedom of the Press in Czechoslovakia. Unco-operative journalists were dismissed or arrested. Some of them succeeded in taking refuge abroad.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE NATIONAL SOCIALISTS STAND FIRM

IT WAS THE National Socialists who put up the most desperate resistance to the Communists and were the last to succumb.

On Tuesday, February 24, our executive committee and our parliamentary group had organized a common meeting in which about two hundred delegates from Bohemia and Moravia took part. With admirable courage, these men and women continued to resist openly, though many of their closest comrades were already in prison and the police had searched the homes of several of them. They did not hesitate to come to Prague to learn exactly what the situation was and to agree on a plan of action to follow. The four Ministers of the party (Zenkl, Stransky, Drtina and I) made a complete report on the origin, causes and development of the crisis. The delegates unanimously thanked us for having remained firm in the Cabinet and in the National Front, and they approved our action in having provoked the Government crisis by resigning.

A workman delegate described to us with a wealth of detail the persecutions which non-Communist employees, particularly members of the National Socialist Party, were undergoing in the factories. "We all felt relieved", he said, "when, by your resignation, you proved that you wished to take no part in the Communist trickery. If, in spite of your resistance, the Communists win, the situation will at least have the advantage of being clear; it is upon them that the responsibility will fall for everything which may happen. I know that we shall lead a difficult life under their reign of terror. But if we won out over the Nazis, we shall also win out over the Bolsheviks. I ask of you only one thing more, but in the name of my comrades I insist that it be done: whatever happens, whether you are threatened or have promises made to you, do not allow yourselves to be tempted or deceived by compromise solutions. Hold firm!"

All the other delegates expressed the same opinion. Some of them asked us if President Benes would not accept the proposals of Gottwald. We repeated to them what Benes had declared to

the representatives of the three parties: in no case would he approve the ministerial combination which Gottwald wished to impose upon him; he would continue his talks with all the parties, and if no understanding were possible, he would abdicate as a sign of protest against the Communist violence.

Meanwhile reports made by delegates from various regions proved that the immense majority of the population was hostile to the Communists; in some cases even the workers were turning away from them. As for the police and the Army, they were not entirely in their hands. The delegates asked us to transmit all these reports to Benes.

At this point Deputy Alois Neumann took the floor to ask, to the general surprise, that the meeting pronounce itself in favour of our participation in the Committee of Action of the new National Front. One of the delegates asked him point blank if the Communists had not by chance offered him a portfolio in the new Cabinet which Gottwald was preparing. Taken by surprise, he declared with a certain embarrassment that, in fact, an offer of this kind had been made to him. This confession loosed a tempest, especially when it was learned that up to that moment Neumann had not judged it necessary to inform the officers of his party of this fact. There was a tremendous tumult. Some delegates rose from their seats to throw themselves upon him. "Throw the traitor out!" they cried. We had great difficulty in restoring calm. As for Neumann, he excused himself for being unable to stay until the end of the meeting because he had "other engagements", and he made his retreat, protesting his loyalty to the party!

Emanuel Slechta, who was to appear in the new Gottwald Government the following day as Minister of Technology, viewed this scene without uttering a word. Nor did he react when Zenkl asked if a similar offer had been made to any other members of the party. During the whole meeting he did not once vote against the resolutions approving our policy without reservation and condemning the Communist attitude energetically. It is rather difficult to believe that on the eve of his entry upon his functions in the new Cabinet no offer had yet been made to him.

That same night Neumann and Slechta consented to take part, with the label of National Socialists, in the Government which Gottwald was on the point of forming. Both knew that they could not pretend to represent anyone except themselves

and a small group of opportunists; and they were certainly not unaware of the fact that they would be disavowed by us.

After we had discovered the dealings between the Communist leaders and Neumann we were anxious to inform the President of the Republic of the attitude of the Party concerning possible dissenters. In a letter which we sent to him the following day we informed him that, in accordance with a resolution unanimously adopted by the highest organizations of our party, any "member of our party who, without the knowledge of the competent organizations, accepts the carrying on of any political functions whatsoever, especially in the Committees of Action or in the new Cabinet, will be automatically expelled from the party". Since we knew that Gottwald would hand a list of the new Cabinet to the President of the Republic in a few hours, we did not desire to allow any ambiguity to remain.

In our message to Benes we insisted also on this point: "Because, according to information which has just reached us, the list of the new Cabinet will be submitted to you today, and because we learn that this list contains the names of members of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party we wish to let you know that the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party has authorized none of its members to take part in this Government, and that consequently those of its members who appear on the list of the Cabinet proposed by Premier Gottwald will, unless their names have been used without their knowledge, be expelled from the party."

The meeting of the Executive Committee was an impressive demonstration of the fighting spirit which then inspired the National Socialist Party. All the resolutions were accepted unanimously. The Executive Committee, after having approved enthusiastically what we had done up to then, renewed the mandate of our officers to continue political talks in the same spirit. The party expressed its complete confidence in its Ministers. It condemned the violent methods of the Communists; it refused categorically to take part in the Committees of Action, asked that the crisis should be resolved by an agreement among the parties of the National Front, and solemnly proclaimed the fidelity of the National Socialist Party to the ideals and principles of the democracy of Masaryk.

At the end of the meeting deep emotion reigned in the hall. The delegates realized the exceptional gravity of the hour. They

knew that only a desperate resistance could still break the Communist offensive.

One could not help being moved by the resolute expressions of all these militants who drew back before no danger. We had no inkling of the fact that the last meeting of the National Socialist Party had just taken place. On the morrow we were to be deprived of all means of continuing the struggle: our last hopes would melt away.

CHAPTER XXXIX

GOTTWALD'S VICTORY

DURING THE NIGHT of February 24–25 the Central Committee of the Communist Party ended its talks with the Social Democrats of the Fierlinger wing. On both sides agreement was reached on replacing Majer (Food), whom the Communists hated, and Tymes (Vice-Premier) whom they considered weak, in the new Government by Fierlinger, Lausman and Erban. The Communist Party consented to the maintenance at her post of Mme. Jankovcova (Industry), who had showed herself docile. It assured itself, in addition, of the collaboration of two Populists, Petr and Plojhar, of two National Socialists, Slechta and Neumann, and of a Slovak Democrat, Sevcik, none of whom had been authorized by their parties to become members of the new Cabinet.

After having strengthened the police measures which had been in force for several days, the Communists concentrated all their efforts on the President of the Republic, whose resistance it was necessary to break at any cost. They knew that Benes persisted in his opposition to their plan. Indeed, in the conversations he had had with the representatives of the Populist and Slovak Democratic Parties the President had shown himself to be as much opposed to the proposals of Gottwald as at the time of his talk with us. He held to his conception of a parliamentary government in conformity with the tradition of the nation, and reaffirmed that if it proved impossible to induce the Communists to adopt a more conciliatory attitude, he would protest against their anti-democratic position by abdicating. He had asked the representatives of all the parties to remain available for the consultations which he wished to have with them as soon as the list of the new Cabinet proposed by Gottwald should be in his hands.

Benes made one last effort to influence the Communists. In his answer to their letter of February 21—an answer which he sent to them four days later—he wrote:

"You know my deep democratic faith. I can only remain loyal to it at this moment, for democracy is in my opinion the

only solid and permanent basis for honest and dignified human life. I continue to believe that democracy finds its full realization in parliamentary democracy and parliamentary government. I want to emphasize that I understand very well, of course, the need for giving it a social and economic content. I have based my political work on these principles, and I cannot, without betraying myself, act otherwise.

"The present crisis of democracy can be overcome in our country by no other way than the democratic and parliamentary method. I do not oppose your own demands by this. I consider that all our political parties, grouped in the National Front, are the trustees of political responsibility. We have all adopted the principle of the National Front, and it has given us satisfaction up to the recent period when the crisis broke out.

"It does not seem to me that this principle is vitiated by the crisis. I am convinced that it is on this basis that the necessary co-operation of all can be founded, and that all conflicts can be resolved in the higher interests of the nation and of the common State of the Czechs and the Slovaks.

"That is why I have negotiated with the five political parties and have noted their points of view, which some of them have even expressed to me in writing. Grave matters are involved, which it is impossible for me not to take into account. So it is my duty to send a new appeal to everyone for the finding of a conciliatory solution according to parliamentary methods and in the spirit of the National Front, with a view to fruitful collaboration. This much from the formal point of view.

"From the personal point of view, it is a matter of course, in my opinion, that, as I have already said, the Premier should be the President of the strongest party: Klement Gottwald.

"Finally, it seems clear to me that Socialism is the way of life which the majority of the nation desires. But I believe also that liberty and harmony can go hand in hand with Socialism, that they are the principles which are indispensable to our whole national existence. During nearly all our history the nation has not stopped fighting ardently for liberty. That history shows us also where disunity has led us.

"That is why I beg you urgently to take these realities

into account, in order that we may find a solution for our arguments. Let us begin again, all together, to discuss the matter of a new and lasting co-operation, and let us not permit the splitting of the nation into two hostile halves to be prolonged.

"I believe that a reasonable agreement is possible because it is absolutely necessary."

By this answer President Benes had therefore confirmed his determination to solve the crisis by obtaining the co-operation of all the parties of the National Front.

The Communists answered by a letter which was a categorical *non possumus.*

"The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia," the central committee of the Communist Party declared, "notes again that it is unable to open negotiations with the present leaders of the National Socialist, Populist and Slovak Democratic Parties, because to do so would have precisely the effect of preventing harmony from reigning among the people and of blocking the peaceful future development of the Republic. . . . The responsible directors of these parties have even entered into relations with foreign circles hostile to our democratic and popular regime and to our alliances, and they have tried, in co-operation with these hostile foreign elements, to reverse the course of the present evolution of the Republic."

The Communists, determined to execute their plan by any means, had started by appealing to the Constitution and parliamentary custom. But the arguments by which they had supported their claims during their many interviews with the President of the Republic having remained without effect, they intensified their police measures and organized new spectacular demonstrations.

On the morning of February 25 Communist agents made the rounds of the factories and Government offices to invite people to attend a mass meeting which was to be held at two in the afternoon in St. Wenceslas Place. Severe reprisals were taken against those who were obstinate. For the first time the workers' militia appeared openly in the streets of the capital.

On the same day the *Rude Pravo* published a special edition in which it announced that if the proposals of Gottwald were not accepted immediately a general strike would be called.

The Communist Party gave its trusted workers oral instructions according to which the demonstrators were to go from St. Wenceslas Place to the Hradcany, where the President of the Republic lived, to compel him to accept the resignations of the twelve Ministers and to approve the list of the new Cabinet.

Meanwhile, Gottwald once again insisted to the President, on the morning of February 25, that he "give way to the desires, the will and the voice of the people". The President had received, in addition, Zapotocky and Nosek.

As for the representatives of the democratic parties, the chancellory informed them that Gottwald would present his ministerial list the same day, and asked them to remain in readiness to answer a call of the President, who would need to talk with them. This message seemed to indicate that the President was maintaining his opposition to the Communist demands.

Then, at noon, the radio announced that the President had accepted the resignations of the twelve Ministers.

I immediately telephoned to the chancellory, and I was told that the President had not yet made any decision on the matter. I at once communicated this information to my friends. There was only one possible explanation: the Communists had issued a false report with the intention of still further confusing public opinion.

Knowing that the National Socialist Agricultural Committee had met at three in the afternoon for a special conference, I hurried to the secretariat of our party to bring them the latest news. Happy to learn that the President had not given way, they decided to send a delegation to him to express their confidence in him and their readiness to follow him to the end in the struggle against the enemies of democracy.

About four o'clock, Zenkl, Drtina, Krajina, Firt and I met at Stransky's to await the telephone call which was to summon us to the President. When nothing happened, I called the Hradcany to inquire if we would still be received during the day. To my stupefaction, I was told that the President had just given his approval to the new list handed to him by Gottwald and that the latter was about to announce the news to the public. In consternation, I asked why the President had made this decision. All that the person at the other end of the line found to say to me was that this was not the time to answer such a question. I protested vehemently against the fact that so

grave a decision could be made without it being thought necessary to inform us of it.

We were utterly crushed. None of us could understand what had caused this abrupt change in the attitude of the President of the Republic.

We were never to see Benes again; never again did we receive any message from him. To this moment we have never been able to find out what happened in the Hradcany during that fatal morning of February 25, 1948; and no explanation which has seemed valid to us has ever been given on that subject.

A few minutes after my conversation with the Hradcany we were warned that Gottwald was going to announce to the crowd assembled in St. Wenceslas Place that President Benes had accepted our resignation and signed the list of the new Government. After having congratulated himself on the fortunate manner in which the "popular democracy" had overcome "the ambushes of the reaction", Gottwald added: "We are grateful to the President of the Republic for having known how to respect the desires and the will of the people on a question which created for him personally a difficult problem."

While the Communists were cheering their Premier in jubilation, the police, with revolting brutality, broke up a procession of anti-Communist students which was marching towards the Hradcany. When, during the day, the rumour had spread that the Communists were preparing to go *en masse* to the presidential residence to force Benes' hand, the students—nearly ten thousand of them—decided to prevent the Communists from entering the Hradcany. When they reached there, about four o'clock, they did not know that the President had already approved the list of the new Cabinet. A cordon of police stopped them. They began to argue with the young police officer in an endeavour to persuade him to let them pass into the third courtyard of the Hradcany, from which they meant to send a delegation to the President.

At that moment several cars packed with armed police appeared. Their commander gave them the order to drive the demonstrators away immediately. But as the police, rifles in hand, approached them, the students intoned the National Hymn. The police, surprised, stopped and stood to attention. The moment was truly tragi-comic. But as soon as the National Hymn was ended, the commander, a Communist, bellowing with rage, gave the order to attack. The police threw them-

selves upon the students and, without any provocation by them, opened fire. Several students fell under the shots.

Next day the Ministry of the Interior alleged that only one student had been wounded. The university authorities maintained that there had been some killed. According to eye-witnesses, three seriously wounded students had been carried away at once by the police. What became of them was never known. Some of the demonstrators were wounded by shots and about a hundred by blows from clubs and rifle-butts. Finally, more than a hundred arrests were made.

CHAPTER XL

TWO VICTIMS: DRTINA AND MASARYK

BEFORE THE CATASTROPHE which had just befallen the nation the population was struck with stupor. The fighting spirit, the will to resist which had still animated it the day before, had given way to discouragement and despair.

The tragic story of Munich was being repeated. In September 1938 this same people, which had prepared for battle with the same enthusiasm and the same sacrificial spirit against an enemy equally superior, had remained, after the capitulation, immersed in sorrow, incapable of the slightest movement.

They did not understand what had happened; but they knew that democracy had been conquered and that it was to be replaced by a regime of violence and terror.

The same question was on all lips: "Why did President Benes accept all the proposals of Gottwald?" The nation had not heard his voice again. Instead of the expected broadcast declaration, the public had learned only what he had answered to Gottwald when, in accordance with the Constitution, the new Cabinet went to take the oath of office before him. It had not been easy to make that decision, Benes had said in substance. It had caused him personal distress, but he had reached the conclusion that it was necessary to accept the proposal of Gottwald: "I saw that otherwise the crisis was in danger of becoming more aggravated and that the people would be so divided that everything might end in confusion."

The chief of the Chancellory, Smutny, had told foreign journalists that President Benes "wanted to avoid the danger of a civil war". The same day the President left for his private estate at Sezimovo Usti, where he was to remain until his death. I had learned that when he left his official residence in Prague he had had the intention of resigning a few days later. I have not been able to find out why he abandoned that plan. When we learned that the President had signed the list of the new Government I said to my friends: "It is all over. We are outlaws now, at the mercy of the Communists."

During the first few days following the *coup d'état* people of all circles, from Prague and from the provinces, friends, acquain-

tances and unknowns, came to see me. Routed and beaten, they came to ask me to explain to them what had happened; they wanted to consult me especially to know how they ought to act in face of the Communist threats. Many of them felt the need to strike back, and seemed disappointed when I told them that in the present situation any active resistance would be suicidal. I advised them to help one another in a spirit of fraternal solidarity, to remain dignified but prudent, to await the time when the situation became favourable. I stressed that, as had been the case after Munich, everything would depend on the international situation.

My heart bled at the sight of these poor people who saw themselves reduced to slavery for the second time within ten years, without having a chance to defend themselves, without being able to cry out in their despair. Once more we were bearing the brunt of a world-wide conflict.

Within two or three days the Ministers who had resigned found themselves completely isolated. Our apartments were guarded by the police and by plain-clothes men, who followed us everywhere. Our telephones were cut, our letters intercepted. Some persons avoided us for fear of compromising themselves. Only a very few loyal individuals continued to visit us. At the door a policeman asked for their identification papers, and took down in his note-book their names and addresses, in order to include them in his daily report. For our part, we refrained from visiting our friends, in order not to expose them to unnecessary annoyances.

Immediately after their victory the Communists put into motion the machinery of terror and oppression which they had set up. The Committees of Action undertook radical purges everywhere. They struck blindly. Persons whose sole crime was that of having held anti-Communist opinions were relieved of their posts and left workless. Those who had played active roles in the democratic parties were arrested. The new Minister of Justice announced severe penalties for "traitors to the Fatherland" and "lackeys of the reaction". Although no law on new nationalization had yet been passed, all the owners of businesses employing more than fifty persons were ejected, and "national managers" were installed in their places. Even smaller businesses underwent the same fate if for any reason the owner had incurred the disfavour of the Communists. If the authorities or the courts were appealed to for protection against

this illegal interference it was at the risk of persecution by the political police, whose activities were now free of all checks except that of the Communist Party.

In these circumstances it will be understood that no one was anxious to call attention to his relationships with the Ministers who had resigned, whom the newspapers were covering with obloquy, vying with one another in describing them as "putschists", "sold out to foreign reaction", and "conspirators hostile to the popular democracy", and similar terms. It was our duty to ask our friends to abstain from any relations with us. The loyalty of some of them, who did not hesitate to visit us in spite of all the risks they were running, was all the more moving.

We were without means of defence against the lies and slanders with which the Communists and the followers they had found in the other parties assailed us daily. We had no way of denying the rumour which had been spread the day after the *coup d'état*, according to which, not having warned the President of the Republic of our intention of resigning, we had placed before him a *fait accompli* by our "unconsidered and premature decision". It was impossible for us to tell the authentic story of the critical events which had just taken place, which the Communist propaganda was systematically distorting.

The only persons with whom I could associate without fear of compromising them were the other resigned Ministers, who found themselves in the same situation as myself. Drtina had suffered particularly from the tragic ending of the crisis. I shall never forget the sad expression on his face, his ghastly pallor, at the moment when he understood, by listening to my telephonic conversation with the chancellory of the President, that Benes had accepted the proposals of Gottwald. For several minutes he was unable to utter a word. Of us all, it was he who had been the most optimistic, and up to the last moment he had refused to believe that all was lost.

Since our high-school days I had been linked by a deep friendship to Prokop Drtina, whose father, an eminent teacher and one of the friends and closest collaborators of Tomas Masaryk, was one of my professors at the University of Prague. Prokop Drtina was integrity itself. His father had inculcated him with the fundamental idea of Masaryk's doctrine—that every political action should be inspired by a moral principle. This conception was consistent with the passion for truth and

justice which characterized him. His intelligence, his courage and his tenacity made him a statesman whose qualities showed up particularly in a time of crisis. After Munich he had been one of the first to resist, and even before the occupation of Prague by the Germans he was at the head of a secret patriotic movement. He left the country only at the end of 1940, when the Gestapo were about to arrest him. During the whole war he was political counsellor to President Benes, for whom he had an unlimited admiration. The talks on the political situation which, under the name of Pavel Svaty, he broadcast regularly from London, won him immense popularity in the country.

In the autumn of 1945 Drtina was nominated as Minister of Justice. Like his predecessor, Stransky, he fought the arbitrary and illegal methods of the Communists with unremitting vigour. It was he who bore all the burden of the struggle during the critical months preceding the crisis. With a courage which compelled respect from all, he defended the independence of the courts and opposed desperately the abuses of the regular police and the services of the security police. Without ever permitting himself to resort to low personal polemics, he had only one preoccupation: to do his duty worthily, with contempt for the risks he might be running. It is understandable that he was moved when he learned that Cepicka, who had special reasons for desiring his disappearance from the political scene, was to succeed him at the Ministry of Justice. On Saturday, February 28, about noon, I learned that Drtina had committed suicide. I at once went to his home. No one answered the door. The concierge told me, with some embarrassment, that during the night my old comrade had been taken to hospital. He had jumped from the third-floor window. A few hours before, his wife, who was ill, had been obliged to leave the house to receive treatment in a clinic. He had spent the evening of February 27 alone in his apartment.

I was terribly upset. Drtina had been badly injured in the head and hips. At the hospital he was placed under close guard. To a few friends who were able to slip into his room he said simply: "I hope that everyone will understand my gesture of protest: the only thing I regret is that I did not succeed." It was an heroic act, the gesture of revolt of a defeated warrior who nevertheless refused to surrender. The sympathy which he enjoyed in all circles increased still more when the Communist Press and the other newspapers which had been brought into

line had the audacity to slander him by proclaiming that he had tried to kill himself because he was tormented by remorse and was terrified at the idea of the punishment his crimes would bring upon him. The insults with which they covered this man, who was loved and respected for his deep-rooted honesty and his civic courage, aroused the deepest disgust among the public.

For several days Drtina hovered between life and death. He recovered only very slowly. His successor, Cepicka, had announced that he would be prosecuted for his acts of treason. During August, while he was still seriously ill, he was transferred from the hospital to the Pankrac prison. He is the only one of the four ex-Ministers of the National Socialist Party who remains in the hands of his enemies.

Two weeks after Drtina's suicide attempt the news reached us that Masaryk had also committed suicide. An official statement declared that on the morning of March 10 he had been found dead on the pavement of the courtyard; he had jumped from a third-storey window in the Cernin Palace.

It is difficult to describe the repercussions which this tragic event caused. The population was thrown into confusion, seized with panic. Everywhere persons were to be seen crying in the streets. The impression was felt that it was only with Masaryk's death that the full extent of the disaster had been understood.

It was not only in Czechoslovakia that Masaryk's suicide produced a profound impression. In all classes of every democratic country the son of the great President was considered to be the standard-bearer of an admirable tradition. The last sceptics had to bow to the evidence and recognize that what had just been committed at Prague was a crime. Masaryk's death was palpable proof that one more democracy had been destroyed.

At once the most contradictory rumours were spread. Nearly everyone insisted that Masaryk had not killed himself, but that he had been killed by the Communists. A series of really disturbing facts were cited: none of Masaryk's friends had been authorized to approach the body; even his own doctor had not been allowed to see it nor to be present at the autopsy. When the body had been placed in the coffin and lay in state at the Cernin Palace, the crowd which passed day and night before the casket was struck by the fact that the face was not even scratched. Moreover, it was said that he had prepared every-

thing to flee abroad the very day of his suicide, and that the Communist authorities had been warned of his intention.

It is impossible to clarify irrefutably the mystery which hovers over the death of Jan Masaryk, no one except tried Communists having been authorized to approach his body after his death. Perhaps what happened will never be known.

Personally I believe, without being able to prove it formally, that Masaryk committed suicide. My impression is based simply on a psychological analysis. Since the day of our resignation, when I had had a telephone conversation with Masaryk, during which he informed me of his intention of taking his stand beside us on the morrow, I had not been in touch with him again. But it seems to me that his suicide can be explained when his character is well understood. Masaryk was too sensitive and too honest to share the responsibility for a regime which had usurped power, was governing by falsehoods, injustice and terror, and was heaping upon the Democrats accusations which he knew to be pure slanders. He was too humane to tolerate being an accomplice in the injustices of which hundreds of his fellow citizens were the daily victims, and I am convinced that he considered that the name he bore could not be associated with a totalitarian government.

It was perhaps not by chance that Masaryk committed suicide three days after the anniversary of the birth of his father, which the Communists had commemorated clamorously, going so far as to pose as the heirs of the most typical representative of humanitarian and liberal democracy. I learned after his death how much Jan Masaryk had been wounded by this revolting hypocrisy. Finally, Masaryk knew that he was sufficiently well known in the whole world for his heroic sacrifice to unfailingly awaken universal sympathy for his unfortunate country.

The Communists were embarrassed, to say the least. When Gottwald learned the news he flew into a violent rage: "Why the devil are they all jumping out of the window?" he cried. He had all the more reason to be furious because up to that time the Communists had exploited the presence of Masaryk in the Cabinet to deceive the people as to the true nature of their regime. Nosek, Minister of the Interior, who went with Clementis to announce the news to President Benes, was unable to restrain his tears. Nosek told one of his friends that he did not understand why Masaryk had killed himself, since he was not threatened, and even Drtina was not going to be pro-

secuted. This reaction from one of the Communist leaders was one of the reasons that caused me to favour the hypothesis of suicide.

In the face of a public opinion which held them responsible for Masaryk's death, the Communists declared that the late Foreign Minister had been driven to suicide by letters and telegrams from abroad in which "reactionaries" reproached him for having rallied to the "popular democracy". Thus they continued to represent him as a man attached to their cause.

Masaryk's funeral, at which more than 200,000 persons from all the provinces of the Republic were present, conveyed better than anything else the terrible confusion which reigned in all minds. One felt the impression, at once sorrowful and painful, of a horrible discord: Communists and Democrats were bewailing the same man—a man whose death had widened still more the abyss that separated them. The most cynical hypocrisy mingled with the most moving sincerity, the coldest political calculation with the most pathetic sadness.

I was deeply afflicted by the death of Masaryk, by which I lost an affectionate and devoted friend. We had known each other for many years, and our collaboration at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during our exile in London had brought us even closer together. In spite of our fundamentally different temperaments and working methods, which scarcely resembled each other, never had the slightest dissent or the least disagreement arisen to trouble our good relations. After the war, although each was directing a different ministry, we continued to keep each other mutually informed on all important matters, even the most confidential.

Under the simple exterior which he liked to accentuate Masaryk hid a complicated character, difficult to understand. If on the surface he seemed nearly always exuberantly gay, he had a deep-buried tendency to melancholy. A brilliant talker, of dazzling wit, he was highly thought of in society, and was often regarded as a man who loved to amuse himself. In reality he was a misanthrope, but if he hardly prized society, he suffered none the less, without admitting it, from his moral solitude. He was extremely sensitive and, like all very intuitive persons, he had an astonishing gift for divining the feelings of others. His remarkable penetrating intelligence was intuitive rather than logical. He had, in short, the temperament of an artist who had missed his vocation. Good to the point of

sometimes being weak, he never refused his aid to those who asked it. His intimate and often cynical talk was only a means of self-defence against an excessive sentimentality and a too great subtlety. He seemed to give himself completely, yet he was reserved and timid, even towards his friends. What is incontestable is that he had an irresistible charm, due in part, perhaps, to the complexity of his character. Those who knew him intimately realized the unspeakable suffering through which he must have passed before killing himself. But history will, I am certain, prove that the sacrifices of Drtina and of Marasyk have not been in vain.

CHAPTER XLI

THE DECISIVE FACTOR: MOSCOW

DURING THE DAYS of solitude and complete inactivity which followed the *coup d'état* I had time to think over at length the causes of the catastrophe which we had just suffered. The more I reflected, the more it appeared to me that the decisive factor in our defeat had been the intervention of Moscow.

I had been one of the most ardent and most sincere defenders of a loyal co-operation between our country and the Soviet Union. Given our geographic position between Germany and Russia, and in view of the fact that the U.S.S.R., emerging victorious from the war, was the dominant Power in central and eastern Europe, I judged that this was the only policy which could guarantee our national independence, on condition, of course, that our traditional policy of co-operation with the Western Powers was not affected. I did not cease to recommend a friendly and loyal attitude towards the Soviets, in order not to give them a pretext for meddling in our affairs. The development of the situation in the first two years following the war seemed to prove me right: it must be said that up to 1947 the Soviets, after the departure of the Red Army, behaved themselves "correctly" towards us, in contrast to what was happening to certain of our neighbours.

Since Stalin's ultimatum concerning the Marshall Plan, the position had changed completely: his intervention constituted a flagrant violation of our treaty of alliance, according to whose terms the U.S.S.R. had engaged itself not to intervene in our affairs. It was a grave blow to our national sovereignty. Even the man in the street, who spoke of a new Munich, understood perfectly.

Our policy of co-operation with Russia had therefore failed. The rest followed as a natural consequence. A small country like ours obviously had no means of carrying on a struggle against a great Power on the scale of Soviet Russia. But knowing that as long as there was no world conflagration Russia would continue to subject us by using the Communist fifth column, we concluded that the only means of saving our independence was to defend the democratic regime by barring the

way to those who were trying to bolshevize the State. The Russians realized that as well as we did, so that when our attitude in regard to the Communist Party stiffened and the Muscovite plans risked being defeated, they hurried to the rescue.

Beginning with the intervention of the Kremlin in the matter of the Marshall Plan, the Communist Party, sure of being able to count on the support of Moscow, displayed a more and more intense activity with the aim of gaining power. The Slovak crisis was the most outstanding episode of this cold war. The progressive communization of the police and the Army was only another aspect of the same struggle.

But while they were strengthening their position by degrees, the Communists did not feel themselves strong enough before our desperate resistance to stifle democracy in a country where it had such deep roots. They saw themselves obliged, in the end, to have recourse to extreme measures. Now, the decision to execute a *coup d'état* could not have been taken without the consent of Moscow. Besides, the project could only be successful with the help of the U.S.S.R.

In 1945 the Communists would have been able to bolshevize Czechoslovakia without running into serious difficulties. At this time, with the exception of a small section given over to the American Army, the national territory was occupied by the Red Army, and no organized force existed in the country capable of opposing effective resistance to it. In 1946 the Communist Party was infinitely stronger than in 1948. If it hesitated to institute a totalitarian regime at a time when the circumstances were favourable, it was because it was necessary to take into account the international situation. In 1945 and 1946 Moscow did not want to compromise her relations with the Western Powers, particularly with the United States, by bringing Czechoslovakia to heel, the love of this country for democratic principles being notorious. It was the period when Soviet Russia was agreeing to compromises: she had agreed that Poland should be governed by a coalition Cabinet of which Mikolajczyk, leader of the Peasant Party, was a member. In Hungary she had permitted comparatively free elections to take place, which had brought a great victory to the Small Landholders Party. Even in Bulgaria and Roumania coalition governments had been tolerated. It was only in Yugoslavia, where a totalitarian regime had been set up by Tito, that the last traces of democracy had already disappeared.

During the Slovak crisis in the autumn of 1947 the Communists had means of action no less powerful than in February 1948. They proceeded according to a plan which they applied four months later in Prague without changing an iota. But at the moment of moving into action they drew back, doubtless because Moscow thought the time had not yet come.

If in February 1948, in Prague, the Communists went the limit, it was because Moscow had given them the go-ahead signal. There are no written documents proving this interference of Moscow in our affairs, but there exists a series of facts which are significant in the highest degree.

The unexpected arrival, at the height of the crisis, of Zorin, Vice-Commissar of Foreign Affairs and former Ambassador of the U.S.S.R. to Prague, indicated clearly that the Soviets had a hand in the matter. No one had been forewarned of his coming, neither Masaryk nor even Clementis, who was told at the last moment, so tardily that he had to suddenly leave a lunch in which he was participating to reach the airfield in time. No one knew the real motive for this visit. The official *communiqué*, according to which Zorin had considered it advisable to come to Prague to check on the deliveries of Russian wheat, could not be taken seriously. Everyone was convinced that his visit was connected with our internal political affairs.

But why had the Soviet Government sent an official personage, when there was certainly no lack of secret agents of the Cominform, not to mention its famous political police, which had installed itself in Prague some weeks before the *coup d'état*? The Russians could have only one motive: by this spectacular gesture they were bent on showing that they approved the actions of the Communists. Thus all those who evinced the least inclination to resistance were to be intimidated. The Soviets, whom the progress made by the democratic forces in Czechoslovakia had not escaped, knew that the Communist Party was not strong enough to accomplish the task imposed upon it by the Cominform. Hence the necessity for a concrete act on Moscow's part. The Soviet Press and radio did not limit themselves to reproducing the arguments which the Czechoslovak Communists used against their adversaries during the crisis; they vied with one another in proclaiming that it was necessary to liquidate the "anti-Soviet agents of domestic and foreign reaction" in Czechoslovakia, presenting this slogan as the point of view of the Soviet Government. The Czechoslovak

Communist Press did not fail to reprint these articles and declarations, emphasizing that the official opinion of Moscow must be seen in them.

During the crisis Gottwald did not take a single step without justifying it by the necessity of liquidating the enemies of the Soviet Union and the adversaries of the Communists, whom he put on the same plane. The Communists, among others the Minister of Information, Kopecky, tried to impress public opinion by declaring that the Red Army, massed on the Czechoslovak frontiers, was ready to intervene in favour of the Communists against the "reaction". Not only did the Soviet authorities never deny this purposely ambiguous news, but their propaganda did everything to give the impression that the Communists could count on the help of Moscow.

According to trustworthy information, some of which was reproduced in foreign papers, like the Zurich *Volksrecht* of February 20, new Soviet units were brought into Austria during the crisis and were garrisoned not far from the Czechoslovak frontier. Troop movements in Saxony were also reported.

The Hungarian Communists had known since February 9 that a change of regime in favour of the Communists would take place in Czechoslovakia before the end of the month. The Yugoslav and Roumanian Communists had spread similar rumours. Without doubt they had knowledge of the Cominform plan.

On February 23 I had learned that eight days earlier—that is, before our resignations—new members of the Russian Secret Police had arrived in Prague.

On February 27 a high official of the Communist Party declared during the course of a private conversation: "Our friends have given us guarantees against any eventuality". When the person to whom he was talking asked him if by "our friends" he was alluding to the Soviets, he answered without hesitation, "Who, if not the Soviets, could be our friends?"

On March 15 the new Minister of Foreign Trade affirmed: "It is to our Slavic allies, and above all to the Soviet Union, that we owe our success in surmounting the obstacles which barred the way before us, which could have prevented us from inflicting defeat upon the reaction!"

This phrase—the fact is worth noting—disappeared from the accounts reporting the declaration of my successor, who, it seemed, still lacked political experience.

Do not the few facts I have just cited demonstrate undeniably that the Communist *coup d'état* was realized with the consent and political support of the U.S.S.R.? It is to be expected that other additional proofs will supervene to establish the fact that Soviet intervention played a directing role in the crisis.

Finally there is an argument which seems to me decisive: no Communist Party in the world is authorized to take an initiative of any importance without the consent of Moscow. That should settle once and for all the question of Soviet interference in our domestic affairs.

On March 22, 1948, the Communist *coup d'état* in Czechoslovakia was the subject of a debate in the Security Council at Lake Success. Ambassador Papanek, who up to February had headed the Czechoslovak delegation to the United Nations, made a report on the events which had occurred in Czechoslovakia, and concluded: "All this proves that Czechoslovakia has been the victim of political infiltration and indirect aggression on the part of the Soviet Union, of that indirect aggression which, in 1938, Mr. Molotov recognized as just as dangerous as direct aggression. During negotiations concerning an alliance with Great Britain and France, did not Mr. Molotov declare that the treaty in question should be valid both in the case of direct aggression and of indirect aggression, that is to say of an internal *coup d'état* or an internal political change in favour of the aggressor?"

If Soviet intervention is doubted by no one, it may still be wondered why the Soviets suddenly changed their attitude towards us, beginning with the summer of 1947. In my opinion it was because the Soviets were determined above all to consolidate their "Eastern bloc" and strengthen their bastion to improve their strategic position in respect of the Western Powers. The *coup d'état* of Prague was in a large measure a military operation.

There are other very complex reasons, which may have determined and hastened the Soviet intervention.

The Russians knew that they could count on the Czechoslovaks of all parties and all social classes to bar the road to a new *Drang nach Osten* of Germany. They were not unaware, on the other hand, of the fact that if they carried on a policy directed against the Western Powers, they would not be able to rally to them anyone except the Communist minority, and that

in case of war between the Soviets and the Western democracies the majority of the population would make common cause with the latter.

Moscow did not feel the need of taking special precautions in Prague as long as the Soviet policy was distinctly anti-German.

But if during the war Stalin had called for the carving up of Germany (he had pronounced himself in favour of this solution in his conversation with Benes in December 1943), after the war Soviet policy, to oppose the Western Powers, changed direction and defended the thesis of a unified Germany, a centralized Reich being more likely to "turn Red".

From the end of 1946 signs indicative of a return of Russia to the Rapallo policy, whose culminating point was the Molotov–Ribbentrop pact, multiplied. The new tendencies did not fail to arouse grave anxiety in Czechoslovakia and Poland, even in certain Communist circles. People began to wonder whether some day Moscow would not find some advantage in satisfying German nationalism by consenting to a revision of the western frontiers of Poland in favour of the Germans and to the return of the Sudeten Germans to Czechoslovakia. In December 1947 I stopped in Warsaw for a few days on my way back from Moscow, and learned that Gomulka, Secretary-General of the Polish Communist Party, was in disgrace with Moscow because of his pronounced anti-German nationalism. During the summer of 1948 Gomulka was liquidated.

It is understandable, then, that if the Soviets intended to carry on a pro-German policy, it would be necessary for them to install a regime completely devoted to them in Prague, as in Warsaw.

For the rest, the existence of an independent democracy in Czechoslovakia was enough of itself to be embarrassing for Moscow. Passionately attached to our traditional policy of co-operation with the East and the West, we were seeking by every means to avoid being shut up within the Soviet bloc. Now, the U.S.S.R. could not admit that Czechoslovakia, the only country in Central Europe which had a common frontier with the American zone of Germany, should be a centre for the expansion of Western influence in a sector which she considered as her fief. The most simple means of parrying this danger was, of course, to suppress Czechoslovak democracy and to install in Prague a puppet government ready to obey the Kremlin's every beck and call.

The Communists of the other States of Central Europe desired the disappearance of our democracy as much as did the Russians. So long as Czechoslovakia was not transformed after the image of the other "popular democracies", of which the most perfect model (it is that no longer) was the Yugoslavia of Tito, the Czechoslovak democracy risked contaminating the neighbouring nations, all subjected to a Communist minority, all discontented with the new regime.

What we had been trying to bring about was a synthesis of the fundamental principles of political liberalism and of certain elements of collective socialism. If this political experiment, which was not without audacity, had succeeded, the expansion of Communism in Europe would have been threatened. The direction we had taken already permitted us to win several successes which indicated that it would be possible to realize the principal aims of Socialism without suppressing individual liberty. This mixed system, based on the co-existence, in the economic domain, of private businesses and, in the political domain, of civil liberties and a strengthened governmental authority, was incompatible with the totalitarian regime of a single party. The Cominform, realizing the growing danger the first successes of this system in Czechoslovakia represented for the satellite States, decided to put an end to it. It was necessary to act quickly, for if the elections fixed for May 1948 had taken place under normal conditions the democratic parties would have emerged from them considerably strengthened. At the moment when the Kremlin was reincarnating the Comintern from its ashes to crack the whip for Communism in other countries and support Russian political expansionism, it could not admit that the Communist Party should be weakened in Czechoslovakia—that is to say, in a vital region of the Russian sphere—from the triple point of view of politics, economics and strategy.

The Czechoslovak crisis was provoked shortly after the defeat suffered by the French Communists when the general strike of 1947 collapsed. The coincidence is significant. Elsewhere the Italian elections were to take place in April 1948, and a Communist success appeared scarcely probable. At the same time, a certain tension was already characterizing the relations between Moscow and Tito, although the affair had not yet become public. In Poland it had been judged necessary not only to liquidate the peasant and Catholic opposition, but also

to purge the Communist Party by expelling its "nationalist" elements. In these conditions an intervention against the Czechoslovak democracy seemed to impose itself.

Moscow was well aware that the installation of a Communist regime in Prague would be followed at most only by diplomatic protests, while the Communists were sure of the complete and effective support of the Kremlin. Even in the economic field we had from our Western friends only very limited help; while Stalin was sending to Czechoslovakia more wheat than Gottwald had ever asked for, I did not even succeed in obtaining commercial credits from the United States, although American Ambassador Laurence Steinhardt, realizing the political importance of such a gesture, intervened urgently in our favour with the highest authorities of Washington.

Even inside the country we were far from having at our disposal means of action as powerful as those of our opponents, since they occupied all the key positions. In the international domain we were practically isolated, while the Communists enjoyed the support of a great Power. The fight was uneven, and we knew it. Were we wrong, in these conditions, to refuse to submit to an enemy infinitely stronger?

I have thought over this question at length, all the more since I am conscious of the responsibility which I incurred in the recent developments in my country. I think today, as I thought at the time of the crisis, that we could not have acted otherwise. The fight, after all, was not hopeless. Here is why:

Since 1947 the population had been turning away from the Communists more and more. Youth, disappointed by their violent and dishonest methods, had assumed, in the immense majority, a distinctly hostile attitude towards the Muscovites. A considerable number of workers had returned to Social Democracy and to National Socialism. The peasants, realizing that the agrarian reform would be followed by the progressive collectivization of the countryside, became increasingly hostile to the Communist Party. In such an atmosphere free elections would have sufficed to assure our victory. Thus all our efforts tended to prevent our adversaries from taking measures likely to compromise the honesty of the balloting.

Moreover, since the autumn of 1947—the period at which we fought back against the offensive of the Communist Party—we had regularly won successes which had obliged the Communists to give way. We had blocked their plans in the matter of the

tax on millionaires, in the Slovak crisis, in the fight for control of the Social Democratic Party and in the case of the treaty with Bulgaria.

During the year 1947 our situation had without doubt appreciably improved. No one would have understood it if, with such results to our credit, we had suddenly thrown in the sponge on the eve of the elections.

It is true that no argument in favour of the possible success of active resistance could count any longer if, violating the rules of the game, our antagonists had recourse to violence. The possibility, certainly, could not be ruled out; it was not at all certain, on the other hand, that the Communists would go so far as a putsch. We had the best reasons in the world for knowing that it was not they, but Moscow, which would make the final decision—and it is always difficult to foresee the reactions of the Kremlin unerringly.

The hypothesis of a *coup d'état* excepted, our hope of winning was therefore not unjustified. It went without saying, alas, that if the Communists, backed up by Moscow, resorted to direct action, our cause was lost. But even in this case we had a duty to resist, to show that in Czechoslovakia a totalitarian regime could not be imposed except by violence. For the future of the country it was of the greatest importance to banish all ambiguity. A defeat can strike down a people; it does not break them; a surrender shakes their faith in their own destiny. Today more than ever I remain convinced that we were right to take up the combat and to continue it to the end. We could not, by a passive attitude and a policy of perpetual concessions, permit our adversaries to seize the power without striking a blow. There are reverses which incite the conquered to redouble their fighting ardour and which can lead them to victory. Dare I hope that this is one of these?

CHAPTER XLII

MY FLIGHT

WE HAD KNOWN for a long time that in the event of a Communist victory we leaders of the Democratic parties would have no other course than that of taking refuge abroad. We would have had to be naïve to believe that if we stayed in the country, even though we discontinued all political activity, we would have any chance of escaping persecution. Sooner or later we would have been arrested. Not only does a totalitarian regime refuse to tolerate the slightest opposition, but any former adversary, even when he has been reduced to impotence, risks seeing himself some day being accused under one pretext or another and of being "liquidated" in consequence. Even those who fall into line are not safe; examples are not lacking to prove that.

During the fortnight which followed the *coup d'état*, the Communists had told me several times—very discreetly, of course—that I had nothing to fear. They went so far as to let me know that though the authorities had relieved me of my post as lecturer at the University of Prague, they might possibly reverse that measure. The Communist leaders knew me well enough not to count on my conversion, from which I deduced that their message was above all an indication that they were anxious to reassure me to dissuade me from continuing my political activity abroad.

For me that was one reason more for hastening my departure.

Already, while the battle against the Communists was going on, I had resolved to exile myself in the event of a defeat of the Democrats. However, I had forbidden myself to make the least preparation so long as we had a chance of winning: an indiscretion would have been enough to start a panic. It was for this reason that I had not even dared send my family to a safe place.

Immediately after the *coup d'état* I thought about escaping. It was extremely difficult for anyone to leave Czechoslovak territory. Even before February 25 the frontiers had been hermetically closed, and passports were no longer valid without the express authorization of the Ministry of the Interior. The frontier between Czechoslovakia and the American zone was

comparatively short and easy to watch. Not only had troops been massed along the frontier, but a band of territory twenty kilometres wide was subjected to strict surveillance by police and soldiers, who were constantly asking for your papers. A few days later it was not permitted to move about in this zone at all without a special permit. A few persons succeeded in spite of everything in passing into Germany, mostly on skis. Not being good at sports, and, moreover, too tall and too well known to pass unnoticed, it was necessary for me to seek some other means.

The preparations for my flight were complicated by the fact that I was watched day and night by the police and that everyone I saw was noted down. The watch became more and more strict: after a short time a plain-clothes man was assigned to ride with me when I went out in my car.

How, in spite of all the difficulties, I succeeded in getting into contact with friends who had been good enough to assume the burden of extricating me from my difficult situation is a chapter of which certain details must for the moment remain undisclosed: too many persons to whom I owe infinite gratitude would otherwise be compromised. In any case, once our preparations were completed, on March 19, my wife and children left the house on foot. I followed them half an hour later, on the pretext of going to see a friend in the centre of the town. It was about seven in the evening.

Contrary to my custom, I entered into conversation with my "guardian angel". I asked him why the police were giving themselves so much trouble on behalf of the resigned Ministers. He answered me politely; he had orders that the police were concerned solely with our personal safety, and he was there to protect me against the "insults of the crowds". It was a quite useless precaution, I pointed out to him, judging from the fact that I had often moved about on foot without ever being molested, and that, on the contrary, I had met only sympathy everywhere. I added, with an indulgent smile, that I understood perfectly the reason for all these measures, and that all these precautions were unnecessary, since I had not the least desire to go into exile for a second time. I did not fail, moreover, to point out to my guard that if the desire came to me to escape his company he would not be able to hinder me in any way. My guard took this observation for a good joke, and laughed heartily. Before going into "my friend's" house I

offered him a cigarette to help him kill time. He thanked me very politely. He did not know that he would have all the more time to kill because the house had two doors.

When my "protector" had finished his cigarette I was in another car, on my way to freedom. Or so, at least, I hoped.

It was only when we had left the capital that the man who was at the wheel told me where we were going. " You will spend the night in a wood with some good friends," he explained to me, "and tomorrow morning you will leave in a plane which will come to pick you up."

During the whole night I waited with my companions in the wood. It was cold, and we were all a little nervous. At dawn all ears were alert, but no humming motor was to be heard. Absolute calm—a despairing calm—reigned all about us. I was hungry: I nibbled a bar of chocolate, the only thing I had brought with me in the way of food.

The day passed thus; then it was night again—a night still more horrible than its predecessor. We were frozen. We were afraid to walk about for fear of making the leaves rustle under our feet and drawing attention to our presence. There was still less question of making a fire. For our disappearance had certainly been reported, and the police were organizing searches for us in all the frontier regions.

We took refuge at last in a hut of branches about four and a half feet by six. As a shelter it was a last resource, but it was hidden by the trees and was strategically situated, if I may put it that way, on the edge of the meadow which was to serve as an airfield. From it we could maintain, turn by turn, an extensive enough watch over the surroundings.

When dawn appeared we were thunderstruck to see a score of persons approaching from the field. The group spread out at the edge of the woods, keeping in the shelter of the trees.

"It's the police!" I exclaimed. "We have been betrayed."

"No, it is not," one of my companions answered. "Don't you see that it is a unit of the labour brigade? It is Sunday today; the men are going to drill."

I was hardly convinced; and when some of the men approached the hut in which we were hidden we saw that they were policemen, very sketchily disguised. Some of them had only taken the trouble to provide themselves with shovels and pickaxes, others had neglected to button up their civilian coats,

so their uniforms could be seen. I at once understood that if the police sent after us had placed themselves under the trees, it was in order not to alarm the pilot who was to come for us. I had been only too right; they were on our scent.

A few minutes later the sound of a motor was heard: it was our plane. We shivered in our boots.

The plane flew over the meadow once, twice, then it regained altitude and disappeared. Had the pilot, in spite of everything, seen the counterfeit labour volunteers, or having received no recognition signal from the ground, had he believed that we had been unable to reach the rendezvous?

For us it was the end. At any moment now we would be arrested. No longer having anything to lose, I resolved to make an attempt which seemed condemned in advance. I left the hut in a casual manner, calmly lighted a cigarette, and then, with an air of assurance, I walked across the fields towards the first road I saw. I must have presented a curious appearance in my city clothes, on this spring morning, in the heart of the country. I passed, very dignified, within sixty feet of the police, without daring to turn. As soon as I had entered the woods, sure now of not being seen, I took to my heels.

To what did I owe my salvation? I really do not know. Doubtless the police thought I was one of them, a high official of the Ministry of the Interior, whose arrival they expected. In fact, as I learned later, the chief of the political police in person arrived on the spot shortly afterwards to direct the operation. He had been set on being present when the trap was sprung which would permit him not only to arrest the fugitives—this part of the programme was almost completely realized—but also to get his hands on the plane which our friends had sent from abroad. I suppose that because he had reserved the leading part in the play for himself, he had given instructions not to start anything before he arrived.

After running for half an hour I stopped to get my bearings. I did not know the region. But I had one aim: to get as far as possible from the meadow. Therefore, I kept on walking, turning my back to the place of our rendezvous. I came to a railway, which I followed in this direction until, five hours later, I was finally able to sit down on a station bench.

The people turned to look at me: my clothes were not exactly impeccable, and I had not shaved for three days. The unknown solitary walker who was myself was not likely to

inspire much confidence, and as, moreover, I feared being recognized, I avoided speaking to anyone.

At least I knew at last where I was. In the waiting-room a map allowed me to ascertain where I was. My problems, however, were still far from being solved: if I had enough money with me to enable me to make a long trip across the country I was hardly decided as to my destination. Go to proved friends? Most of these lived in regions where I was too well known to be able to remain unnoticed for long. Leave at random for some province where I had not been for a long time, and then from there get into touch with my friends? That was a solution which still had its dangers. I hesitated a few moments, then I decided on the latter course, counting a little, I admit, on my good luck.

While I was waiting for my train I noticed a woman looking at me with great attention. When the train started she was still on the platform. She followed me with her eyes, and big tears ran down her cheeks. She was holding a handkerchief, which she waved weakly, as though to say farewell.

I reached my destination without having been recognized. When I succeeded in getting in touch with the friends who had helped me prepare my escape they could not believe their eyes. They had been convinced that I had been arrested at the same time as my companions in flight. In fact I had missed it by a hair's-breadth.

Some day I hope to be able to tell the sequel of this story and to thank all those who, by their courage and devotion, permitted me to carry out my second escape successfully.

I will not say how glad I was to find my family again in France, my wife's country, where, an *émigré* for the second time, I was received with a cordiality and delicacy which almost made me forget I was an exile. I had the pleasure of meeting again several French friends to whom I owed my liberty, and of expressing my gratitude to them. In 1940 also it had been thanks to the courage of a captain of the French Navy that I was able to reach England with six hundred Czechoslovaks, two days before the arrival of the Germans in Bordeaux: this patriot had, in fact, chosen to disobey Darlan to join General de Gaulle.

In spite of my disappointment, in spite of the numberless difficulties which I had had to surmount in order to cross the frontier, I do not regret having been forced to spend a little

more time in my country. While I was at home in Prague I was practically cut off from the world. Now, while I was hiding in preparation for my second escape, I was able to have many contacts with persons of all groups and all parties, which permitted me to follow closely the development of public opinion.

What struck me first and moved me deeply, was the ardour of all those whom I asked to help me. With some very rare exceptions, they were persons whom I had never seen and who were often neither of my circle nor of my party Not one of them refused to help me, although they realized the risks they ran in doing so.

Immediately after my flight a warrant for my arrest had been issued, and the police machinery had been put into action. The wireless and the newspapers constantly threatened with severe penalties all those who had knowledge of a plan of escape or who, directly or indirectly, helped in an escape. The danger to which I exposed those who assisted me was all the greater because the ranks of the Communist fifth column were growing daily by the adherence of opportunists who the day before were still on the other side of the barricades. From this point of view the situation was infinitely more delicate than during the war, for then only the Germans of the Reich and of the Sudeten area and a minute handful of Czech traitors were able to play the role of denouncers.

It is necessary to imagine the atmosphere of terror which then reigned to measure fully the disinterestedness and spirit of sacrifice of all those who, through pure patriotism, saved me. The poorest persons made it a point of honour to shelter me in the best possible conditions, and they were never willing to accept the slightest sum in repayment. It was during these critical days that, after having taken the measure of the people of Czechoslovakia at close range, I became convinced that they possess principles solid enough to permit them once more to rise and stand erect.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE NEW DAY

IT HAD BEEN a long time since a feeling of revolt against the new regime had succeeded to the stupor of the first days which followed the *coup d'état.* With a surprising realism and good sense, the common people with whom I was in touch in my retreat judged the situation with much more clear-sightedness than most of the intellectuals and politicians. No one was fooled. The "popular democracy", they had quickly understood, was nothing other than a camouflaged Soviet protectorate. An old workman confided to me one day: "National independence? They talk about it all the time; they are playing at governing, but they know very well that they are only puppets and that Moscow is pulling the strings." A woman compared Gottwald to Hacha in my presence: "The Communists wanted to hang Hacha because he submitted to the Germans. But what is Gottwald doing? Is not he bowing before Stalin as Hacha did before Hitler?" A peasant complained bitterly of the requisitions of wheat, and said to me: "During the war the best of everything we had was exported to Germany. Now everything takes the road to Russia." I heard words like these every day. A minor official pushed the parallel farther: "Our Communists are showing themselves as zealous as Henlein's followers during the war; they want to anticipate the wishes of their masters in Moscow."

Public opinion thus lumped the Czechoslovak Communists and the Russians together in the same aversion. A peasant said to me one day: "I see no difference between the imperialism of the Tsars and that of Stalin. The Tsars also granted a certain autonomy to the Poles and the Finns, but in reality the power was held by envoys from St. Petersburg. Gottwald is in a way the Ambassador of Stalin. Formerly we liked the Russians very much. But today! . . . You see clearly that they are oppressing us exactly like the Germans during the war, and yet the real terror has not begun. It will come, I have no illusions about that. The Germans also smiled on us at the beginning."

For these fine people history was repeating itself: only the names and the labels were changing. And it was pathetic to

note to what an extent the regime of oppression was familiar to them. A student, returning from a "spontaneous" demonstration organized by the Communists, in which he had been compelled to take part despite his disgust, could not help laughing as he said: "You who have not lived through the German occupation of the country cannot savour the tragi-comedy which we are viewing at this moment. When our chiefs had led us in a herd into the square and I saw the orator gesticulating and roaring as he announced 'An era of happiness due to the popular democracy', I thought for a moment that I saw about me the sad and desperate faces of my comrades as at times when I had been present at Nazi demonstrations. If, in place of the Communist orator, they had given us Moravec,* there would not have been much difference. The same promises, the same enthusiasm, which rang false, the same discipline of a crowd kept in awe of the machine-guns. The likeness was so great that I wanted to laugh and cry at the same time."

In the schools the children received the propaganda with which they were deluged with the same scepticism and the same irony. The son of a man who sheltered me for some time, a boy of thirteen, told me one evening that he had never enjoyed going to school so much as since the *coup d'état.* When his father, astonished, asked for an explanation, the boy answered: "It is because we feel ourselves much more united than before. We cannot say anything when they tell us lies, but we know that no one believes them, that our professor is forced to tell lies which he does not believe either, unless he is a Communist. Many of our professors who were very strict before, and of whom we were afraid, treat us like comrades now. We no longer have the right to say what we think, but we know that we are all thinking the same things, and that is good."

As soon as the Communist regime had established itself the teaching of history changed. I heard from the same young boy that a professor did not hesitate to affirm that in 1918 we owed our liberation, not to the Allies, but to the Soviet Revolution; not to Masaryk, but to Lenin. The father refused to believe that a professor could distort the facts in so gross a fashion. But the lad insisted that it was indeed so, and he ran to find a magazine for youth which the Communists had been distributing in the schools since 1947—that is to say, well before the

* Moravec was a Czech military expert who collaborated with the Germans.

coup d'état. In an article about the thirtieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution the farmer read with stupefaction that the revolution of Lenin had been the decisive cause of the German defeat in 1918, and that without November 7, 1917 (the day when the Bolshevik uprising began), there would never have been an October 28, 1918 (the date of the liberaton of Czechoslovakia). And the young scholar added: "We had a good laugh when we read that. We know very well that it is just the opposite that is true, and that if the French, the English and the Americans won the war, it was *in spite of* the Russian Revolution."

The father was clearly satisfied with the observations of his son. "They won't win them over any more than the Germans did," he said. "Only, it is necessary that we help our children not to forget the truth. I went to a bookstore yesterday to buy the works of Masaryk and Benes, because I foresaw that, like last time, they would disappear from circulation very quickly. Unfortunately, I arrived too late: two days after the *coup d'état,* the store had sold all its copies."

In the evening we listened to the foreign broadcasts. It was just like war-time. The weekly commentaries of the B.B.C. by Sir Bruce Lockhart, who had been a member of the British Embassy in Prague for several years, were particularly popular. After a certain time the Government forbade listening to foreign broadcasts, which, of course, prevented no one from doing it. Just like war-time. Better, for during the German occupation people had learned how to go about it. And I saw several mimeographed newspapers edited from the news reports broadcast by Paris, London and New York, which were passed from hand to hand. Good news was received with veritable transports of joy. What I mean by "good news" was, for instance, the despatches announcing the defeat of the Italian Communists in the April 18 elections, or the declaration of Bidault stigmatizing the new regime. "You see," said those about me, "the French still like us. . . . They understand very well that if we are reduced to this, it is because we have chosen our neighbours badly. Is that our fault?"

It is true, alas, that there are some dark blots on this picture: denunciations were numerous; many opportunists became turncoats. On the other hand, a stirring solidarity united all true democrats, who drew back before no sacrifice when it was a question of helping friends in danger.

The more the bitterness towards Russia grew, the more eyes turned to the West. The more the fist of the dictators made itself felt, the heavier the political and social oppression, the more Czechs took refuge in the hope that "it can't go on", that the Western democracies would come to the rescue. It was a good sign, for in a country like ours, continually threatened in its national existence, an exaggerated optimism and a fanatic faith are necessary to the nation to enable it to survive.

Every day many persons tried to cross the frontier to take refuge in a free country. Some of them succeeded, others were less fortunate. Every time people learned of the escape of a politician who had taken an active part in the struggle against Communism joy was general. How many times these same words have been repeated to me: "How fortunate that several of you have been able to get away, in spite of all the police precautions! Here we are forced to keep quiet. Let us hope you succeed in your turn! It is you who will speak for us."

Never have I been more conscious of the immense responsibility which falls upon us, the politicians who have means for resuming the fight, than at such moments.

And today, in the name of my exiled comrades, as well as my own, I believe I can affirm that the freedom which we have again found as individuals has no meaning except in the measure that it serves us to deliver all our people from the totalitarian yoke. It is only then that we will lay down our arms. For the present the battle continues.

THE WARNING SIGNAL

In February 1948 the Iron Curtain was lowered before Czechoslovakia, which from that time forward was included in the Soviet bloc. Unable to count on help from any great Power, she was not strong enough to divert the danger of Soviet domination by her own means. The story of the *coup d'état* of February 1948 proved that Czechoslovakia, which, by its democratic tradition and its general conception of life, is closely linked to the Western World, could not be communized except with the help of Soviet Russia and under pressure from the Kremlin.

The resignation of several Ministers, which in democratic countries is a normal means of demonstrating disagreement with the Government's policy, was declared a crisis against the nation. The non-Communist Ministers who tried to ensure respect for legality were considered traitors and were outlawed. With the help of a communized police, and through methods of political and social terrorism, the new Gottwald Government took power. There was no longer anything which could prevent the bolshevization of the country by violence.

All the events which followed the February *coup d'état* were only its logical consequences. After having consolidated their positions in all public organizations and institutions in May of the same year, the Communists proceeded to hold new elections which were nothing but a sham. They permitted only a single list of candidates, and although all the candidates of the non-Communist parties were selected by themselves, they did not constitute even one-third of the candidates nominated. Moreover, they used every means to prevent the electors from showing their disagreement with the new regime: the only choice was between the official list and a blank ballot; the ballot-boxes were arranged in such a manner as permitted the officials present to see which kind of vote had been cast. Not to vote for the Government list was considered an act of treason; it was recommended that votes should be cast in groups and publicly. Thousands of citizens considered "unsure" had been

struck from the electoral roll. The Committees charged with checking the voters and counting the votes were made up by the Communists, of persons who were completely devoted to them. In spite of all these precautions, many courageous citizens voted against the official list by casting a blank vote. According to the Ministry of the Interior their number amounted to 10 per cent; in reality there were many more. On the basis of many reports coming from all sections it may be estimated as at least 20 per cent. In no other country subject to a Communist dictatorship has such a large number of electors voted against the single list proposed by the Government.

On June 7, 1948, the President of the Republic, Eduard Benes, resigned. Officially this decision was explained by reasons of health, but no one was ignorant of the fact that Benes had renounced his post to demonstrate his disagreement with the new Constitution voted at the beginning of May, which he had refused to sign because it was in flagrant contradiction with all democratic principles. A week later Gottwald was elected President of the Republic and Antonin Zapotocky became Premier.

The Communists attempted to make the country believe that they still respected Benes, all the more so since his popularity increased in proportion with the heightening of Communist oppression. He was then at his private estate in Sezimovo Usti, having left the Hradcany in Prague on February 27, two days after the formation of the new Gottwald Government. He was to see the capital only twice more, at the time of the funeral of Jan Masaryk and during April 1948, when he took part in the celebration of the six hundredth anniversary of the founding of Charles University in Prague: on this occasion he made a brief speech in which he stressed his faith in the idea of liberty. Unless one counts his letter of abdication in June, this speech was his last public demonstration. He retired with Mme. Benes to Sezimovo Usti, where he lived until his death, isolated from the world and closely guarded by the Communist police.

He received only a few visits. The names of everyone who came to see him were carefully taken down by the police officers who surrounded his house. In his conversations with persons he thought worthy of trust he did not hide his bitterness towards the Communist tyranny, which he condemned in the most violent terms. But he no longer possessed either the physical strength or the practical possibility to make his feelings public.

At the end of August he was attacked by another apoplectic stroke, to which he succumbed on September 3, 1948.

The fate of this statesman, gifted with remarkable qualities and profoundly attached to the idea of liberty, was tragic. He was one of the greatest diplomats and the best foreign ministers of modern times. Unfortunately, his country, which, because of its geographical position, suffered the shocks of international convulsions with a very special violence twice under his presidency, was crushed by the great storm which passed over Europe and burst upon this little nation, left alone, in the hour of danger, before a powerful enemy. Twice struck down by catastrophes caused by the conflict of great Powers, Eduard Benes had no opportunity to show the full measure of his abilities. He died alone, bitter and bruised, but without having lost hope of seeing justice triumph.

His funeral was the occasion for imposing national demonstrations. The whole country paid tribute to him and to the idea which he had defended. In spite of the scope of the police measures taken by the Communists, hundreds of thousands of men and women came from the provinces to pay tribute to the President whom they loved and in whom they had placed all their hopes. In an impressive silence the hearse passed through a weeping throng. The death of Benes assumed the significance of a symbol.

A year has passed since free democratic Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. What is the balance sheet of this year of Soviet-Communist domination?

From the political point of view all civil rights and liberties have been abolished. The secrecy of the postal service is no longer respected. The private life of citizens is subjected to constant surveillance. Searches of homes are commonplace. Arrests by police without authorization of judicial bodies are becoming more and more frequent. The police hold arrested persons for months without bringing them before the courts. According to reports from a reliable source, in many cases questionings are accompanied by blows and tortures often no less brutal than the methods used by the Nazis. The judiciary has been reorganized according to the principles of "popular democracy"—that is to say that the independence of judges no longer exists and the courts are subject to the orders of the Ministry of Justice, which for practical purposes means the Secretariat of the Communist Party. In October 1948 a law

was passed "for the defence of the State", which puts citizens at the mercy of the executive authorities. Several concentration camps, called "labour camps", have been established.

In all public organizations and institutions purges are going on, one after the other, which do not spare even members of the Communist Party itself. Persons affected by these measures, if they are not sent to the mines or employed on construction work or in agriculture, often find it impossible to get work owing to the fact that only the Labour Office has the right to assign anyone to a job. Through this lack of security the Government keeps all citizens in a state of fear, which is experienced even by the members of the Communist Party, who watch each other. A secret committee directed by the agents of the Cominform keeps watch over the Czechoslovak political police and the Secretariat of the Communist Party. Moscow, distrustful of the Communists of all other countries, to obviate a re-awakening of national spirit, often entrusts the most important posts to foreign Communists. In Prague this usually means persons of German or Hungarian origin, who are less likely to come under the influence of Czech and Slovak national groups.

The whole Press is on a leash. On the morrow of the *coup d'état* the newspapers of the Democratic parties, which continued to come out, usually under their old names, resembled the Communist papers to a confusing extent, and often tried to gain favour by being more royalist than the king.

In the intellectual and artistic fields all liberty disappeared. In elementary, secondary and higher education, young people were indoctrinated with the principles of Leninism and Stalinism, proclaimed as the only admissible scientific theories. The whole national history was hurriedly revised. The Nazis had sought to persuade the Czechs that it had always been to their interest to be part of the German Reich; the Communists taught that the Czechs and Slovaks owed their liberation, not to Masaryk, to Wilson and to Clemenceau, but to the Bolshevik revolution and to Lenin and Stalin. As under the German domination, the works of Masaryk, Benes and other great Democrats disappeared from circulation. Text-books were adapted to the new regime. An effort was made to sever all links with Western culture. Only the three upper classes of the French and English high-schools in Prague were allowed to continue in existence, which amounted practically to the suppression of

these institutions. Only Communist newspapers and magazines from the Western countries are on sale. Moscow seeks to exercise an exclusive influence not only in the political domain, but also in the cultural domain.

The Communists are bearing down particularly on higher education, knowing that the University students are violently anti-Communist. Their methods are more subtle than those of the Nazis, who simply closed the Czech universities. The Communists have not suppressed higher education, but they restrict it to the young people of their choice. On the pretext of admitting to institutions of higher learning only those who are fit for intellectual work, they compel all students to take examinations on their ideas and their political knowledge, thus eliminating all those whom they consider "unsure". To enter a University young people have to present a certificate from the Committee of Action of the secondary school from which they come, from the national committee of their community, and several other papers whose purpose is to weed them out on purely political grounds. Through this system all undesirables find access to higher education forbidden to them. In the first months of 1949 the number of students already enrolled in the universities who were expelled from them amounted to 10,000. Most of them were sent to the mines, where they were assigned to particularly hard manual labour. On the other hand, the students affected by this measure were replaced by young labourers to whom a sketchy examination was given after three months of preparation.

It goes without saying that theatres, moving pictures, concerts and exhibitions are subject to constant surveillance, and are obliged to conform to the official conception of art.

From the economic point of view nationalization is practically total: 95 per cent of industry, including small businesses, is nationalized. Since the few private establishments which still exist are subject to all kinds of control and pressures from the authorities, it can be said that all industry is run by the State. Likewise all wholesale trade is now in the hands of the State. As for retail trade, it is being ruined systematically for the benefit of the State-operated wholesale trade and of the co-operatives, which are subject to the strictest regulations and are operated by Communists.

In the country districts collectivization of the land, which, according to a governmental plan which is still being kept

secret, is to be brought about within the framework of the Five-Year Plan, is being gradually realized. Peasants are no longer able to get agricultural machinery, seed, fertilizer, etc., except through co-operatives which are in the hands of the Communists. Contrary to the law still in force, which permits property to be owned privately up to an area of fifty hectares,* properties even smaller than this are being arbitrarily confiscated and distributed. The systematic campaign waged against the so-called "Kulaks" has the object of splitting up the land into such small units that increasingly meagre productivity will force collectivization.

The economic situation has degenerated considerably. Trade with the Western countries, which represents 60 per cent of the foreign trade of Czechoslovakia, is running into growing difficulties. Trade with the Anglo-Saxon countries is declining particularly. The United States has cut off or appreciably reduced its exports to Russia and her satellite countries of several raw materials and a certain number of manufactured articles particularly important to Czechoslovak economy.

Towards the end of 1948 the shortage of foreign exchange made itself felt in catastrophic fashion. That is why the Soviet Government found itself compelled to grant a loan to the Prague Government, partly in gold, which the country needed to pay for its imports coming from the Western countries. This loan was only an expedient, which did not solve the problem.

In spite of the necessity for Czechoslovakia to increase its trade with the Western countries, the Soviets insist that she continue to export a large part of her products to Russia, especially those of heavy industry. According to some reports 50 per cent, according to others 70 per cent, of the output of heavy industry takes the road to Russia. Even light industry, particularly textiles and shoes, is obliged to deliver an increasingly large proportion of its products to the U.S.S.R. Exports of these articles to the Western countries are thus diminished, and the internal market is deprived of them. At the time of the Nazi hegemony people talked about the "Raubwirtschaft".† What the Soviets are doing in Central Europe is nothing other than organized brigandage. Moscow directs the economy of this region in conformity with her own interests, taking its war potential into account before everything else, with no regard for the needs of her satellites.

* About 225 acres.

† Economy of brigandage.

The fall in production is not due solely to the increasing difficulties which foreign trade is experiencing. If production is not occurring in sufficient quantity and if the quality is unsatisfactory, it is also because the radical nationalization of industry and commerce and the progressive collectivization of the soil have upset the economic structure of the country. Moreover, the increasingly heavy bureaucratic machinery and excessive centralization is pressing down on the entire economic life of the nation.

The social factor also accounts to a large extent for the precarious condition of the country's economy. Workers are obliged to do the same amount of work for lower salaries; strikes, considered as sabotage, are forbidden. The Unions are no longer anything more than instruments of Government policy. The peasants, knowing that, on one pretext or another, their properties may be taken from them at any moment, and finding themselves compelled to deliver to the State almost all their production, have become indifferent about their work.

The decline of production is bringing about a general reduction of the living standard of all social groups with the exception of the governmental circles, which are privileged. Certain indications permit the belief that the Soviets are not displeased at seeing the country becoming impoverished; Moscow has no interest in keeping the countries of Central Europe on a higher level than that of the Soviet Republics. Moreover, the social levelling of the population facilitates the domination of a totalitarian dictatorship.

The rapidity with which the general condition of the country has deteriorated during the last year strikes all those who visit the country without preconceived ideas. Many of them report that even the Communist masses are disappointed. Discontent is increasing at all social levels. The "popular democracy" has destroyed democracy and imposed slavery on the populace.

The subjection of Czechoslovakia is far from affecting the Czechoslovak people alone. It is an event on a European scale. The question has been asked whether, after the Communist *coup d'état* in Prague, the balance of power between the Western Powers and the Eastern Bloc underwent a change or not. It is true that immediately after the war the influence of the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia was greater than that of all the other Powers and that without the effective aid of the Western Powers, Czechoslovakia was incapable of preventing this pre-

dominance. But it is no less true that it was only after having installed in the country a Government completely at its orders that the Soviets became masters of the whole of Central Europe. As long as Czechoslovakia, a highly industrialized country, was not subject to the will of Moscow, Russia could not make of Central Europe an economic bloc sufficiently productive to increase her war potential by any considerable amount.

From the strategic point of view Russia gained incontestable advantages by getting hold of Czechoslovakia, from the fact that her army thenceforward disposed of the western frontier of Bohemia. On the day when the Red Army evacuates Germany and finds itself no longer on the Elbe and in Saxony, it will still be nearly at the heart of Germany by means of Bohemia, which is only 300 kilometres* from the French frontier. It is certain that the balance of power between Eastern Europe and Western Europe would have been changed if the Western Powers possessed in Czechoslovakia a position analogous to that which they occupy in Austria, where their influence counteracts that of the Russians, all the more so as Czechoslovakia penetrates deeply into the valley of the Danube and is the direct neighbour of the Soviet Union. The communization of Czechoslovakia has considerably strengthened the position of the U.S.S.R. in Europe.

The fall of Czechoslovakia produced a shattering impression on Europe and the whole world. On the day after the *coup d'état* the United States, Great Britain and France published a common declaration in which their Governments declared "that thanks to a crisis artificially and deliberately provoked certain methods already exploited elsewhere have been used to bring about a suspension of parliamentary institutions and the establishment of a disguised dictatorship by a single party under the cloak of a government of national union. They can only condemn the development the consequences of which must surely be disastrous to the Czechoslovak people who again proved during the sufferings of the second World War their devotion to the cause of liberty."

The French Foreign Minister, M. Georges Bidault, underlined this solemn declaration by a moving address delivered before the French National Assembly on February 28, 1948, in which he said:

"This is not the first time, and the precedent is not very

* Less than 200 miles.

distant, that a Czechoslovak tragedy has sounded in Europe and in the world like a poignant warning signal. Once again the sky of Bohemia is overcast, once again the hearts of free and peace-loving men have become heavy as they read the despatches from Prague.... It is necessary to admit that what has just happened does not leave unchanged either the international situation, already troubling, or the unstable balance of the world. Once more the problem of the survival of democracy founded on liberty is raised.... It is not possible to believe that moves on the international chessboard can continue in this fashion without bringing about a situation which can rapidly become dangerous."

If the fall of Czechoslovakia reverberated in Europe like a cry of warning, it also provided a precious lesson. After what has happened in Prague one may ask if it is possible to arrive at an understanding with the Soviets by the normal methods used among free and democratic peoples. No other country has made as many efforts to reach an honest understanding with Soviet Russia, no other nation is so deeply Russophile, no other land of Central Europe has carried out so progressive a social policy. To so much goodwill, Moscow answered with an act of violence which was as brutal as it was cynical. If Czechoslovakia failed, who can hope to reach an understanding with the masters of the Kremlin?

In this sense the events in Czechoslovakia should serve as a lesson to the whole world. The Western Powers, realizing the gravity of the events which had just occurred in Prague, answered by tightening their ranks to defend themselves against Soviet expansionism. In March 1948, a month after the Communist *coup d'état* in Prague, the pact of Brussels was signed, which united Great Britain, France, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg in a common defence against any aggressor. A year after the subjection of Czechoslovakia by Moscow, the Atlantic Pact was signed.

When Hitler, on March 15, 1939, occupied Prague, he strengthened his position by this new conquest, but at the same time he made impossible the policy of "appeasement" which up to that date had won him so many easy successes. Without going too far into analogies, it may be said that the subjection of Czechoslovakia has convinced the Western world of the necessity of opposing a firm and energetic policy to Soviet dynamism.

The Czechoslovak people are enduring sufferings and privations in no way inferior to those which were imposed upon them under the domination of the Nazis. But the more the brutality of the new regime increases, the more their resistance grows and the more they aspire to their liberation. A nation which since the fifteenth century has aroused the conscience of the world by defending the idea of liberty, a nation which for a thousand years has been struggling for its national existence and independence, cannot long support the yoke of foreign domination. The new ordeal through which Czechoslovakia is passing today will only strengthen her attachment to the ideal proclaimed by T. G. Masaryk, her first President, and her hope of seeing a free Czechoslovakia reborn in a free Europe.

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Note.—All subject entries refer to Czechoslovakia unless otherwise stated