CZECHOSLOVAKIA

REPORT ON THE GERMAN MINORITY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA; THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD NATIONAL SOCIALISM AND GERMANY

860F.00/358a

The Secretary of State to the Chargé in Czechoslovakia (Benton)

No. 321 WASHINGTON, April 4, 1934.

Sir: A thorough understanding of the attitude of the German speaking population in Czechoslovakia toward the Czechoslovak Government and toward the governments of neighboring countries would appear to be of the utmost importance in relation to present and future developments in Central Europe. You are requested, therefore, to prepare and to submit to the Department a report in regard to the political and economic status of the German speaking inhabitants of Czechoslovakia, their influence upon the internal and foreign policies of the Government, their attitude toward recent developments in neighboring countries, the trend of political opinion among them, and such other related matters as may, in your opinion, serve to throw light upon the influence which they may be expected to exert in respect to possible future political developments in Central Europe.

Very truly yours, For the Secretary of State:

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

860F.00/363

The Chargé in Czechoslovakia (Benton) to the Secretary of State

No. 170 PRAGUE, May 5, 1934.

[Received May 21.]

Sir: In compliance with your Instruction No. 321 of April 4th last, I have the honor to transmit herewith the original and four copies of a report I have prepared with regard to the German minority in Czechoslovakia.

1 In Instruction No. 343, June 28, 1934, the Chargé was commended for this despatch. The instruction stated: "It contains precisely the information which was required by the Department and your clear and comprehensive analysis of that information is of great value, in that it contributes to a proper understanding of an important element in the political situation in Central Europe."
This report is divided into eight parts as follows: (1) Historical Résumé and Statistical Data; (2) Political Parties; (3) Influence of the German Minority over the Internal and Foreign Policies of the Czechoslovak Government; (4) Economic Status of the German Minority; (5) Attitude of the Czechs toward the German Minority, and vice versa; (6) Attitude of the German Minority toward National Socialism and Germany; (7) National Socialist and pro-Hitler elements among the German Minority; (8) Summary.

I have endeavored in part six to give a true picture of what is undoubtedly the most important aspect of the German minority problem in Czechoslovakia, namely, the attitude of the German speaking Czechs toward National Socialism and Germany. With this in view I have made a number of visits to the German provinces, where I was able to discuss conditions with various people in different walks of life. The information thus gained at first hand, as well as in conversations with Czech officials, diplomatic colleagues and private persons in Prague, has been of invaluable assistance to me in preparing this report.

I should add that conditions in the German provinces, as elsewhere throughout the world, are ever changing, and what is true today is not necessarily true tomorrow. Various factors, political, economic and social, enter into the problem, any or all of which are likely to effect, in one way or another, the trend of thought among the German minority—a minority which has always been, and still continues, politically disunited and leaderless.

Respectfully yours,

J. Webb Benton

[Enclosure]

Report by the Chargé in Czechoslovakia (Benton) on the German Minority in Czechoslovakia

(1) Historical Résumé and Statistical Data

Prior to the XIII century there were few Germans in the Bohemian Lands (Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia), which were inhabited by a population essentially Slavic. During that century German coloniza-
tion began, and German towns and villages grew up. This colonization was the result of the German "Drang nach Osten"—to Poland, Hungary and Russia principally—and various Czech kings took advantage of it in order to induce German merchants and skilled work-
ers to settle in the country. The settlement of these Germans, how-
ever, did not affect the Czech character of the kingdom, the German settlers being considered as foreigners and living according to their own rules and customs.
Later, disputes arose between the Czechs and Germans, the former being supported by their King, Charles IV (1316–1378)—a German Luxemburger—who, as Roman Emperor and King of Bohemia, established his court at Prague, thus making that city the headquarters of his Empire. The Hussite wars which followed (1419–1434), were largely responsible for the withdrawal of the Germans to the frontier lands.

In 1526 the Hapsburgs were invited by the “free will of the Bohemian people” to rule over the country; and with them the German influx began anew. A Hapsburg, Rudolph II (1552–1612), was one of the most notable kings Bohemia ever had. As King of Hungary (1572), King of Bohemia and German King (1575), and Roman Emperor (1576), he selected Prague as the capital of his Empire; and, while religious and social dissatisfaction prevailed during his reign, the country flourished economically.

Religious and other disputes later led to a Czech uprising against the Hapsburgs (1618–1620), and to the beginning of the Thirty Years War. The uprising culminated in the Battle of the White Mountain, when the Czech nobility was practically wiped out and the country reduced to a peasant nation, a middle class only emerging as late as the XIX century.

As a reward for their support of the Government in the uprising, the Germans were granted permanent residence in the Bohemian Lands, and accorded citizenship. An intensive campaign against the Czechs then followed, one so intensive that many were induced to forgo their homes and emigrate, their places being taken by foreigners, Germans especially; and German was declared the official language of the country. From this date Hapsburg rule continued uninteruptedly until the Great War, and with it the domination of the Germanic (Austrian) element over the Czechs.

According to the National Census of 1930, the German minority in Czechoslovakia numbers 3,231,688, divided as follows: Bohemia, 2,270,943; Moravia-Silesia, 799,995; Slovakia, 147,501; and Sub-Carpathian Russia, 13,249. These figures do not include 53,000 odd German Jews, out of a total of approximately 357,000 Jews registered as Czechoslovak citizens.

Of the 3,231,688 people of German race in Czechoslovakia, owing allegiance to the Prague Government, the vast majority inhabit the lands bordering the German States of Bavaria and Saxony and the Prussian province of Silesia—roughly speaking from Cheb (Eger) on the Bavarian frontier to Opava (Troppau) on the Silesian. Locally known as Sudeten Germans—a name taken from the range of mountains separating Bohemia from Germany—they are in a vast majority in these regions, the extent of their penetration and influ-
ence into the interior varying, and in many cases being as much as ninety kilometers.

There are islets too of Germans in the purely Czech parts of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as Slovakia. Purely Czech and Slovak cities, such as Brno (Brünn) and Bratislava (Pressburg), have important Germanic elements in their population, the German population of the former place being over 30%. In addition, there are considerable numbers of Reichs Germans living not only in the border districts, but in the large towns in Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia. They totalled 45,000 in 1931, and are for the most part merchants, their numbers having been swelled of late by nearly five thousand refugees, mostly of non-Aryan stock, from across the border.

The German minority in Czechoslovakia clings tenaciously to its language, culture and customs. Any attempt at absorption by the Czechs is vigorously opposed. In Prague and other large cities, where the two races live side by side, there is little intercourse between them other than the essential. Each have their schools, theaters and clubs, kept up at times at great personal sacrifice on the part of the Germans, and each strive to show to the world that their culture is supreme. Intermarriage between the two races occurs; but not as frequently as might be supposed. Generally speaking it may be said that the German speaking Czechoslovaks—although for the moment the majority are not in favor of incorporation in the Reich—are decidedly anti-Czech and resent being ruled over by a race which they consider vastly inferior to themselves.

(2) Political Parties

In the last general elections for Parliament (1929) six political parties represented the German minority element within the Republic. These parties succeeded in polling 1,651,068 votes, out of a total of 6,693,207 votes cast for the lower Chamber. They elected 63 deputies (out of 300) and 32 senators (out of 150).

First in size and political importance is the German Social Democrat party with 21 deputies (506,750 votes polled) and 11 senators in the present Parliament, followed by the German Agrarian League with 16 deputies (396,383 votes polled) and 9 senators, and the German Christian Socialists with 11 deputies (348,097 votes polled) and 8 senators.

The second named party has been a member of the Government coalition since 1926, and the first since 1929, when it replaced the German Christian Socialists, which since then have been in opposition. These three parties favor a larger measure of local autonomy for the districts they represent than is at present the case.

The fourth strongest German party, the German National Socialist, polled 204,096 votes in the 1929 election, and elected 8 deputies and 4
senators. This party was dissolved in October 1933, for advocating incorporation in Hitler’s “Drittes Reich”, and for carrying on propaganda considered dangerous to the State.

The German Nationalist, the fifth German party in point of size, polled 189,071 votes in the 1929 elections, and elected 7 deputies but no senators. Due to its close affiliation with the German National Socialist party, this party has incurred the displeasure of the Government, which, in October 1933, directed it to cease political activities, although allowing its deputies to continue in Parliament.

The sixth and last German party, the All-German Fusion party led by Herr Schönerer, is unimportant, having polled less than 7,000 votes in the 1929 elections.

(3) INFLUENCE OF THE GERMAN MINORITY OVER THE INTERNAL AND FOREIGN POLICIES OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT

The German minority in Czechoslovakia exercises an influence over internal policies commensurate with its size. The two largest parties, the German Social Democrat and the German Agrarian League, which between them control slightly over 60% of the German votes, are members of the present Government coalition in which they are represented by two Ministers (Public Health and Public Works).

In local and municipal government the German minority is represented when 20% or more of the inhabitants of the district or town concerned belong to that minority. In the Sudeten provinces which are overwhelmingly German, for instance, local and municipal government is largely in the hands of that minority, while in cities, such as Brno (Brünn) with 30% Germans, its representation is proportionate to its numbers.

The German minority, however, exercises no influence whatsoever over the foreign policies of the Government except, perhaps, and then only to a limited degree, in purely commercial matters. Czechoslovakia’s foreign policies are exclusively in the hands of the so-called “Castle group” with M. Beneš, the Foreign Minister, at the head. The two German parties in the coalition Government are represented in the Foreign Affairs committees of the Chamber of Deputies and Senate; but their influence is negligible. M. Beneš’s foreign policies have never been seriously questioned by Parliament.

In foreign commercial policy the German minority probably exercises a limited and indirect influence through its representatives in and out of Parliament, since a large proportion of the country’s banks and industries are controlled by the German or German Jewish elements; but this influence is never allowed to affect the “vital interests” of the State, or to change in any way Czechoslovakia’s foreign policies as mapped out and directed by M. Beneš.
In the Czechoslovak Foreign Office, and in the diplomatic and consular services, practically all positions of trust are held by Czechs or Slovaks, mainly the former. Only one Minister—the Czechoslovak Minister to China—belongs to the German minority.

(4) Economic Status of the German Minority

With the exception of the automobile and some of the steel industries, a large proportion of the leading Czechoslovak industries are established in parts of the country where the German minority predominates. This is true of the coal-mining industries in northern Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia, the glass industry at Jablonec (Gablonz) and Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad), as well as the textile industry in and around Liberec (Reichenberg). Thus a large proportion of Czechoslovakia's industries are in the hands of the German and German-Jewish minority elements.

In the present unsatisfactory economic situation the German speaking provinces of Czechoslovakia have of necessity suffered a good deal. For months the textile, glass and other industries have lain practically idle; and this has, of course, had a direct repercussion on the population, creating discontent and making the unemployed susceptible to advanced ideas.

Of the three million odd people of German race in Czechoslovakia (excluding Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Russia, for which figures are not available), 1,416,300 are employed in industry and the various trades. 694,554 are engaged in agriculture, while the remainder make their living in various commercial and banking pursuits, in the public services, in the various professions and in other ways.

(5) Attitude of the Czechs Towards the German Minority and Vice Versa

Generally speaking, it may be said that the attitude of the Czechoslovak Government, and of the Czech people, toward the German minority is correct. From the point of view of international law the German speaking population has no grounds for complaint, or has it ever been seriously alleged that the Government has violated the minority treaty (Little St. Germain Treaty, September 10, 1919) protecting them.

Friction has, nevertheless, always existed between the Czechs and their German minority, and has not decreased, but rather increased, since the advent of the Hitler régime in Germany. Roughly speaking, it may be said that the nearer the German border the greater the fric-

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tion between the two races. In Prague, Brno (Brünn) and other cities there is no friction of importance.

In certain border districts feeling between the Czechs and Germans is especially pronounced and nationalistic clubs and societies have proved fertile ground for chauvinism. Frontier incidents have not been lacking, and have helped increase bad feeling. Discrimination against the German minority in small ways is ever present. For instance, road construction and repair, which has gone ahead at a high rate of speed in the Czech parts of Bohemia, has not done so in the parts of the country where the German population predominates, and large and important cities such as Ústí n/L (Aussig) are still only approached by bad or mediocre roads.

Local government in the German speaking districts is in the hands of the German minority; but this is not true of the services controlled by the State, such as the military, rural, and in some cases, city police, telephone and telegraph, railway, etc. Employees of these services are invariably aggressively Czech, and their inability or refusal to speak German often creates difficulties which do not make for harmony between the Czech and German races.

(6) Attitude of the German Minority Toward National Socialism and Germany

In discussing the attitude of the German minority in Czechoslovakia toward foreign countries it is safe to say that this attitude only finds serious expression as regards Germany. True, the few German speaking Czechoslovaks in Brno (Brünn), and close to the Austrian border, are friendly inclined toward and interested in what happens in that country; but there is really no crystallized attitude with regard to Austria, as is the case with Germany.

It is difficult to estimate with any degree of accuracy the trend of feeling in the German districts toward National Socialism, or toward the Hitler régime in Germany. The average Czech believes, or at least flatters himself into believing, that practically none of Czechoslovakia’s citizens of the German race are in favor of Germany, or of the Hitler régime in that country, although they do admit that a certain amount of National Socialist sentiment does actually exist. On the other hand, the members of the German Legation in Prague—with the exception doubtless of the Minister who is not a Nazi—are of the opinion that most of the three million odd Germans in Czechoslovakia are not only ardently in favor of National Socialism, but are striving for incorporation in Hitler’s Germany.

Both of these points of view are undoubtedly incorrect. There are probably between 1,100,000 and 1,400,000 people of the German race in Czechoslovakia in favor of National Socialism. These figures have
been reached as a result of a careful study of the subject, and by a
mathematical calculation based on the only available data, namely,
the general election figures of 1929. In that election the (Czechoslo-
vak) German National Socialist and German Nationalist parties,
which have always been in favor of Hitler’s “Drittes Reich”, polled nearly
400,000 votes. In October 1933, one of these parties was dissolved, and
the political activities of the other curtailed, on account of their Na-
tional Socialist sentiments, not long after municipal elections at Cheb
(Eger), and other towns in the German districts, had shown an over-
whelming swing toward National Socialism of the Hitler variety.
At the same time the formation of National Socialist societies was
forbidden.

If general elections were held today, and the two dissolved German
parties allowed to present candidates, it is believed that the votes
they might reasonably be expected to poll would exceed those polled
in 1929, by approximately 250,000; but since Czechoslovak law only
grants the vote (for deputies) to citizens 21 years of age and over,
there remain a large number of persons with definite political ideas
but without the legal means of registering them. In Czechoslovakia,
as elsewhere, these citizens are often the most prone to accept advanced
political ideas, and it is safe to assume that a large proportion of the
youth of the German race in Czechoslovakia, male as well as female—
probably around 150,000—is in favor of the “Drittes Reich”.

Assuming this to be so, there remain between 300,000 and 600,000
German Czechoslovaks—drawn from the non-voting and youth ele-
ments principally—who, while they are definitely in favor of National
Socialist principles which they would like to see adopted in Czecho-
slovakia, are against breaking away from the Czechoslovak State.
They argue that Hitler has done marvels for his country, and that
too much democracy, as is now the case in Czechoslovakia, tends
toward national disunion and weakness. The German speaking
Czechoslovaks are not alone in this feeling, for there are many real
Czechs who find much to commend in National Socialism, and even
Hitler’s treatment of the Jewish question.

In considering the districts of Czechoslovakia where the German
race predominates, the fact must not be lost sight of that the inhabi-
tants are not in any sense of the word united, or have they a leader.
If they had been united in 1918, they might conceivably have been
strong enough to effect their incorporation in the Czechoslovak State,
not as a minority, but as a people equal in political and other rights
to the Czechs and Slovaks. But their three million odd inhabitants
were divided and leaderless, and have remained so ever since.

As has been shown, the two most powerful political parties repre-
senting the German minority in Czechoslovakia, the German Social
Democrats and the Agrarian League, are members of the present Government coalition, while the German Christian Socialist party is in no sense anti-Czech. These parties polled 1,251,230 votes, out of a total of 1,651,068 votes cast by the different German parties in the 1929 general elections. There is no reason to believe that the loyalty of the German Social Democrats to the Czechoslovak State will seriously waiver as long as Czechoslovakia is a democracy, while the present cooperation between the Czech and German Agrarians is likely to continue, since it is based on a community of interests.

(7) National Socialist and Pro-Hitler Elements Among the German Minority

The National Socialist and pro-Hitler elements among the German minority are drawn for the most part from the middle and industrial classes. Generally speaking, the agricultural class, which numbers some 700,000 odd individuals, is content with its lot and has no desire to change its present political status.

The unsatisfactory economic conditions prevailing in Czechoslovakia for some time past have played a not unimportant part in promoting, or at least in preparing the ground for National Socialist and pro-Hitler sentiment among the middle and industrial classes in the Sudeten provinces. As is always the case, economic distress is fertile ground for advanced ideas. With improved conditions National Socialist and pro-Hitler sentiment among the German minority might be expected to decrease.

The big German or German-Jewish industrialists are for the most part against National Socialism. They are opportunists pure and simple, and as long as they feel they are likely to reap more advantage from Czechoslovak rule, as is now the case, they will oppose any policy tending to bring about a change in their political status. As has been shown, there are approximately 357,000 Jews in Czechoslovakia. Of these only slightly over 53,000 are classified as German Jews, who are, of course, bitterly opposed to National Socialism and the Hitler régime in Germany. They generally lend their political support to the German Social Democrat party.

The so-called aristocracy in Czechoslovakia is for the most part pro-monarchist (Hapsburg), and has little in common with the governing classes in Prague. Many of the leading families are of Czech descent; but their orientation is invariably toward Vienna and “monarchy.” Politically they play no role. They are, as a rule, against National Socialism and Hitler’s Germany.

National Socialism and pro-Hitler feeling is not uniform in the Sudeten provinces. It varies in extent and intensity. For instance, in the Cheb (Eger) district, and again the Opava (Troppau) district,
it is strong and very aggressive. The Liberec (Reichenberg) district, on the other hand, harbors comparatively little National Socialist or pro-Hitler sentiment. The reason for this difference is not clear; but it is apparent to every one and recognized by the Czechoslovak Government which has been, and continues to be considerably perturbed over the inroads that National Socialism appears to be making in the Cheb (Eger) and Opava (Troppau) districts. Propaganda from across the border is blamed for this state of affairs, and every effort has been made to stop it; but so far with no great success.

(8) SUMMARY

The German minority in Czechoslovakia is between one-fourth and one-fifth of the total population of the country (3,231,658 out of 14,467,565). It is politically disunited and leaderless—a state of affairs the Prague Government is at pains to foster—its interests in the Czechoslovak State being taken care of by six different parties.

Of the total German minority, at least 1,500,000 can be counted upon as loyal to the Czechoslovak State at the present moment. This loyalty is dictated by self-interest, largely economic, and not by any love of the Czechs who are looked upon as an inferior race. This element among the German minority is represented by three political parties—the German Social Democrat, the German Agrarian and the German Christian Socialist—all of which are rabidly democratic and opposed to advanced views. The first two parties are members of the present Government coalition. The presence of National Socialism in Germany probably tends to make this element more loyal and ready to cooperate with the Czechs than has been the case since 1918; but in the event of the reestablishment of a democratic régime in Germany the political orientation of these people might be expected to become more favorable toward that country and correspondingly less so to the Czechoslovak State.

Between 1,100,000 and 1,400,000 people of the German race in Czechoslovakia favor National Socialism. Of this number probably not more than 800,000 at present desire incorporation in Hitler’s “Drittes Reich”, the remainder, while potential Hitlerites, favoring the application of National Socialist principles within the Czechoslovak State. The German National Socialist and the German Nationalist parties are, or at least were, up to the time the former was dissolved and the rights of the latter curtailed, the political mouthpiece of these people.

The presence of a large German-Jewish element in Czechoslovakia—approximately 52,000—and many political and religious refugees from across the border, has, curiously enough, had no appre-
ciable effect in stemming the tide of National Socialism which, as has been shown, has made substantial strides during the past year.

That the Prague Government is worried over the growth of National Socialist sentiment in the German provinces cannot be denied. The fact that it has been considered necessary to stop the political activities of two important German parties, and take other measures such as the prohibition of National Socialist societies and the banning of many of the Reich German newspapers, shows clearly that the central authorities are fully aware of the potential dangers in a movement closely associated with the Hitler movement in Germany.

Should an armed conflict break out between Czechoslovakia and Germany the loyalty of the different elements among the German minority to the Czechoslovak State would be extremely doubtful. History shows that blood is thicker than water, and the Germans in the Czechoslovak army, irrespective of political affiliations, might be expected, in the event of war with either Germany or Austria, to desert in large numbers, the local population engaging at the same time in sabotage. In other words, the German minority might be expected to behave in precisely the same manner as did the Czech population of Austro-Hungary during the Great War.

In the event of a war with either Poland or Hungary the loyalty of the German minority could probably be counted upon. This is especially true in the case of Hungary, the average German Czechoslovak disliking and distrusting the Hungarians as much as do the Czechs and Slovaks.

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INFORMAL REPRESENTATIONS ON BEHALF OF MORMON MISSIONARIES THREATENED WITH EXPULSION FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA*

360F.1163 Church of Jesus Christ/3 : Telegram

The Secretary of State to the Minister in Czechoslovakia (Benton)

WASHINGTON, October 8, 1934—4 p. m.

36. Department informed by J. Reuben Clark, Junior, who writes in behalf of the First Presidency of Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints from Salt Lake City, Utah, that formal court proceedings are pending in Czechoslovakia looking towards expulsion of church mission and missionaries. Mr. Clark writes:

"It is our understanding that there is complete religious liberty in Czechoslovakia, and that all churches obeying the law are permitted freedom of worship.

* For previous correspondence regarding representations on behalf of Mormon missionaries, see Foreign Relations, 1924, vol. 1, pp. 248 ff.
It is our further understanding that the charges made against the Church and the objections to the continuance of its work in Czechoslovakia have all now been successfully met except one which affirms that the Church is not recognized in any country, and that even in the United States it is not permitted to work except in the State of Utah.

To this charge the following answer may be made:

The Church has missions and many congregations in most of the countries of Europe, including the British Isles, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Switzerland, and Austria. The Church also has missions in Palestine and Syria, South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, Argentine, Canada, in the South Sea Islands, New Zealand, and Australia.

The Church has branches or congregations in every State of the Union, and in Hawaii. In fact, at the present moment the Church is maintaining missions in every country in which it has ever established one, except those from which it has voluntarily withdrawn."

Mr. Clark requests that foregoing be brought to attention of proper officials of Foreign Office with request that matter be brought to attention of the judge before whom case is being tried.

After consulting Consul General Lee regarding present status of case discuss matter informally with Foreign Office to ascertain if Clark's request can be complied with. If request is rejected consult with Arthur Gaeth* to ascertain if he desires case adjourned beyond October 16 to permit presentation of evidence on this phase of case.

Department has for many years extended protection to missionaries of this church in foreign countries. Foreign Relations, 1897, page 123. This church enjoys same civil rights in the United States as are enjoyed by other religious bodies. A branch of the church is located in the District of Columbia.

Hull

360F.1163 Church of Jesus Christ/O: Telegram

The Minister in Czechoslovakia (Benton) to the Secretary of State

PRAGUE, October 11, 1934—4 p. m.
[Received October 11—2:45 p. m.]

49. Under Secretary of Foreign Office assures me that the information contained in your No. 36, October 8, 4 p. m., will be brought to immediate attention of the competent judge. Arthur Gaillardth [Gaeth] believes it unnecessary to request postponement of the case which is now set for October 16th.

Benton

*President of the Czechoslovak Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.
The Minister in Czechoslovakia (Benton) to the Secretary of State

Prague, October 22, 1934—2 p. m.
[Received October 22—12: 44 p. m.]

54. My number 49, October 11, 4 p. m. Arthur Gaillardth [Gaeth] informs me case has been satisfactorily settled.

Benton