



Source: *Slavonic and East European Review* 26 (1947/48), 309-313

Manifesto of the first Slavonic Congress to the nations of Europe¹

June 12th 1848

The Slavonic Congress at Prague is an event that is new both for Europe and for the Slavonic peoples themselves. For the first time since history made mention of us, we, the widely scattered members of a great family of kindred peoples, have assembled in large number from widespread regions to make one another's acquaintance once more as brothers, and to deliberate peacefully upon matters that concern us all in common. We have mutually understood one another, not only through the medium of the beautiful tongue spoken by eighty millions of souls but also through hearts that beat in unison, and through spiritual and intellectual interests that are identical. The truth and candour that marked all our proceedings constrain us also to proclaim before God and the whole world what was the object of our Congress, and what were the principles which guided our deliberations.

The Latin and Germanic nations, once so famous in Europe as powerful conquerors, for centuries not only ensured independence for their own States by the might of the sword, but were also able in every possible way to satisfy their lust for dominion. Their statecraft, based mainly upon the right of superior force, assured liberty merely for the higher classes, and dominance by means of privileges, while laying only duties upon the common people. Not until quite recent times was it possible, thanks to the power of public opinion which suddenly made itself heard throughout all lands as the very voice of God, to break down all the fetters of feudalism and restore once again to the individual the inalienable rights of man and of humanity. On the other hand, the Slavs, among whom liberty was ever cherished the

more fervently as they showed little aspiration for conquest and dominion, and among whom the desire for independence always prevented the formation of a higher central power of any kind, fell in the course of the ages, people after people, under alien dominion. A policy which has long been condemned, as it should be condemned, in the eyes of the world, has most recently of all deprived the heroic Polish nation, our noble kinsmen, of their independence as a State. The whole great Slavonic world, it seemed, found itself in bondage for all time when the ready servants of that system of bondage did not hesitate to deny to the Slavs the very capacity to be free. But this ridiculous contention finally vanishes before the word of God as spoken to the heart of each individual during the mighty convulsions of our day. The spirit has won the final victory; the ban of the old curse is broken; the thousand-year-old structure, raised and defended by brute force in collusion with fraud and malice, is collapsing into dusty ruin under our eyes. A fresh vital spirit, spreading over the wide expanses, is creating new worlds—freedom of speech, freedom of action have at last become realities. Now the long underyoked Slav is again raising his head, he is scaring violence away from his presence, and with lusty emphasis is claiming his ancient heritage, his liberty. Strong in feeling, stronger still in will-power and his newly acquired fraternal unanimity, he remains none the less true to his natural character and the principles of his forefathers. He demands neither conquest nor dominion, but he asks for liberty for himself and for all others: he demands that liberty shall be unconditionally recognised as the most sacred right that man possesses. Therefore we Slavs reject and hold in abhorrence all dominion based on main force and evasion of the law; we reject all privileges and prerogatives as well as all political differentiation of classes; we demand unconditional equality before the law, an equal measure of rights and duties for all. Where a single slave is born among millions, true liberty does not exist in that place.

¹ The full acts of the 1848 Slavic Congress are in *Slovanský Sjezd v Praze Roku 1848: Sbirka dokumentů*, ed. Václav Žaček (Praha: Nakladatelství Československé Akademie Věd, 1958). The German original of this Manifesto is on pp. 365-368; the English version here is by William Beardmore. [SPIN note]



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Yes, liberty, equality, fraternity for all who live in the State is our watchword to-day, as it was a thousand years ago.

Nor is it only for the individuals in the State that we lift up our voices and put forward our demands. Not less sacred to us than man in the enjoyment of his natural rights is the nation, with its sum total of spiritual needs and interests. Even if history has attributed a more complete human development to certain nations than to others, it has none the less always been seen that the capacity of those other nations for development is in no way limited. Nature in and for herself draws no distinction between nations as though some were noble and others ignoble; she has not called any one nation to dominate over others, nor set aside any nation to serve another as an instrument for that other's ends. An equal right on the part of all to the noblest attributes of humanity is a divine law which none can violate with impunity. Unhappily, it would seem that in our days such a law is not yet known, or not observed as it should be, even among the most civilised nations. What men have voluntarily surrendered as against individual persons, that is, authority and tutelage, they still continue to arrogate to themselves as against individual nations; they claim predominance for themselves in the name of freedom, being unable presumably to distinguish between those nations and themselves. Thus the free Briton refuses to recognise the Irishman as on an equality with himself, thus the German threatens many a Slavonic people with violence if it will not agree to assist in the upbuilding of the political greatness of Germany, and thus the Magyar is not ashamed to arrogate to himself exclusive national rights in Hungary. We Slavs utterly decry all such pretensions; and we reject them the more emphatically the more they are wrongfully disguised in the garb of freedom. Faithful, however, to our natural character, and declining to seek revenge for wrongs done us in the past, we extend a brotherly hand to all neighbouring nations who are prepared to recognise and effectively champion with us the full equality of all nations, irrespective of their political power or size.

Similarly we reprehend and hold in abhorrence that policy which claims to deal with lands and nations as mere material, subject to a ruling power, to take, to change, to partition at pleasure or fancy irrespective of the race, the language, the customs and the inclinations of the nations, and regardless of their natural connection or of the independence which is their right. The brute force of the sword alone decided the fate of the vanquished—vanquished without taking part in the fight—from whom nothing other was demanded than soldiers and money for consolidating brutal force, or hypocritical flattery of the violator.

Taking our stand on the conviction that the mighty current of thought of to-day demands new political formations and that the State must be reconstructed, if not within new bounds at least upon new foundations, we have proposed to the Austrian Emperor, under whose constitutional rule the majority of us live, that the imperial State be converted into a federation of nations all enjoying equal rights, whereby regard would be paid not less to the different needs of these nations than to those of the united Monarchy. We see in such a federal union not only our own salvation but also liberty, enlightenment and humanity generally; and we are confident that civilised Europe would readily contribute to the realisation of that union. In any case we are determined to ensure for our nationality in Austria, by all the means available to us, a full recognition of the same rights in the State as the German and Magyar nations already enjoy, and in this we rely upon the powerful demand for all genuine rights which wells up warmly in every truly free breast.

The enemies of our nationality have succeeded in terrifying Europe with the bogy of political Panslavism which, they have declared, threatens to destroy all that has been won anywhere for freedom, enlightenment and humanity. We, however, are acquainted with the one magic word which of itself suffices to lay that bogy; and for the sake of freedom, enlightenment and humanity we do not desire to keep it secret





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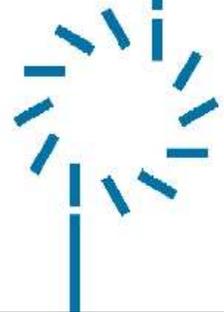
from the nations disquieted by the pricks of their own conscience. That word is justice, justice towards the Slavonic nations generally and justice towards its oppressed branches in particular. The Germans pride themselves upon being more capable than other nations and disposed to make a just assessment and valuation of the specific qualities of others. We hope they will apply that in our case, and we would ask that in speaking of the Slavs they be not caught out in any lie. We raise our voices emphatically on behalf of our unhappy brethren the Poles, whom malicious violence has robbed of independence; we ask the governments concerned finally to remedy this old sin, this curse which has descended as a burdensome heritage upon their Cabinet policy, and in this matter we rely upon the sympathies of all Europe. We protest against the arbitrary partition of territories such as it has been desired to carry out of late especially in Poznan ; we look to the Governments of Prussia and Saxony to abandon at long last the systematic denationalisation of the Slavs in Lusatia, in Poznan, and in East and West Prussia, which they have carried on up till now ; we demand of the Hungarian Ministry that without delay they cease to employ inhuman and violent methods against the Slavonic peoples in Hungary, in particular the Serbs, the Croats, the Slovaks and Ruthenians, and that the national rights which are their due shall be fully assured them as speedily as possible. Finally, we hope that a callous policy will no longer be an obstacle to our kinsmen in Turkey, but that they will be enabled to give free play to their national aspirations in State form and develop their nationality along natural lines. In thus expressly opposing action of such unworthy character we do so precisely by reason of our confidence in the beneficent effects of liberty. Liberty makes nations which have hitherto been dominant juster than they were before, and gives them to understand that wrong and outrage do not bring shame upon him who must suffer but upon him who perpetrates them.

We, the youngest but by no means the weakest, in entering once more the political arena of Europe, propose that a general European Congress of Nations be summoned for the discussion

of all international questions; being thoroughly convinced that free nations will more easily come to agreement than paid diplomats. May this proposal meet with due consideration before the reactionary policy of the individual Courts causes the nations, incited by hatred and malice, mutually to destroy one another!

In the name of liberty, equality and fraternity of all nations.

František Palacký
President of the Slavonic Congress.



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