Masaryk, Tomáš Garrigue (1850–1937)

Czech statesman and philosopher, first president of Czechoslovakia (1918-35). In 1900, he founded the Czech Peoples Party to represent Czech interests in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Masaryk fled at the outbreak of World War 1, and (with Eduard Beneš) formed the Czechoslovak National Council. In 1918, he returned as president. Revered as the 'father of the nation', Masaryk enacted land reforms and pursued a liberal path on minority rights. Benes succeeded him.

Masaryk, Thomas Garrigue (gĕrĕg'), 1850–1937, Czechoslovak political leader and philosopher, first president and chief founder of Czechoslovakia. He is revered by most Czechs and was internationally recognized as a great democratic leader.

Born in Moravia, Masaryk received (1876) his doctorate from the Univ. of Vienna and married an American, Charlotte Garrigue. His first important work, Der Selbstmord als sociale Massenerscheinung der modernen Civilisation [suicide as a mass phenomenon of modern civilization], was published in 1881, and in 1882 he became professor of philosophy at the new Czech Univ. of Prague. He launched (1883) a monthly review, The Atheneum; became associated temporarily with the liberal nationalist Young Czech party; assumed the editorship (1889) of Čas [time], a political journal; and was elected (1891) to the Austrian parliament and the Bohemian diet.

In 1893, he turned away from parliamentary activity to devote himself to the political education of his people. Disciples had gathered around him, and they launched (1900) the Czech Peoples party (later the Progressive party), based on Masaryk's ideas. Known as the Realist party, it emphasized the economic and social foundations of political power and strove for Czech equality, suffrage, and autonomy; the protection of minorities; and the unity of Czechs and Slovaks.

In 1907, Masaryk was reelected to parliament. He did not openly advocate independence at this point, but favored the transformation of the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a federation of self-governing nationalities. He also called for an end to anti-Semitism and opposed (1908) Austria-Hungary's annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

At the outbreak of World War I, Masaryk fled abroad and, with Eduard Beneš, formed the Czechoslovak national council, which in 1918 was recognized by the Allies as the de facto government of Czechoslovakia. Traveling widely during the war years, Masaryk raised funds in the United States for the Czech cause, and in Russia he organized (1917–18) the Czech Legion, an independent Czech army composed largely of former prisoners of war. The national council, of which Masaryk was president, maintained close secret contact with Czech nationalist leaders (notably Charles Kramář) at home.

Upon the collapse of Austria-Hungary at the end of World War I, Masaryk became (1918) the first president of the Czechoslovak republic. He was reelected in 1920, 1927, and 1934. An extensive land reform was one of the first acts of his government. He steered a moderate course on such...
sensitive issues as the status of minorities (particularly the Slovaks and Germans) and the relations between church and state. In foreign policy, he fully backed his foreign minister, Beneš. Masaryk resigned in 1935 because of his advanced age, and Beneš succeeded him.

Bibliography

Masaryk's extensive writings on philosophical, social, and political subjects include The Making of a State (tr. 1927, repr. 1969), Modern Man and Religion (tr. 1938), and The Spirit of Russia (tr., 2d ed. 1955).

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA