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Message of President Masaryk to Parliament of Czechoslovakia, 1922

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[Source: Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, Commerce Papers, Box 176, Folder Czechoslovakia 1922.]

**Message of President Tomáš Masaryk* to the Representatives of
Parliament
(January 1, 1922)**

Mr. President,
Messers Vice-Presidents,

Our wishes for the new year certainly afford us an appropriate occasion for more serious reflection on what we have attained in three years and on what we have failed to attain. I am grateful to you for giving me the opportunity of expressing myself about certain questions....

II. Our state revived during the war and through the war; it is for that reason that our foreign policy was and still is today of such great importance. In the measure in which calm, peace and work prevail in Europe internal policy will everywhere take its proper place. With us also an equilibrium must be established between internal and foreign policy; so that foreign policy will no longer direct our internal policy. The future of our Republic and our people depends upon our home policy, on the manner in which we shall be able to administer our State, on our ability and capacity in the political and administrative sphere.

We require above all a competent and good administration; to speak concretely a new and capable bureaucracy. Without a bureaucracy, without bureaucrats and civil servants there is no state. It is the duty of our body of civil servants to become a democratic and republican service; what we may call to de-Austrianise itself is what our bureaucracy, first of all, must do of itself. We require a new spirit, new methods, new knowledge, a new education; our body of bureaucrats thus renewed will have the necessary authority. In recent times—especially since the war—much has been said, in a very one-sided fashion, of economic relations only as the basis of all social life and especially of the state. It is a one-sided and incorrect point of view.

If society and the state depended only upon economic relations, they would change both within and without much more easily and much more quickly to correspond to the economic situation and conditions of the moment. The state in and by itself has a just authority; the state is the product of a long historical evolution; this is true of our state whose revival was made possible by the fact that it had existed from old time and that we

had preserved its continuity. It is necessary that it should now be a truly modern, democratic and republican State. An administrative and under no circumstances a ruling state. The feeling for the State, the State sense must, in the first place, be understood democratically by the bureaucracy. The State is not the final and highest end of human endeavor, but it is an indispensable means to the moral and intellectual life of society. Anarchism, the lack of the State sense, and hostility to the state have been repudiated long ago and more recently again by the evolution of the period after the war. We have won independence; we have revived our state; but we wish to have a state which will meet the needs of the new age. Our Republic must have its programme, its idea; the claim of our State must be recognized by the whole of Europe and particularly by our citizens, by every thinking man. It is in this respect that the body of civil servants must set an example to the people. The body of civil servants must thoroughly understand the duty of a democratic administration and the administrative reforms must be carried out in conformity with it. I include the reform of the education of the civil servants in the university, in the schools and in preparatory institutions; it is also possible that some complementary education may be found necessary....

V. One word on the agrarian reform. This reform is truly national, in the sense that is to say, that in our country a peculiar class of large estates had been evolved. The conditions recall in almost disagreeable fashion the conditions in Prussia and in this way they indicate the reasons of this unpleasant phenomenon. In principle even the smaller of the landed proprietors agree that the abnormally large estates have now become impossible. What, however, must be the measure of size and to what use must the large estates be put?

It is the large estates which have perfected agriculture, forestry and stock-breeding; wholesale production has, here as in industry, its advantages. The great landlords point in their defense to the fact that they supplied food to the large towns and industrial centres. I do not doubt that a certain number of larger estates should remain intact; it will be necessary to decide how large these may be. It will also be necessary to reflect it is the State which must manage them or if and under what conditions they might continue to be occupied by their proprietors and if they might not be leased. We must not deprive individual initiative of its basis; it is a mistake to leave everything to the state since the state is not sufficiently prepared to undertake such a duty. A general dissection would not satisfy our needs, as far as I can judge; we must profit by the technical ability and capacity of officials and the private agricultural employees; here already we have a serious social problem which involves hundreds of thousands. On every side the insecurity of conditions is a cause of complaint. It is certainly a grave defect which results in a loss of many millions to the State.

The agrarian reform is a tremendous work; a work which will continue not for a few years only but for a long time to come. We must think of the increase of the population and of its future needs; the solution of the agrarian problem is at the same time the solution of the most serious problems of our Republic. The solution of the agrarian question cannot be a uniform one. We have different districts, not only in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathian Russia but also in the Bohemian [lands].

The constitutional position and the organization of the Agrarian Office [must] be perfected. The Agrarian Office is much too isolated; it has no sufficient connection with the ministries and the whole administration and it is under no control. This control properly speaking is exercised to a certain extent by the Supreme Administrative Court; for the provision of the law placing the Agrarian Office under the Council of Ministers does not owing to its vagueness guarantee the desired control. The National Assembly working through the appropriate committee has here a fruitful field for its activity of constructive criticism and control.

It has been proposed to transform the Office into a Ministry. The proposal evidently arose from the perception of this peculiar isolation of the Agrarian Office. I think that it is a reasonable proposal. In any case the experience of three years compel a reform of so important an institution, and I cannot doubt that the Agrarian Office must be removed from the domain of politics. The decisive factors are the interests of the community and the special technical economic and financial point of view and a statesmanlike comprehension of duties of vital importance for our Republic. Our Agrarian Reform can find no example either at home or abroad, in view of its extent, the diversity of its aims, and the variety of local conditions. If we are already compelled to learn from our own work and our own mistakes, let us try at least to discover them as soon as possible and to eliminate them rapidly. Three years will have passed since the promulgation of the law on the redemption of estates. Since then it has been shown, as is now generally admitted, that the laws on Agrarian reform like the organization of the authorities which must apply them, require a reform—so let us reform them.

VI. The present government and the parties have agreed on a speedy realization of social insurance in all its scope. The scheme arises from a correct understanding of the economic and social situation. The first considerable sum has already been proposed and approved....

I did not wish, gentlemen, to discuss all our political problems; I have only turned my attention to some more serious problems on which President Tomašek touched.

I follow the evolution of the Republic in every field with the greatest attention because with the greatest love. I can testify with a clear conscience to the progress we have made. Conditions are everywhere improving. I do not say that there are no defects. I think that I realize them clearly and I try to the best of my ability to correct them. Nevertheless, I agree with you, Mr. President Tomašek, that in the Republic a great amount of good work has been done.

I thank you for your kind wishes and for my part, I wish you, the National Assembly and all those who are working for the public good, all success and progress.

*Biography of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, by T. Mills Kelly

Born: March 7, 1850

Died: September 14, 1937

First President of Czechoslovakia, 1918-1935

Member of Parliament (Austria), 1891-1914

Professor, Charles University

Perhaps no other figure in Czechoslovak history is as recognizable as Tomáš Masaryk. Born on 7 March 1850, Masaryk obtained a doctorate of philosophy and married Charlotte Garrigue, an American music student, in 1878. A professor at the Czech University of Prague, Masaryk was a social and political critic. From 1891 to 1893 he was a member of the Young Czech Party and from 1900 to 1914 the leader of the Realist (Progressive) Party and deputy to the Austrian Reichsrat from 1907-1914. During his political career in the Habsburg Monarchy, Masaryk worked hard for universal suffrage and the federalization of the empire. During World War I Masaryk worked abroad to secure Czech and Slovak independence, gaining Entente and American recognition for the Czechoslovak National Council. In 1918 Czechoslovakia gained its independence and Masaryk was elected the first president of the new state. He resigned in 1935 and died on 14 September 1937.

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