

Štefan Osuský

Štefan Osuský was born on March 31, 1889, in Brezová pod Bradlom, Slovakia, then under the monarchy of Austria-Hungary. After the revolution in 1848, Hungarian became the official language and Slovak schools, books, and newspapers were banned. Osuský's father, who wished his son to receive the best education, sent him in 1902 to Poszona (now Bratislava) to study at a local Hungarian lyceum. Osuský was, however, soon expelled for his Slovak patriotic feelings in an incident that occurred during a visit by the Hungarian minister of education, Count Apponyi.

Osuský recalls the incident in his biography:

In spring of 1905 the minister of education, Count Apponyi, came to the lyceum to pay an inspection visit. He came to our class when we had Latin. Latin was my favorite subject and I was very good in it. . . . After the exam Count Apponyi called me and asked me in Hungarian, "What is your name, young lad?" I answered, "My name is Osuský." "Where are you from?" "From Brezová." He replied: "Brezová, isn't it the nest that breeds all the revolts against Hungarians? You, however, are going to be a good Hungarian!" He didn't ask me whether I'd be a good Hungarian citizen, but simply if I'd be a good Hungarian. I remembered the words of my father's not to mix into politics. . . . I paused a little to think about the best answer. Obviously, I could not agree to be a good Hungarian, I could not even force myself to say anything like that, so I remained silent.

Count Apponyi, offended by Osuský's silence, made sure that Osuský was expelled from all the Austrian schools.

In 1906 Osuský left his native Slovakia and moved to America to pursue his education. He studied theology at Concordia College in Springfield, Illinois, earned his Ph.D. in philosophy and psychology from the University of Chicago, and in 1915 received his law degree and became a co-owner of the company *Sinden, Hassal, and Osuský Law Firm* in Chicago. He was also active in many Slovak causes. In 1915 he founded and edited the newspapers *Slovenské slovo* and *Slovenský týždenník*. In 1916 he was elected vice-president of the Slovak League and sent to Europe to join Thomas Garrigue Masaryk in the fight against Austria-Hungary for the liberation of Czechs and Slovaks. In Geneva, Osuský founded and ran a press agency for the Czechoslovak National Council based in Paris and closely cooperated with George D. Herron, a confidant of American president Woodrow Wilson, who favored self-determination for the peoples of Central Europe. At the beginning of 1918 Osuský helped organize the Czechoslovak legions in Italy, where he met Milan Rastislav Štefánik and, under his influence, became a supporter of a unified Czecho-Slovak nation.

After the independent Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed in 1918, Osuský was appointed Czechoslovak envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to Great Britain. At the same time, as secretary general of the Czechoslovak delegation, he attended the Paris Peace Conference. On June 4, 1920, Edvard Beneš and Štefan Osuský signed the Treaty of Trianon with Hungary. The signing represented not only a final

recognition of Czechoslovakia and its borders but also the admission of the new state among other European states and acknowledgment of the Czechs and Slovaks as equal members of the European community. Osuský also played an important role in creating the Little Entente, a protectionist alliance of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania.

Beginning 1919 Osuský represented Czechoslovakia in the Reparations Commission of the League of Nations, which decided postwar reparations to be made by Germany and its allies; for four years he also represented Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, and Greece at the commission. The Assembly of the League of Nations elected him chair of the Control Commission, a position he remained in for fourteen years. He participated in a number of international conferences, becoming an experienced and well-informed Czechoslovak diplomat who maintained close personal contacts with political leaders at home and abroad.

In January 1921 Osuský was appointed Czechoslovak minister plenipotentiary to France; he remained in the position until France fell in 1940. During his stay in Paris, Osuský met many significant European diplomats and politicians. The Paris Legation was important for the Czechoslovak foreign policy because it was on the alliance with France that the international security of the Czechoslovak Republic was built.

The Munich agreement of 1938--negotiated among Chamberlain, Daladier, Mussolini, and Hitler--and the following occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Hitler's Nazis in March 1939, resulted in the collapse of the first Czechoslovak Republic. Edvard Beneš abdicated and went into exile. Osuský, however, refused to surrender the Czechoslovak Legation to the Nazis and, having maintained his position as Czechoslovak minister, began organizing the Czechoslovak liberation movement. In October 1939 he signed a treaty with the French government regarding the formation of the Czechoslovak army in France; in November he mobilized Czechoslovak expatriates into a national army in France. After the fall of France to the Germans in June 1940, he arranged for the troops to be transferred to England. With the support of the French government, Osuský hoped to be the leader of the Czechoslovak exile movement, but his ambitions clashed with those of Edvard Beneš, who considered himself the leader of the liberation struggle in London. In November 1939 Beneš appointed Osuský as a member of the Czechoslovak National Committee in Paris and, in July 1940, minister to the Czechoslovak government in exile and member of the State Council in London, but their relationship was slowly deteriorating. They totally disagreed about the organization and management of the Czechoslovak exile movement, the position of the Slovaks in the future democratic Czechoslovakia, and Beneš's pro-Soviet political orientation. These tensions culminated in March 1942, when Beneš stripped Osuský of his official posts and excluded him from the Czechoslovak resistance. Osuský wrote a series of articles on Beneš and the Provisional Government; however, he ended up in political isolation.

Thus, after almost thirty years, Osuský returned to the United States to become a professor of modern European history at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. Not until the communist putsch in February 1948, however, did he join the political activities of his fellow Slovaks. In 1949 he cofounded and later served on the Executive Board of

the Council of Free Czechoslovakia and held important posts in the Association of Captive European Nations.

Although Osuský never returned to Czechoslovakia, he followed its development closely. Besides his educational work, he studied Czechoslovak politics and its international relations. He wrote many articles, essays, and studies. His study of the ideological and spiritual conflict between East and West, entitled *The Way of the Free*, was published in New York, London, Hong Kong and Milan.

He was the recipient of many international honors, including the Karlík Prize for exceptional services rendered to Czechoslovakia (1934), an honorary degree from the University of Dijon, France (1936), and decorations from Bolivia, Chile, Greece, Luxemburg, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

Osuský was a born diplomat with an excellent educational background. His vision was a united Europe, a Europe without wars, democratic, and at peace. He rejected ideological totalitarianism and the superiority of one nation over another. He devoted his life to the struggle for an equal state of Czechs and Slovaks.

Osuský died in Herndon, Virginia, on September 1973, at the age of 84; he was buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Washington D.C. The epitaph on his grave reads:

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither.

-Hoover Institution Archives, 2007