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**EWALD AMMENDE, THE CONGRESS OF EUROPEAN NATIONALITIES AND
THE RISE OF GERMAN NATIONAL SOCIALISM**

by

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Abstract

Ewald Ammende was a Baltic German who played a formative role in establishing the Congress of European Nationalities in Geneva in 1925. The organisation was intended to represent the interests of all national minorities in Europe. Although Ammende was always concerned with the fortunes of specifically ethnic Germans, initially good intentions dominated his work. With the rise of National Socialism, however, things changed. In particular the failure of the 1933 Congress to address the treatment of Jews in Germany signalled disaster for Ammende's good work. This paper examines the changes in Ammende's career as he moved from being a champion of minority rights to someone who compromised with National Socialism.

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Introduction

Ewald Ammende was General Secretary of the Congress of European Nationalities and an international publicist for cultural autonomy.¹ His was a complicated personality. This zealous organiser of Europe's national groups in the 1920s and 1930s could, at times, be highly tactless. What's more, although he was acutely aware of principled terms of debate, none the less he eventually compromised with German National Socialism. It follows that we should wonder what cultural autonomy really meant to him. Ultimately Ammende lacked the unwavering moral commitment of, for instance, Paul Schiemann, and in that respect his life not only flags up the truism that systems and institutions are only as good as the people staffing them, but also suggests that different people saw different things in a form of social organisation which generally has been accepted as progressive.²

¹ Thanks are due to John Hiden for drawing my attention to Ewald Ammende in the first place and for commenting extensively on an earlier draft of this paper. This research has been funded by the British Academy.

² For Schiemann's biography, see J.Hiden, *Defender of Minorities. Paul Schiemann, 1876-1944*. London: Hurst. 2004. For cultural autonomy as a progressive phenomenon, see C.A.Macartney, *National States and National Minorities*. OUP. 1934. p.408. Macartney describes it as a 'brilliant success' according to the Estonian majority and the minorities alike.

Ewald Ammende was born into an affluent ethnic German family in Pärnu (today in Estonia) in 1892. They had extensive business interests criss-crossing the Russian Empire and were steeped in local politics.³ Unsurprisingly, then, Ammende studied economics and politics at Riga Polytechnic, Cologne School of Trade, Tübingen University and Moscow Institute of Economics. Just as appropriately, after the First World War he obtained a doctorate from Kiel University for a dissertation detailing the history of German minorities in Central and Eastern Europe. Ammende, who was well aware that extensive cross border organisation between national minorities before 1914 had been impossible, felt that Woodrow Wilson's idealism had signalled a new world mood. It was given institutional form through the League of Nations which in turn sought to base international relations on law rather than power. At last it seemed feasible to intensify contacts between national minorities, at least up to the Soviet border. As a result, ethnic Germans found new possibilities to explore their national identity and to experience membership of a linguistic community encompassing Alsace, South Tyrol, Schleswig, Batschka, Siebenburgern, the Black Sea coast and, of course, the shores of the Baltic Sea.

Of course many Germans considered these fresh possibilities to be more than offset by hardships that were part and parcel of the new Europe. Germany itself had suffered under the terms of Versailles while ethnic Germans were hard hit by agrarian and other reforms instituted by the new states of Central and Eastern Europe. Ammende, however, had both the imagination and occasion to capitalise on the post-war situation. In the wake of the First World War he became a journalist for two important German-language newspapers located in the Baltic States, first the *Rigasche Rundschau* (where he worked with the older Paul Schiemann) and then the *Revaler Bote*. His profound engagement with the politics of the time is apparent from the fact that within just two

³ CV compiled by Ewald Ammende himself is held in Moscow. Fond 1502, opis 1, dela 30 (hereafter 1502-1-30). State Military Archives of Russia, Moscow (hereafter SMAR).

years he wrote about the repatriation of prisoners of war from Russia, Europe's economic reconstruction, the founding of the League of Nations, how Estonia's railway system could be reconstructed to promote commerce, free trade in the Baltic area, famine in Ukraine, the character of Communism and the nature of Italian fascism.⁴

Image 1. Ewald Ammende.



Source: Rigasche Post, 19 April 1936

Image 2. The family home. Villa Ammende. Pärnu, Estonia.



Source: Photograph by M.Housden

⁴ Particularly interesting is his pamphlet *Europe and Soviet Russia*. Riga: Ruetz and Co. 1921.

The *Verband* and cultural autonomy in Estonia

Ammende's early journalism displayed an urgency indicative of a heart being worn on a sleeve and issues involving German national minorities absorbed his energy in particular. While working on his doctorate, Ammende travelled extensively and met a number of representatives of scattered German communities. The fact that none of the groups had managed to attain full civic equality in their new states prompted Ammende, in association with the *Siebenbürgern Sachsen* Rudolf Brandsch, to call a meeting of German minority leaders to forge a united front.⁵ Its purpose would be to raise awareness of the cause of national minorities in the League of Nations. To this end Ammende wrote a lengthy memorandum in 1922 identifying legislation protecting minorities, and especially cultural autonomy, as the only way of eradicating the 'cancer in the body of our part of the earth', namely 'national hatred'.⁶ Although his energy focused primarily on organising German groups at this point, Ammende none the less recognised that he was also taking the first steps towards the eventual organisation of *all* national minorities in Europe. As he put it: 'The community of German minorities would not only fight for their own interests, but for the interests of minorities in general.'⁷ In sum, Germans could be pioneers of a project that in time would yield universal benefits. In Autumn 1922 the Association of German Minorities in Europe (*Verband der deutschen Minderheiten in Europa*) was founded in Vienna. Although the Berlin-based lawyer Carl Georg Bruns was elected its business leader, Ammende's memorandum provided the circle's terms of reference.

⁵ Brandsch served in the Hungarian parliament before the First World War and the Romanian parliament after.

⁶ E.Ammende, 'Gründe, Aufgaben und Programm für eine Zusammenkunft der Vertreter aller deutschen Minoritäten in Europa', *Nation und Staat* October 1932. pp.63-8.

⁷ *Ibid* p.64.

What 'cultural autonomy' meant in practice became clearer when the Estonian parliament passed appropriate legislation on 5 February 1925.⁸ The legislation had been under development for years and was a path breaking project offering Estonia's minorities an unrivalled degree of autonomy.⁹ Baltic Germans such as Max Bock, August Spindler and Werner Hasslblatt had participated in parliamentary committees drafting and re-drafting versions of the law.¹⁰ They, together with the influential editor of *Revaler Bote* and parliamentary deputy Axel de Vries, popularised the project among Estonia's Baltic Germans, but Ewald Ammende was also involved. In 1924, along with Hasselblatt and School Director Pantenius, he met the leader of Estonia's National Party, Jan Tõnisson, to define the nature of cultural autonomy. It was to address exclusively the cultural (as opposed to the political) demands of national minorities; it should be realised through local elections; it should involve the creation of local cultural chambers as well as a central body; and it should concern itself with educational and welfare issues.¹¹

In the event, the *Riigikogu* (Estonia's parliament) was slow to pass the legislation and only after an abortive Communist coup in Tallinn on 1 December 1924 did the government treat the matter with greater urgency. On 17 January 1925, along with Hasselblatt and de Vries, Ammende met State President Jaakson. According to the press, discussion centred on the best way to bind minorities into the state in order to insulate them from foreign threats. Two days earlier Ammende had already met Tõnisson for related talks. It seems highly probable that some parliamentary 'horse trading' was

⁸ For a classic account of cultural autonomy, see M.Garleff, *Deutschbaltische Politik zwischen den Weltkriegen*. Bonn: Verlag Wissenschaftliches Archiv. 1976.

⁹ Latvia's post-war law on schooling had already offered its minorities a degree of autonomy in that country.

¹⁰ See for example reports and articles in *Revaler Bote* of 9 March 1923, 10 March 1923, 14 April 1923, 12 April 1924, 10 May 1924 and 20 May 1924.

¹¹ E.Hausen, 'Unser Kampf um die Autonomie. Ein Rückblick', *Sonderausgabe. Revaler Bote* 23 February 1925. In the event, welfare was dropped from the sphere of cultural autonomy.

involved to ensure a majority of deputies in favour of the legislation and a vote before the end of the current parliamentary session.¹²

Ammende therefore contributed to the official conception of cultural autonomy in Estonia and helped engineer its passage through parliament. Appropriately he served in both the central cultural council in Tallinn and the regional counterpart in Pärnu. His participation was brief, however. Once the project had been achieved, Ammende's restless personality dictated that he dedicate himself to a different mission, namely the Congress of Organised National Groups in the States of Europe, or Congress of European Nationalities.¹³

Origins of the Congress of European Nationalities

This was undoubtedly his best known achievement. By this point his incessant travelling had left him with an extensive network of contacts among Europe's national minority leaders and in August 1925 he wrote another memorandum inviting representatives to attend a forum designed to cater to their common experiences.¹⁴ The document built on the memorandum of 1922, but if anything was stamped by an even clearer moral purpose. Ammende expected the congress to promote national tolerance, to recognise cultural self-administration as a means to this end, and to support the right of every national group to constitute itself as a public-legal corporation to manage its cultural autonomy. The inaugural meeting was to be held that October in Geneva. The location of course was significant, being also home to the League of Nations. It signalled Ammende's determination to internationalise the minorities question and, to this end, his

¹² 'Zur Frage der Annahme des Autonomie-Gesetzes', *Revaler Bote* 17 January 1925.

¹³ Two fine studies of the congress are S.Bamberger-Stemman, *Der Europäische Nationalitätenkongress 1925 bis 1938. Nationale Minderheiten zwischen Lobbyzistentum und Großmachtinteressen*. Marburg: Verlag Herder-Institut. 2000 and X-M.Nunez Seixas, *Entre Ginebra y Berlin. La Cuestion de las Minorias Nacionales y la Politica Internacional en Europa 1914-1939*. Madrid: Akal. 2001.

¹⁴ Ewald Ammende's invitation to European nationality groups, August 1925. R60462. Akten der Europäischen Minderheitenkongress in Genf 1925. Political Archive of the German Foreign Office, Berlin (hereafter PAGFO).

hope that the congress would lobby the League extensively. In fact Ammende's memorandum of 1925 spelled out that defending the rights of national minorities should be the League's first duty, a vital pre-requisite to the preservation of peace in Europe.

Initially the congress received a lukewarm reception in official quarters. A copy of Ammende's memorandum was passed to the German Foreign Office where officials expressed bewilderment at the speed of his actions. The German ambassador to Riga, Adolf Köster, reported the congress was raising disquiet among the governments of France, Italy and Poland, all of which viewed the initiative as a German-backed revolt against the terms of Versailles.¹⁵ It was also said that an organisation seeking to bring together all Europe's minorities would have to be led with considerable skill, otherwise it could unleash dangers on a continental scale. To official German eyes, however, the project's saving grace was the fact that although some ethnic German participants were said to be Pan-German (e.g. figures from Denmark and Czechoslovakia), this was not true of the congress's emerging leaders (i.e. Ammende, Schiemann, Josip Wilfan who was a Slovene from Italy, and Géza von Szüllö who was a Hungarian from Czechoslovakia).¹⁶ Köster recommended that since the congress was being established by the minorities themselves, since support for German minorities would eventually benefit all European national minorities, and since Europe's stability was dependent on the contentment of precisely these people, then the German Foreign Office should show good will towards the endeavour.¹⁷

A number of non-German minorities continued to view the congress with suspicion. Like the Polish government, representatives of Polish national minorities assumed the German state stood behind the project and there were rumours that Ammende was getting paid by the *Wilhelmstrasse*. Yet these anxieties diminished as the

¹⁵ A.Köster. Memo of 22 February 1926. German Embassy, Riga. R60463. PAGFO.

¹⁶ Memo of 27 October 1925. R60463. PAGFO.

¹⁷ Koester, Memo of 22 February 1926.

congress progressed. The atmosphere was helped by statements that genuine national minorities had to be loyal to the states in which they lived and that existing European borders would not be the subject of debate.¹⁸ For some groups at least, confidence in the congress increased with time. Representation of Russian groups was always patchy, but a meeting of Russian minorities in 1932 noted that the congress should not be criticised just because it benefited German minorities since it could offer the same advantages to Russians. One speaker advised Russian minorities to turn up in force to promote their particular agenda.¹⁹

The original terms of the congress deserved sympathy. In line with Ammende's 1925 memorandum, it passed resolutions recognising national cultural freedom as an intellectual cornerstone of the civilised world and demanding it be enshrined in both international and domestic law. It made cultural autonomy a central demand, recommending that national groups form public-legal corporations (organised either by territory or by personal rights), to promote national cultural life which could be enjoyed in loyalty to any given minority's host state.²⁰ The congress expressed its support for the League of Nations and all other international organisations promoting minority rights. In other words, the congress tried hard to be non-controversial and non-emotional. To this end it declined to discuss specific grievances the better to concentrate on the principles which underlay them. It was hoped that debate would help create unanimous agreements rather than majority decisions. Initially, therefore, the congress grew up as a responsible community of minority thinkers who were hoping for international respect.

¹⁸ O.Junghann to German Consul General in Geneva, Mr.Aschmann. Memo of 22 October 1925. R60463. PAGFO.

¹⁹ 'Die erstmalige Tagung der russischen Minderheiten', *Nation und Staat* October 1932. pp73-4.

²⁰ For a discussion of some issues involved in the distinction between territorial and personal autonomy, see D.J.Smith, 'Non-territorial cultural autonomy as a Baltic contribution to Europe between the wars' in D.J.Smith (ed.), *The Baltic States and their Region. New Europe or Old?* Amsterdam: Rodopi. 2005. pp.211-26.

The subversion of ideals and dissimulation

When it first met, the congress attracted representatives from 27 groups of 10 nationalities from 12 different states. At its peak, it included members speaking for 27 million people.²¹ In building up this forum, Ammende had achieved something remarkable. Inevitably, however, such a body always encountered difficulties. Ukrainian and White Russian minorities attended the first meeting only as observers. They refused full membership since the terms of the congress forbade them from airing their specific complaints about the treatment of minorities by the Polish state. Nor had the congress been running long before Polish minorities began complaining that German interests did dominate the proceedings. They perceived cultural autonomy to favour former élite groups disproportionately and in 1928 Polish minorities left the congress. At the same time, intractable problems rumbled on about how to fund the organisation. It was, after all, a movement headed by private individuals and money from a variety of sources, not least the German Foreign Office, arrived mostly by indirect routes.²² Ironically the Ammende family also encountered acute financial problems as the 1920s went on. If all of this wasn't enough, proceedings increasingly were soured by bitter attacks on the League of Nations, often led by Ammende himself.²³ Although there was some substance behind Ammende's words, his tone tarnished the congress's image as a constructive force for fraternal understanding.

With all of this admitted, what finally damaged both the German and European national minorities movements irreparably was the rise of National Socialism. In a speech given to the *Verband* in June 1932, Paul Schiemann warned about the 'New

²¹ *Congress of European National Minorities. London Meeting 14-17 July 1937.* Vienna-Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller. 1938. p.9.

²² Bamberger-Stemman, *Der Europäische Nationalitätenkongreß* pp.147-60.

²³ *Sitzungsbericht des Kongresses der Organisierten Nationale Gruppen in den Staaten Europas.* Vienna: Wilhelm Braumüller. 1925. pp.66-7. Also M.Housden, 'Ewald Ammende and the Organisation of National Minorities in Inter-war Europe', *German History* 18 (2000) pp.450-54.

Nationalist Wave' breaking across Central and Eastern Europe.²⁴ Having identified 'an annihilatory will' that had become part and parcel of post-war politics, Schiemann maintained that ethnic German youth in the lands beyond the German state increasingly were being influenced by people coming from the West whose nationalism threatened to destroy the very foundations on which their societies stood. It was, he added, impossible to struggle for equal nationality rights in, say, Latvia and Estonia, when the German state risked trampling the rights of others. Schiemann was clear that ethnic Germans had to fight nationalism not only among the majority peoples where they lived, but in their own camp too.

The subversion of the originally liberal terms of the congress became apparent with depressing speed. If the congress had always included some Pan-Germans, the extent of the challenge they represented increased as January 1933 approached. Schiemann's speech was published by the *Verband's* journal *Nation und Staat* in September 1932, but in November the very next edition carried a long article by a Nazi Party member from Vienna, a lawyer called Gürke.²⁵ He advocated the removal of inimical elements from German public life and recommended that marriage and sexual relations between Germans and Jews be prevented by law. Referring explicitly to the detail of Estonia's cultural autonomy law, Gürke added that it was nonsense to allow an individual to choose his or her own nationality since this was an objective matter. In their different ways, the articles by Schiemann and Gürke made plain the threat Nazism posed to the European minorities movement. The worst nightmare began to become apparent when, on 7 April 1933, Hitler's regime produced the Law for the Reprofessionalisation of the Civil Service which stated that 'civil servants who are not of

²⁴ P.Schiemann, 'Die neue nationalistische Welle', *Nation und Staat* September 1932. pp.799-811.

²⁵ N.Gürke, 'Der Nationalsozialismus, das Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtum und das Nationalitätenrecht', *Nation und Staat*, October 1932. pp.7-30

Aryan descent are to be retired.' Further regulations, issued on 11 April, defined a person as non-Aryan if one grandparent was Jewish.²⁶

The legislation, supplemented by the boycott of Jewish shops in Germany had repercussions throughout the German minorities movement and led to contacts between its leaders and German officials. Unfortunately Ewald Ammende's involvement here remains annoyingly difficult to pin down. He may well have had contact with relatively senior figures in Germany, but details about meetings and what might have been said in them are sketchy.²⁷ Beyond dispute is that he published an essay on the Jewish question which appeared in the *Europäische Nationalitätenkorrespondenz* in August 1933.²⁸ He argued that Jews were being defamed inside Germany and that, as a result, calls had arisen in parts of eastern Europe (particularly Poland) to boycott German-owned shops. He quoted with approval an idea floated by a German Reichstag deputy advocating cultural autonomy for Germany's Jews, but emphasised that it had to be a matter of individual choice whether anyone joined such a national group. He even quoted Emil Margulies, a Jewish leader from Czechoslovakia, saying that the key to minority rights had to be equality of all state citizens before the law. But if an article as powerful as Paul Schiemann's 'New Nationalist Wave' had fallen on deaf ears, Ammende's more ponderous piece was unlikely to make a splash.

Other leaders from German minorities, people whom Ammende knew well, lobbied Hitler's new administration, in the process displaying the ease with which Nazism could corrupt whatever it touched. Before April's civil service law, two leading figures in the *Verband*, Colonel Kurt Graebe and Werner Hasselblatt, contacted Reich Minister Göring requesting that they be heard before any policy likely to affect Germans

²⁶ For both pieces of legislation, see Y.Arad, I.Gutman and A.Margaliot (eds.), *Documents on the Holocaust*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem. 1999. pp.39-41.

²⁷ See Bamberger-Stemman, *Der Europäische Nationalitätenkongress* p.330.

²⁸ E.Ammende, 'Zur Frage der Juden in Deutschland', *Europäische Nationalitätenkorrespondenz* (1933) pp.4-6.

abroad was decided.²⁹ Hasselblatt had in fact taken over leadership of the business of the *Verband* following the death of Bruns in early 1931, and days before the passage of the civil service law, he wrote to *Geheimrat* Roediger in the Foreign Office spelling out the potentially disastrous consequences of legislation making it obligatory for German civil servants to have German blood.³⁰ If other states adopted comparable legislation, it would harm German settlements abroad. Less happily, Hasselblatt went on to say that since the planned legislation really was aimed against *assimilated* Jews (i.e. people who did not really constitute a self-conscious national group), any law should be drafted accordingly. Foreign Office officials took note of Hasselblatt's line and his memorandum was passed over to the Reich Interior Ministry for information.³¹

Meanwhile the *Verband's* journal, *Nation und Staat*, began publishing extracts from Hitler's speeches.³² It took at face value comments made on 27 May 1933, for instance that the Third Reich aspired to no border changes and had no desire to subjugate peoples who hated Germany. The journal also quoted the Chancellor's speech to the Reichstag of 17 May which stated that assimilation was anathema to National Socialism. Hitler denounced Germanisation, saying it was completely impossible to turn a Frenchman into a German.

Perhaps the low point of the *Verband*, however, was its attempt to provide an intellectual argument harnessing the rejection of forced national assimilation to a justification for the expulsion of Jewish Germans from the German nation - that is to say, their 'dissimilation'. This happened in an article by Baron Üxküll von Guldenbrand, originally from Estonia and editor of *Nation und Staat*.³³ The article, entitled 'Germany's National Political Programme', came out in June 1933 and began by quoting Hitler's May

²⁹ Hasselblatt and Graebe to Göring, 20 March 1933. R60494. PAGFO.

³⁰ Hasselblatt to Geheimrat Roediger, 3 April 1933. R60595. PAGFO.

³¹ Foreign Office note of 7 April 1933. R60595. PAGFO.

³² 'Kundgebungen Hitlers und v. Papens zur Volkstumspolitik', *Nation und Staat* June 1933. pp.590-3.

³³ F. von Uexküll-Guldenband, 'Deutschlands volkspolitisches Programm', *Nation und Staat* June 1933. pp.536-42.

speeches. It argued that most state-building nations wanted to assimilate their minorities, whether through choice or compulsion, but the result damaged minority and majority alike. If the character of the majority was not safeguarded in the face of assimilation, it risked becoming diluted and falsified. In this respect the situation in Germany was said to be unique. Here an intellectually, culturally and religiously well-defined national minority (i.e. the Jews) wanted to assimilate not just with the German state, but also the German nation. In the process it did not, however, want to give up its Jewish characteristics. This desire had existed for some time but had become exaggerated since the end of the First World War. As a result Germans had become sidelined from banking, other branches of the economy, the Arts, so on and so forth. Most crassly the article proposed that German Jews had gained socially-important positions at the time of the German revolution, despite the fact that they personified some of the characteristics German society had been revolting against. The end result was this: a group which was only superficially assimilated had come to exert a considerable and unwanted influence over a majority nation. Then the article posed the question:

'Does a great nation now have the right to reflect on its own character and to remove foreign elements from its spirit, its soul? This question can only be answered "Yes".'

In other words, assimilation was said to involve the absorption of a minority by a majority to the detriment of the minority's national character; but it could also represent an aspiration by a minority to join a majority leading to a fundamental change in the character of that majority. Üxküll's article, therefore, tried to justify the removal of Jews from the German state and nation (i.e. the dissimilation of the Jews) as a legitimate step to protect German culture in the face of unwanted approaches. Tragically the leadership of ethnic Germans swallowed the line. When the *Verband* met in Bad Saarow in September 1933, with representatives from 12 different states (it is unclear whether or

not Ammende was present), it agreed unanimously that the association had complete trust in the new leadership of the German state.³⁴ Under the circumstances, a caveat saying that developments in the Reich could not simply be transferred to the German communities abroad looked distinctly weak.

The congress in 1933

In 1933 the *Verband* met a few weeks ahead of the annual Congress of European Nationalities which was scheduled to convene in Bern. Across the Summer Ammende had been concerned that the congress might have to be postponed. At a congress committee meeting held in April 1933, delegate Jakabffy (an ethnic Hungarian who was a deputy in the Romanian parliament) recommended this option since specific discussion of the Jewish question could not be avoided.³⁵ Ammende, however, insisted that proceedings had to go ahead and middle ground would have to be found between German and Jewish representatives. German delegates also wanted the congress to go ahead, not least because they favoured Hitler's anti-assimilationism and wanted to proclaim this message loudly. The extent to which Ammende really thought that this group, now buoyed up by Werner Hasselblatt working closely with the German Foreign Office, could reach a compromise with Jewish groups must be open to question.³⁶

As a matter of fact, Jewish groups were important components of the Congress of European Nationalities. Leo Motzkin had long been a member of its managing committee and Jewish minorities from at least Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Bulgaria attended the annual congress meetings.³⁷ Indeed intensive contacts continued throughout Summer 1933 between Jewish leaders, Ammende and

³⁴ Wochenbericht der Abteilung VI, 10-16 September 1933. 16 September 1933. R60494. PAGFO.

³⁵ See H.Krabbe, 'Neuvieme Congress des Nationalites Europeennes tenu a Bern du 16 au 19 Septembre 1933', 4/6638/6638. S338. League of Nations Archive, Geneva.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Motzkin was born near Kiev in Ukraine, was educated in Berlin and went on to live in Paris.

other members of the congress's managing committee. Ammende clung to an increasingly forlorn hope that moderate Jewish figures such as Motzkin would eventually agree a treatment of events which would not alienate German representatives completely. It was clear however, following Jewish conferences held in Prague and Geneva, that the Jewish position was (understandably) intransigent. Jewish groups, centred around Emil Margulies (from Czechoslovakia) and H.Rosmarin (from Poland) demanded that a definitive resolution be put to the congress condemning specifically the treatment of Jews in Germany.³⁸

A letter from Graebe to Schiemann argued that the Jewish stance reflected pressure from the Polish government on its minorities.³⁹ But Jewish groups had plenty to be angry about and Ammende's position as General Secretary of the congress was becoming almost impossible. A definitively anti-German resolution would provoke ethnic German groups to leave the congress. These were the most numerous single set of national minorities and they provided a conduit for much needed funding from the German Foreign Office. Such money, in fact, enabled Ammende to maintain an office in Vienna which serviced the congress throughout the year. But the Jews were the next most numerous national group and consistently played important roles in congress business, not least by offering the perspective of a minority persecuted relentlessly across history. If the Jews left the congress, others might follow. As Jakabffy told a League of Nations observer: 'We (Hungarians) don't want to prop up a German facade after the Jews depart.'⁴⁰

The opening of the 1933 Congress of European Nationalities was a moment of high drama.⁴¹ Congress President Josip Wilfan had already published a speech in *Nation*

³⁸ Krabbe, 'Neuvieme Congress'.

³⁹ Graebe to Schiemann, 21 September, 1933. Schiemann papers. Baltic German Library, Riga.

⁴⁰ Krabbe, 'Neuvieme Congress'.

⁴¹ *Sitzungsbericht des Kongresses der organisierten nationalen Gruppen in den Staaten Europas*. Bern, 16. bis 19. September 1933. Vienna-Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller. 1934.

und Staat praising Nazism's rejection of assimilation and proposing that the movement stood for the same principles as the congress.⁴² Days before it opened on 16 September, and hard on the heels of the Jewish World Conference in Geneva, Leo Motzkin sent Wilfan a letter saying Jewish groups would only participate on two conditions: first, the congress had to consider a resolution clearly and specifically denouncing the withdrawal of rights from Jews in Germany; and second that participants should be allowed to discuss the situation without any restriction. Given that the congress's constitution dictated that no specific case should be discussed, Wilfan refused. Consequently the congress opened with no Jewish delegates present (although Motzkin does seem to have participated in committee meetings which happened during the three day course of the congress).

The published minutes of the congress show some notable silences. Paul Schiemann was not present on account of ill health and General Secretary Ammende said not one word during the debate on 'Dissimilation and Nationality Rights'.⁴³ Wilfan was left to try to manage things. This he did by delivering lectures. To begin with he outlined the difficult situation many congress members faced: they felt bound both to their minority national group and to the state in which their nationality provided the majority population. He recognised that a problem was occurring within the German state but said it would not be in their interests to deal with it in a concrete way, rather only in terms of principle. He characterised the issue as follows: a separate race had been growing together with a majority population for the last century, but recently changes had occurred within the majority population leading them to eject the historic minority. It was a problem of 'dissimilation' - or '*Wieder-unähnlich-Machen*'. The majority population had developed a new idea of 'the nation' which excluded those with certain characteristics. Wilfan supported the choice for dissimilation. He said it was

⁴² 'Volkstums- und Territorialprinzip', *Nation und Staat* April 1933. p.463.

⁴³ *Sitzungsbericht 1933*. pp.61-70.

legitimate for those concerned to pursue different lines of development, at least so long as no one be treated as of lesser value or deprived of their rights.

The words clearly were mealy-mouthed. What's more, at no point did Wilfan deal directly with a question that must have been on everyone's lips: how are we defining nationality now? Like Estonia's cultural autonomy law, traditionally the congress had relied on the principle that every individual was free to determine his or her own nationality, but now Wilfan was accepting something different. He recognised that a person's nationality could be ascribed by a third party. This was a most important change.

While Ammende sat silently, Hans Otto Roth (an ethnic German from Romania) read a statement on behalf of the German groups present. He said they had rejected assimilation consistently. Agreeing with Wilfan, he went on: 'the removal of other kinds of people, particularly those of different races, from a national culture ... is basically justified, although we also regard it as right that those people who are turned into minorities as a result of this dissimilation should receive those rights for which our congress stands.'⁴⁴

Hence the positions outlined in Üxküll's article, Wilfan's address and Roth's statement boiled down to much the same thing: Jews could be ejected from the German nation so long as they were permitted to establish themselves as a separate national cultural body on German soil. It amounted to an acceptance of forced 'dissimilation' leading to Jewish cultural autonomy in Germany. The line exuded moral weakness. It dismissed nationality as personal choice and simply expressed the hope that German Jews would accept their fate and set up cultural autonomy for themselves. In fact it drove the whole congress to conform to an anti-Semitic agenda and threatened to treat cultural autonomy as (so to speak) a 'dustbin' for those despised by a majority nationality.

⁴⁴ Ibid pp.26-7.

The absent Jewish delegates responded to the opening proceedings with a letter dated 17 September and signed by Motzkin, Rosmarin, Margulies and Farchi.⁴⁵ Wilfan presented it to the congress the next day.⁴⁶ The letter confirmed the non-participation of Jewish groups on the grounds that Roth's statement made co-operation between national groups impossible. It argued that the situation in Germany was unique and maintained that if the congress rejected assimilation by force, it should also reject the prevention of assimilation by force. Astutely the letter emphasised that the prevention of assimilation was not really the issue in Germany anyway. Jews were being deprived of their human rights, of their civic equality and were being defamed. This was a concerted breach of the very principles which protected all minorities anywhere, even ethnic Germans. Roth's glib talk of the 'exclusion of Jews' from Germany society was identified as a misdirection from reality. The German statement even seemed to approve the removal of Jews from whatever job they did to earn a living. In public, Roth had justified a policy that amounted to an expression of the crudest prejudice.

A letter like this would have shaken most people and once again Ammende left Wilfan to deal with the situation. He said Europe was made up of separate nationalities with distinct characteristics and that these could remain distinct even if they shared the same language. If one of these nationalities developed a more precise definition of itself, which meant that some people who previously had been considered part of this nation no longer were seen in such a way, then it was impossible to dispute the change. Wilfan admitted it was tragic if some minorities were told by a majority: 'We don't count you as part of us any more,' but the argument was valid since it amounted to the rejection of assimilation - and this was something the congress had stood for since its inception. So just as the congress should reject assimilation, it should approve dissimilation - at least so long as it was carried out in a way which accorded with the freedoms and rights assumed

⁴⁵ Farchi's personal details are unclear.

⁴⁶ *Sitzungsbericht 1933*. pp.63-5.

by the congress. In the end, Wilfan achieved almost unanimous approval for a resolution based on the position he had outlined.⁴⁷

During the subsequent minuted proceedings, one voice did speak up to denounce anti-Semitism wherever it appeared in Europe. An ethnic Russian now living in Estonia, Michael Kurtschinsky, made a statement on behalf of Russian groups from Estonia and Poland, Lithuanians from Poland, Catalans and all Hungarian groups.⁴⁸ He denounced anti-Semitism as an offence against human rights and contradictory to the ideals of the congress. The exact significance of the statement, however, is another question. In the context of no one trying to vote down Wilfan's resolution on dissimilation, Kurtschinsky's words were insufficient.⁴⁹

The Jewish angle

This was a depressing time when ethical discourse was manipulated to promote partisan ends and to deflect attention from deep injustices; and the situation came to the fore relatively quickly. When the congress had met as recently as Autumn 1932, Leo Motzkin thanked Wilfan for all the understanding that had been shown to the Jewish groups recently.⁵⁰ At a difficult time, he said, the congress was promoting decency and all should remember that the persecution of one minority endangered all others - indeed, it endangered the minorities movement itself. At the same congress, S.Vitenberg (an Orthodox Jew from Latvia) said national minorities should tell their 'parent' states to treat minorities well, so that their own minorities abroad would receive similar consideration. Rotenstreich (a Jewish representative from Poland) said that when a state tramples on

⁴⁷ Although the Hungarians might have abstained from Wilfan's resolution. Ibid p.70.

⁴⁸ For a study of Kurtschinsky, see D.J.Smith, 'Retracing Estonia's Russians. Mikhail Kurchinskii and Interwar Cultural Autonomy', *Nationality Papers* 27 (1999) pp.455-474.

⁴⁹ Kurtschinsky had other 'fish to fry'. For example at the congress he spoke about the famine in Ukraine. *Sitzungsbericht 1933*. p.17.

⁵⁰ *Sitzungsbericht des Kongresses der organisierten nationalen Gruppen in den Staaten Europas*. Wien, 29. Juni bis 1. Juli 1932. Vienna-Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller. 1933. pp.20-2.

minorities within its borders, it loses the right to speak on behalf of its own minorities living elsewhere.⁵¹ Hence in 1932 the Jewish deputies had been able to use the congress to argue a plausible line in favour of enlightened self-interest for states in respect of minorities issues, yet within a year this was swept away.

Admittedly there is a case for suggesting that the congress's behaviour in 1933 was not completely misjudged, even that its line on dissimulation *might* have brought Germany's Jews advantages. True, to modern eyes this is a difficult line to take, but the morally irreproachable Paul Schiemann thought it possible.⁵² By constituting themselves as a separate national group inside Germany, Jews could have sought international support by likening their position to that of, say, Germans in Estonia. They might have tried to petition the League of Nations on this basis - although how this would have been possible is unclear, since most of Germany was not subject to any minority rights agreement with that organisation.⁵³ In any case, had Germany's Jews organised themselves as a separate nationality, they certainly could have tried to exploit the Congress of European Nationalities as a platform from which to publicise their ill-treatment. Unfortunately, however, cultural autonomy simply was not a step which most German Jews felt comfortable taking. If national affiliation reflected choices bound up with an individual's identity, then most German Jews felt more German than Jewish. As a German Jewish newspaper put it that June:

'Before the law we are non-Germans without equal rights; to ourselves we are Germans with full rights. We reject it, to be a folk or national minority, perhaps like the Germans in Poland or the Poles in Germany, because we cannot deceive our own innermost [feelings]. We wish to be subject as Germans with equal rights to the new government and not to some other creation, whether it is called League of Nations or anything else.

⁵¹ Ibid p.122 and pp.131-2.

⁵² Hiden, *Defender of Minorities* p.216.

⁵³ K.Jonca, 'Jewish Resistance to Nazi Racial Legislation in Silesia, 1933-1937' in F.R.Nicolsia and L.D.Stokes (eds.), *Germans against Nazism*. Oxford: Berg. 1990.

As far as we are concerned that also closes the question of Geneva, which at present occupies Jewish people everywhere.⁵⁴

Most of Germany's Jews did not want to set up cultural autonomy and plead a case to either the Congress of European Nationalities or the League of Nations. They wanted respect as Germans who happened to be Jewish. After 1932 the congress did not offer this option.

Aftermath and 'the bigger picture'

1933, then, was a nadir for the Congress of European Nationalities morally and practically. A letter to Schiemann from Graebe indicated that Ammende had been in poor form throughout the proceedings.⁵⁵ He had lost his composure through fear that the congress would fall apart at any moment. He had done himself more harm than good with German minority leaders and had lost their respect. Actually it soon became apparent that recent developments had taken a serious toll on Ammende's health. Long a sufferer from diabetes, soon after the congress ended he checked into a sanatorium to take a cure.

Events had run well beyond Ammende's control and an observer from the League of Nations recorded the harm that was being done to the nationalities movement.⁵⁶ The meeting, he said, had been a tense affair and Ammende had become desperate at the threat to his life's work. At one point he even asked the observer to try to persuade the ethnic German delegates to be reasonable. Naturally the League's man refused. He noted that Roth's statement amounted to a defence of Germany's Jewish policy and that this line damaged the congress immensely. Wilfan had read out the Jews' letters in dead silence and had delivered a lecture about them in a manner which many delegates could not

⁵⁴ Article by Alfred Wiener of the Central Association of German Jews, *CV-Zeitung* 1 June 1933. Quoted in Arad et al., *Documents on the Holocaust* pp.52-3.

⁵⁵ Graebe to Schiemann, 21 September, 1933. Schiemann papers. Baltic German Library, Riga.

⁵⁶ Krabbe, 'Neuvieme Congress'.

actually understand. In any case there was no opportunity to debate openly what was happening. When the resolution on dissimilation was put to the congress, Catalan, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and White Russian groups all acted frostily and initially abstained - which led to a recess. When Kurtschinsky denounced anti-Semitism, the German groups all reacted in an icy manner and another recess was called. It seems that faced with Kurtschinsky's statement and the congress's resolution on dissimilation, the ethnic German groups telephoned the Foreign Office in Berlin before accepting the congress's line.

Conversations between the League's observer and senior congress figures showed that tensions now wracked the organisation from head to toe.⁵⁷ Hungarian representatives objected to being forced, in the end, to accommodate a resolution which was at odds with their own ideals. Count Szüllö, the leading ethnic Hungarian, was in revolt against the idea that the congress should exclude discussion of concrete cases. Henceforth he wanted completely free debate.

The congress's established terms of reference were under threat and still more changes were afoot. In line with Ammende's original personal commitment to cultural autonomy as outlined in Estonia's law of 1925, the development of national cultural rights based on the person rather than on territorial autonomy traditionally had been the practical focus of the congress's work. Now, however, a shift began. At the 1933 congress, discussion of territorially-based national cultural autonomy was led by a Sudeten German representative, Dr. Mediger.⁵⁸ He explained that his ethnic group was not 'a minority', but a different and equal national group living within the Czechoslovak state. Sudeten Germans used the word 'minority' to capitalise on the terms of Versailles, but minority rights were only ever a minimal set of their aims. His people wanted territorial self-administration. Thereafter the congress witnessed several demands for

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Sitzungsbericht 1933*. pp.30-4.

territorial autonomy: from Ukrainians living in Poland and Romania, from Lithuanians in the Vilnius region of Poland, from White Russians in Poland and from Carpatho-Russians in Czechoslovakia.

At this point Ammende did finally begin to contribute to the 1933 congress. He said that since 1926 the forum had recognised that territorial autonomy could be appropriate for closely settled national groups.⁵⁹ Later he wrote an article for *Nation und Staat* on the Sudeten issue. But the move towards territorial autonomy as a focus for congress debate mattered immensely. Cultural autonomy based on personal rights was designed for, in relative terms, thinly scattered national groups which were not too numerous - groups which could not capture existing local government institutions by democratic means. Examples of these included ethnic Germans in the Baltic states, but also Jewish groups around Europe. Indeed, cultural autonomy in Estonia had been exploited not just by ethnic Germans, but by Jews as well.⁶⁰ In actual fact no small number of Jewish writers had explored for themselves possible models of cultural autonomy.⁶¹ But there were no settlements of Jews in Europe to compare with, say, the three and a half million Sudeten Germans. Territorial autonomy offered little to European Jews.

Hence the shift away from cultural autonomy and towards territorial autonomy moved the congress's agenda away from the interests of both ethnic Germans abroad (such as the Balts) and European Jews. It moved proceedings towards the needs of borderland Germans. At the same time, by raising the possibility of campaigning for territorial autonomy within Poland and Czechoslovakia (for Ukrainians, Lithuanians and Russians) the strategy offered a challenge to the unitary powers being consolidated within those states. In this respect it looked as though the congress finally was becoming

⁵⁹ Ibid p.40.

⁶⁰ Estonia's Jews implemented cultural autonomy in March 1926.

⁶¹ For a discussion of this point, see P.Schiemann, 'Volksgemeinschaft und Staatsgemeinschaft', *Nation und Staat* September 1927. pp.29-31.

slanted towards German state interests. Not only was it failing to contest the 'Jewish Question', the congress was also adopting a line which implied the weakening of Germany's perceived international enemies.

The main topic for Ammende's involvement in the 1933 congress was, however, famine in the Soviet Union. In the weeks before the congress met he had written a lengthy memorandum, duly circulated to the German Foreign Office and European publishers, proposing that the crisis conditions of the early 1920s were being repeated in Ukraine, especially in areas which contained large numbers of national minorities.⁶² The topic was first raised at the congress by Mikhail Kurtschinsky.⁶³ He said that famine was threatening hundreds of thousands of ethnic Russians, Germans, Ukrainians, Jews, Poles, White Russians, Estonians, Latvians, Bulgarians and others found in the central Soviet Union. A Ukrainian representative from Poland took up the issue. In an emotional speech, Ms. Rudnycka denounced the current famine as produced by Soviet economic policy and an attempted destruction of the Ukrainian nation. She said Soviet policy was already responsible for the deaths of 200,000 Ukrainian farmers.

These interventions were very specific and as such contravened the congress's rules in a number of ways. Wilfan admitted they raised political issues, but he permitted discussion because the motives were so 'high and holy.'⁶⁴ In any case it was obvious that although Jewish groups were forbidden to raise their specific case for discussion, no such problem existed in respect of Ukraine. Ammende also argued that this was for the greater good. He pointed out that many of the suffering minorities were kin to congress participants and that the institution should do everything in its power to support the provision of aid to the stricken region. It was not, however, a convincing position.

⁶² E.Ammende, 'Die russische Hungerkatastrophe', *Europäische Nationalitätenkorrespondenz* 4 (1933). 19 August 1933. R60531. PAGFO.

⁶³ *Sitzungsbericht 1933*. pp.17-21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid* p.23.

To Ammende's eyes, a focus on Ukraine might have involved a desperate gamble to produce a cause behind which many nationality groups could rally at a time of organisational crisis, but it was impossible to ignore that dual standards were being applied. For an organisation as complex as the Congress of European Nationalities, this was damaging enough in its own right. There was just no escaping the impression that the congress's original agenda was being Nazified and the General Secretary's independence was being eroded badly as a result. Clearly he could not even push his own *cause célèbre* of cultural autonomy any longer. The terms of the German nationalities movement had moved on, and Ammende was left to consider the best way to survive personally.

Conclusion

A defence lawyer for Ammende and those around him might point out not only that the times were difficult, but also that these were men working in a new area. Minorities rights were not really established in international relations, rather they had been developing fast as part of the peace-making process and in association with the creation of new states following the collapse of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empires.⁶⁵ International law was only in its infancy and the protection of national minorities was set to become a particularly controversial area anyway. Furthermore international proceedings were still dominated by the Great Powers, imperial thinking had not yet vanished, and animosities still abounded as a result of four years of unbridled warfare. In the face of all this (and notwithstanding their extensive connections to government organisations), Ammende and those around him remained private individuals

⁶⁵ For studies of minorities issues in international context, see D.Crols, 'Old and New Minorities on the International Chessboard: from League to Union' in Smith (ed.), *The Baltic States and their Region*; also M.Scheuermann, *Minderheitenschutz contra Konfliktverhütung? Die Minderheitenpolitik des Völkerbundes in den Zwanziger Jahren*. Marburg: Verlag Herder Institut. 2000.

trying to analyse and address a major European challenge. There is a case for being amazed that their more enlightened work lasted even as long as it did.

But in the end an initiative can only be as good as those promoting it and by 1933 there had been important shifts in the personnel associated with German minorities organisations. German Foreign Minister Stresemann, of course, was long dead, as was the conservative nationalist at the hub of the *Verband*, Karl Georg Bruns. Paul Schiemann should have chaired the debate on dissimilation at the congress meeting of 1933, but was too ill. Meanwhile Ewald Ammende's health was deteriorating too. By contrast, borderland figures and agendas were receiving greater mileage in Berlin, and Werner Hasselblatt had taken over from Bruns at the hub of the *Verband*. In the process, he moved home from Estonia to Berlin and began showing ever more clearly Pan-German sympathies.⁶⁶

There was also the issue of money. Resources were needed to permit Ammende to service the congress. It had begun on a shoe-string, apparently supported by donations from various business sources, but German Foreign Office documents show that within two or three years funding passed from Berlin to the *Verband* was filtering through as well.⁶⁷ A Foreign Office memorandum produced in August 1930 justified the process since the congress provided a valuable stage for the representation of German minority interests.⁶⁸ It said that such support was conditional on German minorities and the congress leadership taking account of Germany's foreign policy needs. To this end, the memo expected there to be liaison with Berlin over important initiatives. Such stipulations were not necessarily a problem during the Weimar period, but after 30

⁶⁶ For a study of Hasselblatt's career, see J.Hackmann, 'Werner Hasselblatt (1890-1958). Von der estländischen Kulturautonomie zur nationalsozialistischen Bevölkerungspolitik' in D.Henning (ed.), *Schriften des Bundesinstituts für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa*. Munich: Oldenbourg. 2005. pp.175-206.

⁶⁷ See, for instance, letter from Bruns to Freytag of the German Foreign Office, 13 August 1927. R60493. PAGFO.

⁶⁸ Memo 28 August 1930. R60528. PAGFO.

January 1933 the situation was different. The importance of funding and the possibility of political control which it implied was underlined by a League of Nations observer in October 1933. He related the impression that German government money was now the prime source of support for Ammende's office.⁶⁹ It meant there had to be strings attached.

Against this background, cultural autonomy clearly had begun experiencing important problems of motivation. In fact the readiness of individuals to turn away from cultural autonomy in a sense mirrored what happened in respect of Weimar democracy. It has been said of Germany's parliamentary constitution that at a time of crisis a system legitimated largely through democratic forms and technocracy was always likely to lack adequate popular grounds for support relative to more emotionally-charged political competitors.⁷⁰ Indeed at one point when discussing cultural autonomy, Paul Schiemann recognised that the very rationality of a state based primarily on the effective and egalitarian management of a given territory rather than national affiliation might run into just such challenges at critical times.⁷¹ More directly, elsewhere he also noted the depressing ease with which nationalism mobilised the masses.⁷² In the context of the 1920s and 1930s, when backs were to the wall it proved hard to motivate people to choose rational politics and national equality over than chauvinistic alternatives.

There is another, related point of comparison between the failure of the European national minorities movement and the demise of the Weimar Republic. In 1932 a League official observed that most of those attending the congress were honourable people, but

⁶⁹ Krabbe, 'Neuvieme Congress'.

⁷⁰ A similar point is made in L.E.Jones, 'Culture and Politics in the Weimar Republic' in Martel G., *Modern Germany Reconsidered, 1870-1945*. London: Routledge. 1992. pp.80-2; also K.Sontheimer, 'Anti-democratic Thought in the Weimar Republic' in T.Eschenburg et al, *The Road to Dictatorship. Germany 1918 - 1933*. London: Oswald Wolff. 1964. p.42.

⁷¹ Schiemann, 'Volksgemeinschaft und Staatsgemeinschaft' pp.36-7.

⁷² Schiemann, Schiemann, 'Die neue nationalistische Welle' p.807.

he regretted the way they kept attacking the League of Nations.⁷³ The Weimar Republic was not helped by constant criticism from German intellectuals. As a result, the very people best placed to capitalise on the freedom of the new liberal system helped delegitimise it in the eyes of the wider population.⁷⁴ From the late 1920s on, members of the Congress of European Nationalities (and the report recognised that Ammende personally was culpable) criticised the League of Nations vehemently and at length.⁷⁵ The organisation had its faults - indeed in the late 1920s it had failed to adopt cultural autonomy as the most suitable way of regulating nationalities issues - but, in the deteriorating atmosphere of the time, it was not helpful for intelligent members of national minorities to keep attacking a body supposedly dedicated to international understanding.

The League of Nations certainly did have deficiencies, but these need to be put in context. Sir Willoughby Dickinson was a senior figure in the League of Nations Union who had a particular interest in the rights of national minorities. Speaking to the congress in 1929 he described a situation in which unrest among national minorities in Eastern and Central Europe was being provoked in large measure by agitators travelling from Berlin and Budapest.⁷⁶ He went on to emphasise the difficulties facing governments of multi-national regions and proposed that many majorities saw no reason to grant 'special privileges' to minorities. Majorities just wanted them moved out or assimilated. Dickinson recognised that this view was shared by the Italian government, many East European administrators and even some members of the League Council. His message, therefore, was roughly this: you might be dissatisfied with the League, but battles are going on within the organisation to assert the moral high ground and things

⁷³ 'Le Congres des Nationalites Europeennes a Vienne 29 Juin - 1 Juillett 1932', 4/6638/6638. Box S 338. League of Nations Archive, Geneva.

⁷⁴ G.A.Craig, *Germany 1866-1945*. OUP. 1981. pp.479-80.

⁷⁵ Housden, 'Ewald Ammende and the Organisation of National Minorities' pp.451-4.

⁷⁶ *Sitzungsbericht des Kongresses der organisierten nationalen Gruppen in den Staaten Europas. Genf, 26 bis 28 August 1929*. Vienna-Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller. 1930. pp.26-9.

could be a lot worse. Three years later it took an independent academic, Prof. Bovet, to remind all present that the congress owed its very existence to the spirit that the League was trying to embody.⁷⁷ He was supported in due course by Jewish representative Margulies who said that Jews had been persecuted for 2000 years, but things had improved considerably since the end of the First World War.⁷⁸ Less fortunately, however, Hans Otto Roth contradicted the mood Bovet was trying to create with a speech talking about 'hammer blows' against the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 'magic forces' being set free across Europe and a sense of nationhood arising in Spain and Belgium like a 'volcanic eruption.' His rhetoric could hardly have highlighted better the forces waiting to ensnare those disillusioned with the path symbolised by the League.⁷⁹

As a League official put it, the actual problem facing Europe was not a lack of well-legislated cultural autonomy, but of something more fundamental: a spirit of liberal tolerance.⁸⁰ A similar point came out of a talk given to the congress by Frederick Llewellyn-Jones in 1929.⁸¹ Discussing Welsh-English relations, he painted a picture of decisions about how best to balance the use of different languages in administrative, legal and educational affairs as based on entirely local agreements. He said that Welsh national cultural events were supported by whichever government was in place in London and emphasised that all this occurred without the existence of any detailed legislation at all. In other words, Welsh-English harmony was said to happen neither as a result of any specific political or cultural system, nor through the force of law, but thanks to an over-arching attitude of good will all round. Much of what Llewellyn-Jones said was ignored in subsequent congress business.

⁷⁷ *Sitzungsbericht des Kongresses der organisierten nationalen Gruppen in den Staaten Europas. Wien, 29. Juni bis 1. Juli 1932.* Wien-Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller. 1933. p.38.

⁷⁸ *Ibid* pp.116-7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid* p.45.

⁸⁰ H.Krabbe, 'L'autonomie culturelle comme solution du problème des minorités. Note de H.Krabbe eu date du 18 Nov. 1931', 4/32835/32835. R2175. League of Nations Archive, Geneva.

⁸¹ *Sitzungsbericht des Kongresses der organisierten nationalen Gruppen in den Staaten Europas. Genf, 26 bis 28 August 1929.* Vienna-Leipzig: Wilhelm Braumüller. 1930. pp.21-4.

It was symptomatic that even national minorities activists rarely paid sufficient attention to what they understood by important themes such as 'loyalty' or thought adequately about the pre-requisites for cohesive multi-national communities. For instance 'loyalty' could be interpreted with a large admixture of expediency. Hence even Ammende's 1922 memo hinted it was a useful tool to facilitate a more effective fight for self-assertion within a host state. This wasn't really good enough. And although on occasion Werner Hasselblatt did speak about how a sense of unity between different nationality groups could emerge from understanding common history, an appreciation of the shared *Heimat*, and common ideas rooted in regional laws and religion, actual discussions fleshing out such shared aspects of life remained few and far between.⁸² In other words, even minorities activists who had been deeply involved in progressive political developments ultimately lacked real interest in the other nationalities with which they shared space. On balance, they were too much consumed with 'ploughing' their own particular national cultural 'furrow' to be able to generate an adequately robust sense of good will all round.

If there was any final justice it lay in the fact that when Ewald Ammende died of a stroke on a train outside Beijing in 1936 he must have realised the extent of his mistakes. There was symbolism in the fact that this pioneer of nationality rights in Europe died in Asia. It was as if he had failed in his personal aims for his home continent and had moved on. It was impossible to deny that by this point his personal ethics had been subject to a disappointing process of drift and his youthful idealism had run aground. As an intelligent individual he must have understood the point well enough. In particular he had done too little to resist the way both cultural autonomy and the Congress of European Nationalities become tainted by the arrival of Hitler's exclusionist anti-Semitism. As a result he sold out both those he sought to represent and himself.

⁸² W.Hasselblatt, *Über die Kulturautonomie*. Unpublished manuscript. Fond 85, nimestik 3, säilik 26. Estonian State Archive, Tallinn. p.20.