



## JÁN URSÍNÝ (1896 – 1972)

The name Ján Ursíny is most frequently mentioned in connection with his political activity and active participation in the civil bloc of the anti-fascist struggle. This has pushed into the background the fact that as a leading representative of the agrarian movement in Slovakia and a leading functionary of the Republican Party of small farmers and agriculturalists, he was one of the most active organizers of Slovak credit cooperatives in the inter-war period.

He was born on 11th October 1896 at Rakša, into a nationally conscious family of small farmers. From 1903 to 1908 he attended the local primary school and later the town school in Martin. From 1912 he continued his studies at the economics school at Šlapanice in Moravia, where he gained a professional education with an economic orientation. After completing his studies, he returned to the family property at Rakša.

Family traditions connected to the soil, but also Ursíny's connection with the Slovak village and perfect knowledge of its needs and possibilities pre-determined his life-long orientation. After the origin of the First Czechoslovak Republic, he became a supporter of the agrarian movement in Slovakia, but he devoted his attention more to practical solution of the small farmers' problems than to actual politics. As a member of the administrative board of the Central Cooperative in Bratislava, centre of the cooperative organizations in Slovakia, he already took part in propagating economic societies associating capital weak small farmers from the beginning of the 1920s. His views on the national economy started from the fact that Slovakia was a mainly agricultural country and so needed a wide ranging cooperative organization, constructed on the basis of self-help and cooperative self-management. Credit cooperatives or "village banks" as he liked to call them, had to make up for the lack of capital resources and contribute to the technical reconstruction of the Slovak economy, with high value self-help (bearable interest rates). He did not see the importance of cooperatives only from the purely economic point of view. Apart from the priority task of improving the economic position of small farmers, they were expected to encourage thrift among their members, and provide advice and education for further economic activities.

After 1924 his name gradually began to be associated with a further component of the credit cooperative organizations in Slovakia, known under the name of Small Farmers' Mutual Savings Bank. It was a self-help people's financial institution of the medium type, constructed for one administrative district. Their chief mission was service to



agriculture by means of cheap, but fully secured operational and investment loans. Ján Ursíny not only stood at the birth of these financial institutions, but as one of the leading functionaries of the Union of Small Farmers' Mutual Savings Banks in Bratislava, he actually directed their activity for fifteen years. At first he held the post of a member of the board of directors. From 1920 to 1930 he was deputy chairman,

and finally the general meeting of the Union on 15th June 1930 elected him chairman of the board. Ten years later he had to leave this position in dramatic circumstances. After the events of March 1939, there were significant politically coloured personnel changes in the autonomous organs of the union. These resulted from the general trend of government circles to push their former political and economic rivals, especially agrarians and including officials in central cooperative institutions, out of leading positions. Under the influence of these facts and as a result of personal antipathy, prime minister Jozef Tiso personally supported the dismissal of Ján Ursíny in a confidential letter from May 1939. The quarrel over Ursíny, considered very politically unreliable by the regime, culminated at an extraordinary general meeting of the Union on 3rd June 1939. In spite of the strong political pressure, the representatives of the member organizations expressed unanimous support for Ursíny keeping his position. However, the Ministry of Finance gave the final verdict in 1940. On the basis of it, Ursíny was forced to resign first from the chairmanship, then from the board of the Union.

A further important chapter in Ursíny's life began to develop in connection with his active participation in organizing the civil bloc of the anti-fascist struggle. He was one of the key figures involved in founding the illegal Slovak National Council in 1943 and preparing the Slovak National Uprising. After it started, he became a member of the presidium of the Slovak National Council and commissioner for economic and supply matters. From 7th February 1945 he worked as commissioner of agriculture and land reform. He held this position only until the formation of the first Czechoslovak government in liberated territory. In April 1945, he was appointed deputy prime minister of the renewed Czechoslovak Republic for the Democratic Party. For two years he also worked in the highest legislative body of Slovakia and of the whole state. He received a sort of compensation for the events of 1939-1940 in December 1945, when he was re-elected to the position of chairman of the Union of Small Farmers' Mutual Savings Banks.

He resigned from the post of deputy prime minister of Czechoslovakia during the political crisis of autumn 1947.



In April of the following year, the Communists accused him, as a leading representative of the Democratic Party, of participation in a conspiracy with a Ludák underground movement (the so-called Obuch affair). Although none of the accusations were proved, he was sentenced to seven years in prison after a staged trial. Ján Ursíny became one of the first victims of the new Communist regime. He was released from prison in 1953 before the end of the sentence, and rehabilitated in 1964 by decision of the Supreme

Court. After his release he worked first as a farm worker at Rakša and later as a stockman in the state forests at Turčianské Teplice.

He died on 8th January 1972 in his native village. In 1945 he was awarded the Order of the Slovak National Uprising first class, and in 1992 the Order of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk second class in memoriam.

**Mgr. Tatiana Cvetková, Archive of the NBS**