



## KORNEL STODOLA

### 1866 – 1946

The Stodola family had an admirable ability to turn new ideas into reality. They made a priceless contribution to the development of Slovak social and economic life. The father of the family, the tanner Ondrej Stodola established the first factory for processing leather at Liptovský Mikuláš, on the basis of his experience from Western Europe. The family tanning tradition was further developed by his eldest son Jozef, whose son Ivan later became both a noted doctor specializing in the treatment of tuberculosis and a successful playwright (The Shepherd's Wife, Jožko Púčík and his career, King Svätopluk). The name of Ondrej's second son Aurel, a university professor in Zürich, has gone down in history thanks to his invention of an artificial hand and improvements to steam, water and internal combustion turbines. Emil, the third in the family, was an outstanding lawyer and politician, co-author of the Martin Declaration and first chairman of the Union of Advocates in Slovakia. Entrepreneurship, enthusiasm, inventiveness and permanent interest in everything progressive was also characteristic of the youngest Kornel Milan, who achieved success in the field of the national economy, politics and publicist writing.

He was born on 26th August 1866 in Liptovský Mikuláš, where he also attended primary school. He began to study at gymnasium in Lučenec, but because of his orientation to languages, he continued at Kežmarok, Bratislava and Prešov. Here he participated in founding the self-education student society Zora. However, his national conviction and desire to devote himself to economic matters resulted in him not completing his study. As a 17 year old, he helped to revive the family business after a fire. He did not stay in Liptovský Mikuláš for long. The world, new knowledge and new people attracted him. On a study tour of Germany, France, England, the USA and Russia, he gained many experiences of modern, industrial processing of leather, new sources of raw materials and markets for the output of his own factory. Since he did not have enough resources for modernization and development of production after his return, the company was taken over by an investment company and Stodola was its director until 1911. He endeavoured to introduce in his birthplace new developments observed in Western Europe. He was a notable promoter of sport, especially hiking and skiing. He named a peak in the High Tatras after his wife Olga, on the basis of being the first to climb it.

From 1911 to 1918, he lived in Vienna, where he devoted his attention to study of the economic and political sciences and to organizing Slovak national life. Hodža, Dé-



rer, Šrobár, Blaho and later also Czech and Rumanian representatives met regularly in his flat to discuss the further direction of the struggle for the rights of the national minorities. During the First World War, he did voluntary work as secretary of a military hospital. In 1915, he became chief of press supervision in Vienna. He used his economics knowledge in favour of the Slovak minority in Vienna, by enabling members of the „Národ“ (Nation) society to establish a self-help financial institution – the Slovenská Záložňa, which provided loans for Slovak tradesmen at reasonable interest rates, under his management.

Politically, he engaged especially in the electoral struggles of the Slovak National Party. In 1918, he became a member of the executive committee of the Slovak National Council, and significantly contributed to preparation of the Martin Declaration of the Slovak Nation. However, he rejected the proposal of V. Šrobár that he take over the position of chairman of the party, so from 1918 to 1925 he was only one of its members in the National Assembly. Stodola's political activity was closely connected with his work in the national economy. In 1919 – 1920, he was government commissioner for railways, post and telegraph at the Ministry with Full Power to Administer Slovakia. In 1920, he became chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Bratislava. This position enabled him to fully use his organizational talents, knowledge and world view, and raise Slovakia's level, bringing it closer to the world. He already promoted the importance of Bratislava as a gateway to eastern markets. He founded the Danubian Trade Fair in Bratislava. This created conditions for active commercial contacts between East and West. He was also the co-founder and first chairman of the Bratislava Crop Exchange and he prepared the ground for the establishment of a Centre for Choice of Profession.

As a member of the boards of financial institutions and especially as chairman of Tatra Banka for many years, he also had the opportunity to penetrate into the problems of Slovak finance. Since he saw a clear imbalance between the banks and the small cooperative financial institutions, he especially assisted with the establishment of small farmers' mutual savings banks, and in 1923 he participated in forming the Union of Tradesmen's Credit Institutions and Cooperatives for Slovakia and Podkarpatská Rus, and became its chairman. Considering the importance of prompt publication of new information, he established the magazine *Hospodárske rozhľady* (Economic Views) as a press organ of the chambers of commerce and industry.

It was only natural that the many-sided activity of Kor-



nel Stodola went beyond the frontiers of Czechoslovakia. Thanks to excellent linguistic knowledge (active mastery of five foreign languages) and natural diplomatic ability, he also achieved recognition and admiration abroad. He was chairman of the International Chamber of Commerce in Paris, a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, honorary consul for Denmark and general consul for Rumania. Later he was awarded the Italian and Rumanian Order of the Crown, and made a knight grand cross of the French Legion d'Honneur.

He was also honoured in his homeland. From 1925 to

1939 he was a senator in the National Assembly for the Agrarian Party. Until the beginning of the Second World War, he was regarded as one of the most influential Slovaks in the area of trade, finance and industry. In 1938, he signed the Žilina Agreement, but he lost all his influence on economic affairs, because of his support for values different to those of the regime of the Slovak state.

Kornel Stodola spent the last years of his life in Bratislava, where he died on 21st October 1946 aged 80.

**Mgr. Dana Kancelová, Archive of the NBS**