Slovak Society, the Second World War, and the Search for Slovak "Stateness"

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Abstract

Positioning the Second World War as a pivotal juncture in modern Slovak history, this study argues that the emergence of a Nazi-Allied Slovak State (1939-1945) and the 1944 rebellion launched to overthrow it (known as the Slovak National Uprising [SNU]) were episodes critical to the formation of collective sociopolitical ideals in postwar Slovakia. Under-explored and inadequately understood in Anglo-American scholarship, the Slovak State and the SNU represent uniquely Slovak responses to the major societal ruptures induced by geopolitical fragmentation and war, first following the Munich Agreement of 1938, and then the collapse of German hegemony in Europe in late 1944. Since 1945, these events and their putative legacies have become divisive and heavily mediated constructs, deployed to advance particular political agendas, as well as to challenge or reaffirm existing arrangements of power. Furthermore, because they imply discrete articulations of Slovak state- and nationhood, the State and the SNU have come to support opposing positions in contemporary debates over Slovakia's political future. This research also illuminates some of the ways in which the war initiated transformations in demography, economy, and social practices in Slovakia. More broadly, it suggests that the uses of wartime history in today's East-Central Europe remain both manifold and insufficiently researched.

Abstrait

En positionnant la Deuxième guerre mondiale comme un moment clé de l'histoire slovaque contemporaine, cette étude soutient que l'émergence d'un état slovaque allié aux nazis (1939 – 1945) mais aussi la révolte de 1944 (connue sous le nom de « Soulèvement national slovaque » [SNS]) furent deux épisodes essentiels pour la formation d'idéaux sociopolitiques dans la société slovaque d'après-guerre. Peu étudiés et mal compris dans l'historiographie anglo-américaine, la création de l'état slovaque et le SNS représentent les seules réponses slovaques aux ruptures sociétales majeures introduites par la fragmentation géopolitique et la guerre, d'abord à la suite des accords de Munich de 1938, puis suite à l'effondrement de l'hégémonie allemande en Europe à la fin de l'année 1944. Depuis 1945, ces événements et leur héritage présumé sont devenus des concepts donnant matière à controverse et fréquemment manipulés afin d'être utilisés pour appuyer certains programmes politiques, mais aussi pour défier ou conforter les régimes en places. De plus, puisqu'ils impliquent une articulation différente entre les notions d'état et de nation, l'état slovaque et le SNS ont été utilisés pour soutenir des positions opposées dans les débats contemporains sur le futur politique de la Slovaquie. La présente analyse met également en lumière les conséquences de la guerre sur la démographie, l'économie et les pratiques sociales en Slovaquie. De manière plus générale, elle suggère que, tout en étant largement utilisée, l'histoire de la guerre ne fait pas l'objet de recherches suffisamment approfondies dans l'Europe centrale et orientale d'aujourd'hui.

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I could not have completed this dissertation project without the vital support of friends, family members, institutions, and mentors. I owe a debt to my parents for encouraging my childhood fascination with the past, and in later years, with all things *Mitteleuropa*. Friends in North America and Europe have schooled me with the sort of humor and pathos rarely found in books; their insights and belief in the historical craft have also sustained me through the peaks and valleys of this long trek. Many generously offered more concrete kinds of sustenance; I am thankful to Andreas Winkler, Ned Richardson-Little and Julia Sittmann, Carolynn McNally, Anna Thier, and Petra Svardová for their hospitality, whether with a plate of *Flamkuchen*, a glass of *slivovica,* or a mooring in a foreign port.

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Any achievement reflected in the following pages must above all be shared with my wife and partner, Liz. She has offered unflagging support at every step, buoying me in defeat and cheering me in success. Her wit, groundedness, and generosity of spirit have modeled a rare kind of inspiration—the courage to overcome self-imposed impasses and habits of spiritual abnegation. She has often challenged me with the wisdom captured in French high-wire artist Philipe Petit's aphorism: “Les limites existent seulement dans l'esprit de ceux qui ne savent pas rêver."

Whatever errors or oversights that appear in the following are of course mine alone.

List of Abbreviations

AMSNP – Archive of the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising
BArch – Bundesarchiv Berlin
CDM – Christian Democratic Movement
CMD – Czechoslovak Ministry of Defense
CNC – Czechoslovak National Council
CPC – Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
CPS – Communist Party of Slovakia
CSS – Central State Security
DP – Democratic Party
EBHG – Emergency Battalions of the Hlinka Guard
FP – Freedom Party
GS – General Secretariat
HG – Hlinka Guard
HSPP – Hlinka's Slovak People's Party
HY – Hlinka Youth
MC – Military Center
MENE – Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment
NC – National Committee
PP–OS – People's Party–Our Slovakia
PSNU – Party of Slovak National Unity
RNC – Revolutionary National Committee
RTVS – Slovak Radio and Television
SCPC – Soviet Central Partisan Command
SCTO – Slovak Christian Trade Organization
SD – Reich Security Service
SDP – Social Democratic Party
SMER – Direction–Social Democracy Party
SNA – Slovak National Archives
SNC – Slovak National Council
SNU – Slovak National Uprising
SPP – Slovak People's Party
USHMM – United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
USNA – United States National Archives
USP – Union of Slovak Partisans

Introduction

At a recent ceremony commemorating wartime Nazi atrocities, Slovakia's Premier Robert Fico offered an unsettling admission: “Some people say that fascism is creeping here [again].... It’s not creeping here, it’s present here."[1] Illiberalism at home and abroad have indeed beset Fico and his Direction–Social Democracy party (SMER) over the past year. A few months after a Slovak neo-Nazi party gained several seats in parliament, the Slovak Republic assumed the presidency of a European Union facing right-wing reaction to a migration crisis, shaken by the departure of a key member state in the United Kingdom, and anxious over potential threats to NATO and the region's security. In the January 2017 commemoration address, the Prime Minister wondered aloud about Slovakia's uncertain future—but his words could have been addressed to the entire European community: the question, Fico explained, is whether the existing democratic order will be replaced by "something that questions the events that Slovakia and the Slovak nation have been based on."[2]

There is something striking, if not poetic, in this turn. Roughly a quarter century after its emergence as an independent, democratic state in a revolutionized, reintegrated East-Central Europe, Slovakia's leaders have become embattled Davids for western liberalism, facing down the Goliaths of right-wing extremism, isolationism, and Euro-skepticism. How did we get here? How did a "Slovak nation" that was less than a hundred years ago still

[1] *The Slovak Spectator,* 23 January 2017. Available online: https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20440418/pm-fico-
[2] Ibid.

climbing out of the shadow of Hungarian assimilation come to be counted, and to count itself, as a modern, democratic nation-state? What are the turning points in this story?

In a broad sense, this dissertation has taken shape as a response to this question. Of course, Anglo-American scholars have already elaborated several plot lines in Slovakia's modern narrative; nevertheless, they have tended to circumvent or gloss over the complicated but climactic juncture of the Second World War. In placing Slovakia's experience of 1939-1945 at the center of its twentieth-century history, I offer a more substantive look at the socio-political transformations that emerged in connection with the war. Undergirding this study is the conviction that today's Slovak Republic, much like today's Europe, is a product of that cataclysmic era.

Such a treatment is sorely needed. English-language literature on Slovakia during the war is very limited. In the former Czechoslovakia, often locked into stale interpretations, or else strained by dogma, much of the work available on these topics benefits from fresh consideration. Both the Nazi-allied Slovak Republic (1939-1945) and the 1944 rebellion designed to overthrow it, today known as the Slovak National Uprising (SNU), have for decades sparked emotional debate in Slovak society. Priest-president Jozef Tiso's authoritarian, "clerical fascist" Slovak State (as the first Republic came to be called) became an object of emulation among some Slovak politicians and intellectuals in the years following the Velvet Revolution of 1989. A former Catholic dissident and one of Slovakia's first Prime Ministers, Ján Čarnogurský gained a reputation as a prominent defender of the State, praising its contributions to Slovak national identity and culture. As Slovakia again weighed independence in the early 1990s, Čarnogurský—who is also the son of a high-ranking Slovak State official—and other center-right figures in the Slovak Christian

Democratic Movement (CDM) drew criticism for their whitewashed and occasionally hagiographic views of the State's relationship to Nazi Germany, as well as its complicity in the murder of more than 70,000 Slovak Jews during the war.

The Uprising, perpetual fodder for Marxist myths and legends under the Czechoslovak Communist regime (1948-1989), presents a likewise tangled political legacy. As early as August 1991, members of Čarnogurský's CDM began attacking what they saw as a new era of "deformation" of SNU history; in the following year, the selection of the rebellion's anniversary (August 29) as a new national holiday for Slovakia revealed how divisive the subject had become.[3] CDM deputies to the Slovak Federative Assembly made impassioned, though ultimately futile pleas against this move—which they regarded as an affront to Slovak nationalism—while, outside Parliament, former Communist leader Alexander Dubček (who had fought as a partisan in the Uprising) argued for its recognition as an inspiring example of resistance to dictatorship.[4]

For many in today's Slovak Republic, the Uprising holiday stands as a symbol of democratic freedom and European belonging, yet, in some respects, even this understanding appears unstable.[5] Beyond challenges from Slovak neo-fascists, there is evidence that the rebellion's significance has faded with time, and perhaps an excess of ritualization and memorialization. A cartoon that circulated around the time of the SNU's seventy-first anniversary celebrations in 2015 speaks to an anodyne attitude toward the Uprising in contemporary public life. A wrinkled pensioner seated on a park bench explains to an

[3] Jozef Šulaj, "Spravodlivo hodnotiť minulosť," in *Nové slovo,* 29 August 1991.
[4] Shari J. Cohen, *Politics without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 178.
[5] Miroslav Pekník, "Slovenské národné povstanie a verejnosť po roku 1989" in *Slovenský národný povstanie 1944: Súčasť antifašistickej rezistencie v rokoch druhej svetovej vojny*, ed. Miroslav Pekník (Bratislava: Ústav politických vied SAV, 2009), 432. In Fico's January 2017 address, the Premier pointed out that the SNU's democratic legacy was endangered by the rise of the Slovak right (see the *Spectator* article cited above).

impassive youth, "Yes, son, I fought during the Uprising with weapon in hand…but I can't quite remember against whom."[6]

Whatever the degree of popular engagement, there is an active community of Czech and Slovak scholars whose work has deepened by leaps and bounds our knowledge of the Second World War in Slovakia. The Institute of National Memory (Ústav pamäti národa) and the Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Historický ústav Slovenskej Akadémie Vied), both in Bratislava, and the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising (Múzeum Slovenského Národného Povstania) in Banská Bystrica, have taken the lead in this research, together sponsoring and publishing hundreds of monographs, journal articles, document collections, and other research projects over the past twenty-odd years. University presses have also contributed several edited volumes and conference proceedings. Though no longer in print, there exists a handful of rich document collections published during the Prague Spring. These sources address the birth of the Slovak State, the evolution of its relationship with Nazi Germany, and the international and local circumstances that shaped those events. The Holocaust in Slovakia, and particularly Slovaks' complicity therein, has also drawn considerable interest. Once preoccupied with undoing years of regime-enforced silence or "deformation" in foundational areas, post-Communist historians have moved toward new horizons in research on the war years. Forays into the dynamics of "collaboration and resistance," the politics of memory, and social history have begun to appear alongside the usual variety of "positivist" political and military histories of the Uprising and Slovakia's experience of the war.

[6] *Sme,* 28 August 2015. Available online: http://komentare.sme.sk/c/7983782/vico.html. Accessed January 3, 2017.

The present work draws on this large and valuable body of scholarship. I have also taken advantage of English-language writings on wartime Slovakia where they are available. In other respects, the project departs from extant sources and literature. Newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and placards pulled from Slovakia's Archive of the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising (Archív Múzeu Slovenského Národného Povstania [AMSNP]) in Banská Bystrica comprise the bulk of the primary documents utilized here. Some of these texts have, to my knowledge, never been examined; others would have certainly been taboo in Communist-era historiography. I have used them to train my analysis on cognitive orientation and mediation, rather than in pursuit of the concrete historical "Truth" about these events. Eyewitness testimonies, reports from the Slovak State's security services and administrative offices, as well as the records of German occupation authorities, obtained in the German Federal Archive (Bundesarchiv [BArch]) in Berlin and the archive at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, DC, have also helped to sketch some the impacts of war and occupation on Slovak society. The National Archives of the United States (USNA) at College Park, Maryland, give us a glimpse—albeit through the eyes of US State Department officials and their Slovak allies and informants—of the volatile, contentious climate of politics in postwar Czechoslovakia.

This dissertation emphasizes the intersections between political speech, its dissemination through various forms of culture, and resulting social action. Put another way, I am interested in the means by which individuals attempted to make sense of and convey the world that they encountered, while accounting for the practical constraints—what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz called the "hard surfaces of life"—which determined their

responses.[7] My thinking has been informed by political theory and sociology, particularly Hannah Arendt's and Johann Arnason's writings on totalitarianism and Jan T. Gross's work on war and revolution. I have also benefitted from cultural historians and social theorists on questions of collective identity, nationalism, and nation formation; Benedict Anderson's well-known theory of nations as "imagined communities" as well as Durkheim's thinking on the origins and functions of collective action have proven useful in this respect. The portions of this work that deal with the relationship between power and history have their roots in Foucault, though the use of the term "discourse," denoting forms of knowledge, putative scientific or historical truths, or ways of speaking that delineate rights and privileges, is widespread enough that I do not directly reference him here. The work of Hayden White and other narrative theorists has also shaped my view of "meaning" in the context of recorded history.

Framing this focus on the Second World War in Slovakia (as well its prologue and epilogue) is an understanding of historical change formulated by the social theorist William H. Sewell, Jr. Sewell conceptualizes "historical events" as a set of "ramified occurrences" which imply durable transformations in social and cultural structures.[8] These structures, and the ways that they govern social and political relations, are rearranged in short bursts. History, in Sewell's view, is "lumpy." Moreover, certain sequences of events can be characterized as "ruptures": when routine practices, established societal standards, and institutional norms become "dislocated," previous cultural schemas, modes of power, and arrangements of resources are rendered untenable and must be transformed and reconstituted. Following a major "rupture," ideology, politics, economy—as well as the

[7] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: BasicBooks, 1973), viii.
[8] William H. Sewell, Jr., "Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing the Revolution at the Bastille," *Theory and Society,* vol. 25, no. 6 (Dec. 1996), 844.

various cultural productions that inform and underpin them—demand "re-articulation." The driving dialectic of "rupture" and "re-articulation" thus "impart[s] an unforeseen direction to societal development and alter[s] the nature of the causal nexus in which social interactions take place."[9]

The following chapters treat Slovak history in the period between 1918 and 1989 as a series of "ruptures" and "re-articulations." Chapter I examines how, after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, a small group of Slovak activists joined a Czech-led movement to articulate a new form of political and national existence in a democratic republic. Divergent views of a "Czechoslovak" ethnic identity and national rights for Slovakia soon complicated this nation-building project, making the Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka's campaign for an autonomous Slovakia a driving factor in Czechoslovak politics. However, Hlinka's mandate did not stem from any widespread salience of a Slovak national consciousness. Rather, it reflected the desires of a small but growing Slovak middle class, frustrated with a goverment dominated by Czech and Slovak "Czechoslovakist" centralists. The extraparliamentary push to achieve greater Slovak sovereignty, led by a nationalist-populist party under Hlinka's successor, Father Jozef Tiso, succeeded in 1938-1939 only thanks to another rupture: the Munich Agreement and Hitler's expansionism made independent Slovakia a reality.

Chapter II approaches the Slovak State under the leadership of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSPP) as the articulation of a new model for Slovak statehood following Munich and the dawn of Nazi hegemony in Europe. With a particular focus on the State's governing ideology, internal structure, and administrative design, I assess the degree of

[9] Ibid, 843.

support that the HSPP's vision enjoyed amongst the Slovak population. Most English-language scholarship has tended to ignore the dynamism of this period. In contrast, I find that enthusiasm for an independent Slovakia ebbed and flowed in response to international developments and power struggles within the ruling party, as well as the ability of Slovak leaders to preserve their authority over domestic policy vis-à-vis Nazi Germany. A confluence of these factors ultimately undermined the Slovak State's viability and weakened the HSPP moderates' campaign to construct a "New Slovakia." However, it would be a mistake to conclude that the HSPP regime was only a "fascist puppet" lacking autochthonous traits and objectives.

The third chapter traces the origins of domestic opposition to the Slovak State. Where Slovak scholars have often foregrounded the heroism and principle of the SNU's authors, I take a more comprehensive view: the road to rebellion was paved with fear and disaffection as well as courage and vaunted virtue. Examining the circumstances, both local and international, that allowed an Uprising plan to coalesce, it is clear that the Slovak resistance did not take on a mass character in the years and months that preceded the SNU. Rather, in its earliest stages, the rebellion was a limited initiative that reflected the desperation and political ambitions of a small group of Slovak elites. On a broader, societal level, the consuming wrath of the war itself—brought home to Slovakia in the activities of partisans and Allied bombing raids—played a decisive role in convincing Slovaks that they could no longer rely on the HSPP for leadership or protection. By 1944, the already enfeebled structures governing life in the Slovak State became deeply "dislocated" and open to "rupture."

Chapter IV positions the SNU, which consumed much of Slovakia from late August to October 1944, as a critical period of socio-political transformation and a re-articulation of structures in Slovak society. As German occupation rendered the Tiso regime moribund in the late summer of 1944, Slovakia's aspiring revolutionaries, calling themselves the Slovak National Council (SNC), put into action their plan to seize power. With the help of the partisans and elements of the Slovak Army, the SNC managed to secure a large chunk of territory and install the rudiments of a new political system, creating the context for a popular reimagination of Slovak statehood. Though it soon became clear that there were disparate visions of the Slovak future within the SNC, the rebellion did not survive long enough to bear them out. Against superior German firepower, Uprising forces soon disintegrated. Reprisals unleashed by the Germans and HSPP loyalists, the arrival of the front, and Red Army occupation left much of the country in ruin by the war's end.

Tracing the emergence of an "Uprising discourse" in the postwar period, the final chapter reveals the SNU as an important component of efforts to "articulate" a novel form of existence for a Slovak nation in a Czechoslovak state. From 1945 until the Czechoslovak Communist Party's (CPC) coup of 1948, the SNU and its legacy became a kind of symbolic battleground in party politics, instrumental to both Slovak Communists' and Democrats' claims to power. By the 1960s, the Uprising began to fuel debates over Slovakia's place in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Attempts to redress grievances over years of Stalinist repression and unfulfilled promises of national rights for Slovakia during the Prague Spring found inspiration in the Uprising and the study of its history. And, when Soviet prerogatives spelled the end of Dubček-era liberalization, it was Gustáv Husák—an important "Uprising

Communist"—who became the new Chairman of the CPC. Under Husák, a new history of the Uprising was used to sugarcoat the "normalization" process and federalize the Republic.

The conclusion takes stock of some of the ways in which the SNU and the Slovak State continue to work in tandem to inform contemporary politics, particularly in shaping, challenging, and reaffirming models of Slovak statehood. I also discuss the relevance of Slovak history in our growing understanding of Slovak national identity and nationalism. Finally, I review some of the ways in which these topics can benefit from future research.

My interest in Slovakia's experience of the Second World War has sometimes been met with puzzlement. Near the end of a year working at the AMSNP, Slovak Radio and Television (RTVS) contacted me—as an "outsider"—to speak on these topics. The resulting interview touched on some of the contentious questions alluded to above: Was the Slovak State really all that bad? Why was the Uprising so important? I do not intend to provide definitive answers to these questions; as this project demonstrates, the study of Slovak history has sometimes suffered from "outsiders'" efforts to dictate or define it. Instead, I hope to add a critical perspective to ongoing Slovak and East-Central European dialogues. The RTVS team was also keen to know how North Americans perceive Slovakia and its people. In this respect, I hope that the present work will stimulate interest in and expand knowledge of the country's past among those on this continent, as well as suggest some useful avenues for regional and continental comparisons.

Chapter I.
From the First Czechoslovak Republic to the Slovak State: Elite Politics and State Formation in Between the Wars

> *How we have made our state anew, by what means and with what aims, I have now shown. Henceforth we must think how to preserve it.* [1]
>
> —Tomáš G. Masaryk, 1927

In the eyes of many observers, the September 1938 diplomatic crisis in Czechoslovakia ended with a great deal of relief. Mollifying Hitler at the price of Czechoslovak territory and the Republic's political integrity, France and Great Britain celebrated the great peace-making potential of reasonable diplomacy. For others, Munich laid bare the hollowness of Franco-British foreign policy, and, according to one of its most ardent opponents, "deranged" the entire equilibrium of Versailles Europe. As he noted in a speech to Parliament on October 5, 1938, Winston Churchill saw the agreement as another wave in the advancing tide of aggression and radicalism sweeping the continent toward war, the beginnings of a great "reckoning." [2]

Amongst Czechs and Slovaks—who were denied a voice in the September talks—the implications were direr. On top of international humiliation and crushing economic losses, one British diplomat surmised, the "hopelessness and indifference of a beaten

[1] T. G. Masaryk, *The Making of a State; Memories and Observations, 1914-1918* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1927), 409.
[2] Winston Churchill, speech of October 5, 1939. Available online: http://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/101-the-munich-agreement. Accessed December 13, 2016.

[Czechoslovak] populace" cleared the way for cynical adventurers who sought to reverse the "twenty year evolution of Czechoslovak democracy."[3]

The events of 1938-39 in Czechoslovakia must be understood in the context of longer-term developments; beyond German aggression, decades of strained relations between Czechs and Slovaks also destabilized the state. Some scholars have blamed Slovak "fascists" for the discord, citing their desire to join the Nazi quest to destroy a democratic Czechoslovakia.[4] Conversely, a view popular amongst the postwar Slovak diaspora holds that the First Republic was a suffocating Czech ethnocracy, justly opposed by a reified "Slovak nation" pursuing its right to self-determination in September 1938.[5] Both interpretations have their post-Munich epilogues. According to its critics, the declaration of an independent Slovak Republic in March 1939 represented nothing more than a power-grab by a cabal of Hitler's puppets. For the state's defenders, it meant victory in a centuries-long Slovak struggle for national recognition.

Providing a critique of these opposing perspectives and the background for following chapters, this chapter examines the prehistory of the so-called Slovak State (1939-1945) through the lens of interwar politics, foregrounding two groups of Slovak political elites and their divergent political programs.[6] I argue that the evolving struggle between Slovak nationalists and their centralist counterparts from 1918 to 1938 laid the groundwork for profound changes in Slovak politics and society from 1938 to 1939 and beyond. Beginning

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[3] George F. Kennan, *From Prague after Munich: Diplomatic Papers, 1938-1940* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 8.

[4] See, for example: Yeshayahu Jelinek. *The Parish Republic: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party 1939-1945.* Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1976. The American envoy to Prague George Kennan also expressed this view in his 1938-39 correspondences. See: Kennan, *From Prague,* 22.

[5] See: František Vnuk, "Slovakia's Six Eventful Months (October 1938 to March 1939)," *Slovak Studies* IV, *Historica* 2 (1964): 7-164.

[6] Officially named the Slovak Republic, in most literature it is referred to as the Slovak State.

with a discussion of Slovak nationalism in the Czechoslovak Republic after the First World War, I examine Andrej Hlinka's Slovak People's Party's pursuit of Slovak autonomy. Lacking sufficient popular support in parliament and the general population, the party's responses to this impasse further alienated it from the Slovak electorate and Czechoslovakia's centralist elites. Amidst the turbulence of the 1930s, Nazi Germany's intervention shifted the balance of forces in Czechoslovak politics and, despite the fact that its platform never received majority support in Slovakia, Hlinka's disciples exploited the rupture of Munich to revise Slovakia's position within the Republic. The ultimate outcome of its autonomy campaign—an independent, German-allied Slovakia in March of 1939—was neither widely desired nor previsioned.

The First Czechoslovak Republic and the Slovak Question, 1918-1938

An already mature movement for Czechoslovak statehood gathered momentum during the final years of World War I. By mid-1918, it was clear that the initiative of Czech and Slovak activists dovetailed with the views of French, British, and American statesmen, who concluded that the Habsburg Dual Monarchy had, in stifling its peoples' national aspirations, helped to spark a cataclysmic war. Czechoslovak independence, which was declared on October 28, 1918, found support at Versailles in 1919, where the arbiters of the postwar settlement lent their support to the creation of a Czechoslovak Republic under the Wilsonian principle of "national self-determination."

The Allies preferred reliably pro-Western and democratic leaders in the region, and the philosopher and university professor Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk and his disciple Eduard Beneš showed themselves equal to the challenges of postwar coalition building. Cultivating personal ties with *Entente* leaders, they advanced a vision of progressive democracy guided

by multicultural harmony and humanism. Drawing inspiration from the Czech and Slovak nineteenth-century "national awakenings" and Slovak national awakener Jan Kollár's theory of Slavic reciprocity, Masaryk (half Moravian Czech and half Slovak) and Beneš (a Bohemian Czech) had helped build a movement behind Czechoslovakism as a founding ethnic principle for a common state between the two nations. Forged in the tradition of romantic nationalisms, the theory held that the Czech and Slovak people formed two branches of the same ethnic tree, rooted in common language and history. With an eye toward *Realpolitik,* Masaryk and Beneš advocated Czechoslovakism as a bulwark to German and Hungarian revanchism in Central Europe. The doctrine provided a "mythic narrative" of Czechoslovakia as the lynchpin of a new democratic order. Along with the Slovak legionary Milan Rastislav Štefánik, another proponent of Czechoslovakism, the British and French supported Masaryk and Beneš as the *de facto*, if unelected, leaders of Czechoslovakia even before the war was out.[7]

The doctrine of a unitary Czechoslovak nation formed the ideological core of the new republic and it seems to have been widely accepted in the Czech lands. It did not, however, enjoy unanimous support. Adopted first by the Czech bourgeoisie and later by smaller groups of liberal Slovak intelligentsia, particularly those associated with the Slovak nationalist journal *Hlas* ("The Voice"), Czechoslovakism elevated Czechs and Slovaks as a "constituent" or "state-forming" (*štátotvorné*) nation of a Czechoslovak state in part to limit the influence of millions of Hungarians and ethnic Germans living on "Czechoslovak" soil. But this principle also obscured distinct aspects of Slovakia's past. Its proponents sometimes labeled Slovaks as a lagging, primitive iteration of the Czech nation and regarded them

[7] A.J.P. Taylor, *The Habsburg Empire, 1809-1918* (London: Penguin, 1990), 266.

paternalistically.[8] For some Slovaks, Czechoslovakism did not adequately express Slovakia's linguistic and cultural development, nor the unique arc of Slovak history under Hungarian rule. The most vocal Slovak critics also argued that a unitary state was poorly equipped to address the economic and infrastructural disparities between the two regions, contending that there should be two state-forming nations recognized in the state system.[9] The so-called "Slovak question" in the First Czechoslovak Republic coalesced as an amalgam of these critiques, leading to calls for some form of administrative recognition for a distinct Slovak nation.

Despite the fact that resentment over the lack of national status for Slovakia became a source of conflict, there is little evidence that Slovak nationalism was too far advanced to be accounted for in a Czechoslovak system, and much less that it was a "deeply rooted element of [Slovak] political culture."[10] Nor was Czechoslovakia, as one scholar has argued, a fundamentally dysfunctional state.[11] Clearly, the "Slovak Question" produced a great deal of friction over the course of the interwar period. However, the origins of that friction lay in differing origins and orientations of Slovak national leadership. Moreover, the conflict over Slovakia's position in the First Republic was not simply a reflection of Czech-Slovak differences. Rather, as the American political scientist Carol Skalnik Leff has argued, it was "intramural," emerging from contradictory models of leadership amongst Slovakia's political

[8] Masaryk professed this view in a 1921 interview with a French journalist: "There is no Slovak nation…The Czechs and Slovaks are brothers. Only cultural level separates them—Czechs are more developed than Slovaks, for the Magyars held them in systematic unawareness." T.G. Masaryk, *Spisy,* vol. 2, (Prague, 1934), 78.

[9] Natália Krajčovičová, "Slovakia in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1938," in *Slovakia in History,* eds. Mikuláš Teich, Dušan Kovač, Robin D. Brown (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 143.

[10] Jan Rychlík, "Czech-Slovak Relations in Czechoslovakia," in *Czechoslovakia in a Nationalist and Fascist Europe,* ed. Mark Cornwall and R.J.W. Evans (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 16; Nadya Nedelsky, *Defining the Sovereign Community: The Czech and Slovak Republics* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 89.

[11] See: Mary Heimann. *Czechoslovakia: The State that Failed.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.

elites, both in terms of their relationships to state power and their understandings of Slovakia's position in a Czechoslovak framework.[12]

Slovakia from Hungary to Czechoslovakia, 1848-1918

On the eve of WWI, few elements of Slovak life escaped the imprint of Magyar rule. A mid-nineteenth century "awakening" of Slovak national awareness was impassioned but limited in reach. Applying the historian Miroslav Hroch's three-stage schema of national development, Slovak "national awakeners" did not succeed in transforming political agitation into a mass movement (stages "B" and "C").[13] The campaign begun by Ľudoviť Štúr collapsed after the defeats of 1848, and for the latter part of the century remained largely inactive. The "Magyarization" of the Slovak lands after the *Ausgleich* of 1867 nearly erased Slovak national politics by decreeing that all civic and administrative activity, including government, education, and the press, take place in the Hungarian language. Hungarian assimilation became the sole pathway to social and economic advancement, and mastery of the Hungarian language became a requirement for elite status.[14] After Slovak cultural institutions and printing houses, such as the influential Matica Slovenska, were shuttered and Slovak suffrage curtailed in the 1870s and 1880s, as the historian C.A. Macartney has written, "a majority of Slovaks…accepted the Hungarian state…and

[12] Carol Skalnik Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 194.

[13] Miroslav Hroch, *Evropská národní hnutí v 19. století*, Praha: Svoboda, 1986. See also: Stanislava Kolková, "Kontinuita alebo diskontinuita elít na Slovensku v zlomových rokoch 1938/39 a 1945—na priklade vedeckých a kulturných elít," in *Odvaľujem balvan: Pocta historickému remeslu Jozefa Jablonického*, eds. Norbert Kmeť and Marek Syrný (Bratislava: Ústav politckých vied SAV, 2013), 238-56.

[14] Taylor, *The Hapsburg Monarchy,* 202.

Magyarized without reluctance when offered the chance of rising in the world by doing so."[15]

Slovakia's geographical features and lack of major urban centers also complicated awakeners' attempts to build a national community. Its population was scattered in villages across mountain ranges and valleys and most Slovaks were engaged in agriculture, while Germans, Jews, and Hungarians largely controlled the industrial and commercial sectors; non-Slovak speakers formed a strong majority in larger cities, including Pozsony/Pressburg (later Bratislava).[16] The atomization and regional identification of the Slovak population, as well as its rural character and underrepresentation in the Austro-Hungarian bourgeoisie, also made it difficult to create an institutional framework to spread Slovak nationalism. Integration within the imperial Hungarian order and connections to parish Catholicism still provided the primary forms of social organization in the Slovak hinterland. Indeed, censuses taken in 1919 indicate Slovaks' unfamiliarity with the very concept of nationality. When asked to which nationality they belonged, respondents offered a range of responses, including "Slovak as well as Hungarian," "Hungarian Slovak," and "It's all the same." The answers "Catholic" and "I talk Slovak and Hungarian" were also given.[17] Owing to their subservient position within the Hungarian kingdom, many Slovaks had developed a sense of reticence and inferiority; at the turn of the century, their society remained "unmolded like clay, practically illiterate [and] utterly lacking in national consciousness."[18]

Contrasted with Slovakia, the Czech lands were far better prepared for political and economic life in a modern nation-state. A Czech national awakening had begun much earlier

[15] C.A. Macartney, *Problems of the Danube Basin,* (Cambridge, UK, 1942), 61.
[16] Owen V. Johnson, *Slovakia 1918-1938: Education and the Making of a Nation* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1985), 24.
[17] Ibid, 80.
[18] Ibid, 96.

there and remained vibrant throughout the nineteenth century. Its development as an industrial heartland for the Monarchy gave Bohemia a substantial bourgeois and working class. In the Moravian countryside, a well-organized agrarian party had already built a following amongst the peasantry. By 1918, both provinces possessed a Czech-language education system and administration, as well as robust cultural and national organizations. Rather than disintegrating under the pressure of a ruling national group, the Czechs had been permitted a modest national existence in the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy, including proportional representation in the *Reichsrat*, the Austrian parliament, where by 1900 they held as many as 87 seats out of 425.[19] The Czechs' experience of participatory democracy, mass inculcation of national consciousness, and their greater wealth and population made them the dominant force in a partnership for Czechoslovak statehood.

Conversely, the critical phase of Czechoslovak state formation—coterminous with the wartime fragmentation of the Habsburg system—saw marginal contributions from the Slovak side. Leaders in Slovakia had lost confidence in their ability to spur political change and feared a brutal backlash should Slovakia remain in Hungary after the war. Adding to a feeling of powerlessness were the complications of life during wartime: communication blackouts, lack of accurate and timely information, and a great deal of anxiety.[20] Unlike their Czech counterparts, Slovaks lacked a strong legacy of national education, political participation, and nationalist organizations. Though an activist current revived among remnants of the Slovak National Party and some Slovak Catholic circles during World War I, Slovak nationalists were unable to generate a large-scale, popular mobilization and

[19] Karol Malý et al., *Dějiny státu a právy na území Československa v období kapitolizmu* (Bratislava: Slovenské Akademie Vied, 1973), 732. Slovakia by comparison held only three seats in the Hungarian Diet at the end of the nineteenth century.

[20] Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia,* 39-41.

recognized the advantages of joining Masaryk's campaign.[21] Štefánik, the journalist Milan Hodža, and Vavro Šrobár, a physician and longtime Slovak national activist, became Masaryk's key Slovak supporters as members of the Czechoslovak National Council (CNC), as well as the main Slovak advocates of Czechoslovakism. Joined by the Slovak Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka, these men represented the most prominent public voices in Slovakia's threadbare national liberation movement. Such weak representation, the Slovak historian Ľubomír Lipták remarked, meant that Slovaks joined the movement as a "poor cousin."[22]

The CNC activists' activities abroad came to fruition in May 1918. After concluding the so-called Pittsburgh Agreement with Czech and Slovak émigré organizations in the United States, Masaryk could proclaim international recognition of a joint state "governed by mutal consent," promising some level of autonomy for Slovakia within a federation at an undertermined point in the future.[23] That same month, Hlinka spoke out in favor of a "Czecho-Slovak orientation" for Slovakia, declaring that Slovaks' "thousand year marriage with the Magyars [had] failed."[24] As the war drew to a close, representatives of the CNC, including Šrobár and Štefaník, threw their support behind the October 28, 1918 Czechoslovak declaration of independence.[25] A small, self-appointed "Slovak National

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[21] Ibid, 29.

[22] Ľubomír Lipták, "Slovenské národne povstanie" in *Slovensko v dvadsiatom storočí* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2011), 250.

[23] James R. Felak, *At the Price of the Republic: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, 1929-1938* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 14.

[24] Karol Sidor, *Andrej Hlinka* (Bratislava, 1934), 308. Quoted in Felak, *At the Price,* 14.

[25] Šrobár arrived in Prague only on October 28 and was the only Slovak representative present during the declaration's ratification. Štefánik was abroad at the time, though his personal correspondences indicate that he supported the agreement. See: *La Mémoire conservée du Général Milan Rastislav Štefánik dans les Archives du Service Historique de la Défense*, Frédéric Guelton, Emmanuelle Braud, Michal Kšiňan, eds. (Vincennes, France: Service historique de la défense, 2008), 205.

Council" gathered at Turčianský Svätý Martin two days later and produced the so-called Martin Declaration, signaling their desire to join a "Czecho-Slovak" nation-state.[26]

These affirmations of a new state based on a theory of Czech and Slovak reciprocity demonstrated that nationally minded Slovak leaders had at least temporarily relinquished their desire for independent statehood or political autonomy.[27] A sense of urgency and uncertainty, conferred by fear of Magyar backlash, spurred the thin ranks of the Slovak leadership to accept a political and ideological program that was somewhat amorphous, but which would shore up the existence of an independent state. The wager of national and political survival could make allies of the Slovak nationalist Hlinka and the centralists Šrobár and Štefánik, but the challenges of Czechoslovak integration would soon test the durability of the elite Slovak consensus.

Diverging Slovak Elites in the First Republic

If we regard "elites" as those members of society possessing social, political, and particularly economic power on an institutional level, a distinct core of Slovak elites did not appear in Hungary under the late Habsburg empire. Magyarization meant that educated members of society could only work on the margins of the established structures to build support for the idea of a Slovak nation. Even counting the "professions" among them—doctors, lawyers, teachers—educated Slovak circles suffered steady attrition, losing roughly half their already tiny number to Magyarization by the first decade of the twentieth

[26] For a copy of the "Pittsburgh Agreement" and the "Declaration of the Slovak Nation," see: Jozef Lettrich, *A History of Modern Slovakia* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955), 288-90.

[27] Dušan Kovač, "The Slovak Political Programme: From Hungarian Patriotism to the Czecho-Slovak State," in *Slovakia in History*, eds. Mikuláš Teich, Dušan Kováč, Robin D. Brown (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 143.

century.[28] The historian Owen V. Johnson notes that on the eve of the war, there were roughly 44,000 persons among the educated class, of whom about one percent identified themselves as nationally conscious Slovaks.[29] Mirroring the scope of their political base, the number of educated, nationalized, and influential Slovaks was very small in 1918.

Behind their low numbers, Slovak elites were also roughly bifurcated according to confessional and political orientation. The Catholic leadership cadre, in tending Slovakia's network of rural parishes, helped to generate a political base for the populists (or, as they called themselves, *Ľudáks*). Escaping Magyarization in independent regional organizations, the Lutheran Church served as a wellspring of consciously Slovak intelligentsia with connections to Prague. These Catholic and Protestant groups had both joined the pre-war campaign to foster a Slovak national identity and had aligned loosely behind Czechoslovakism during the war to upend Magyar rule, yet they diverged in their respective conceptions of the Czechoslovak idea. The origin of a progressive, pro-Czechoslovak preference amongst Slovak Protestant elites is somewhat obscure; it has been suggested that their sixteenth century adoption of the Czech-language bible evolved toward a cultural affinity for Czechoslovakism. But the sheer numerical superiority of Slovak Catholics, accounting for more than 70 percent of the Slovak population throughout the First Republic, likely pushed the Slovak Protestants nearer to the Czechs.[30] Protestant leaders also shared a more cosmopolitan, "Western" lifestyle with their Czech counterparts. The Catholic bloc, meanwhile, eyed the more secular Czech society with suspicion, and tended to view the Czechoslovak Republic as an environment within which to nurture the moral and spiritual

[28] Ján Tibenský, *Slovensko Dejiny:1* (Bratislava: Obzor 1978), 611.
[29] Johnson, *Slovakia 1918-1938,* 106.
[30] Kovač, "The Slovak Political Programme," 123-24; *Apercu Statistique de la Republique Tchecoslovaquie* (Prague, 1930), 10. According to this analysis, Slovak Protestants comprised about 17.6 percent of the population in 1921.

development of Slovakia while shielding it from the central government's interference. This does not mean that centralist Slovak elites envisaged Czechoslovak unity as a negation of discrete Slovak national identity; more broadly, as Carol Skalnik Leff concludes, they "wanted to see Slovak national identity reshaped [...] modernized, and above all protected, by alliance with the Czechs." Slovak nationhood in their view would be rejuvenated as a "new amalgam of Czech and Slovak characteristics" and imbued with the values of equality, tolerance, and democracy.[31]

Religious divides between these camps were more or less recapitulated in the politics of the largest Slovak parties during the First Republic, split between a Catholic Slovak People's Party (SPP) supporting autonomy and an Agrarian Party backing centralism.[32] The two parties claimed the largest shares of the Slovak electorate from 1925 to 1938, together accounting for nearly 50 percent of votes in the three elections that took place over that period. Two Agrarian party leaders—Šrobár and Milan Hodža (the only full Slovak to serve as a head of state)—were the among the most influential Slovak politicians of the era. Established in 1913, the Slovak People's Party maintained a consistent edge in popular support vis-à-vis its counterparts, but still resented the disproportionate influence of Protestants in the National Assembly.[33] For their part, Protestant leaders saw political Catholicism as a dangerous vestige of Magyar-era backwardness. Fueled by the admixture of politics and religion, advocates of two opposing interpretations of Slovak national interests competed for popular influence. One camp pursued a discrete Slovak national space rooted in ethnicity, while the other worked to integrate Slovakia within the framework of unitary Czechoslovakism.

[31] Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia,* 206.
[32] The party was renamed "Hlinka's Slovak People's Party" (HSPP) in 1925.
[33] Lettrich, *A History of Modern Slovakia,* 72.

Centralists and Autonomists in the Czechoslovak Parliament

Interwar Czechoslovakia has been described as "a state of political parties," although the parliamentary system functioned less democratically than its founders had hoped.[34] The Czechoslovak National Assembly, established by the Constitution of 1920, was built in the mold of the *Reichsrat.* Based on proportional representation, it was overpopulated with parties and awkwardly fragmented. Divergent ethnic, economic, and confessional interests produced a parliamentary mosaic that, although not as fractious as its predecessor, required regular reshuffling to forge functioning coalitions. In all but four years, control went to the Agrarians and Social Democrats, though even this partnership would have been unmanageable without intervention from the executive. The state chancellery (the *Hrad* or "Castle") and an extra-parliamentary council of the five major parties (the *Päťka* or "The Five") formed the stabilizing backbone of the Czechoslovak system.[35] Through these channels, Masaryk and his allies could counter partisan interests and sidestep procedure. The president also relied on his personal authority and position as a kind of stately *Paterfamilias* to intervene on behalf of the Castle. The American historian Andrea Orzoff points out that, while the Republic has been described as a constitutional democracy, "constitutional checks and balances were few, and were relatively easily subverted by the executive branch."[36]

Slovak autonomists' opposition to the centralist mandate in the National Assembly yielded little fruit. Slovak national grievances centered on economic, confessional, and language issues and the Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka, the SPP's spirited leader, built his reputation on attacking Prague policy in all these arenas. Whether protesting the hardships wrought by uneven industrialization and "economic dualism," the overrepresentation of

[34] Edward Táborský, *Czechoslovak Democracy at Work* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1945), 94.
[35] Johnson, *Slovakia 1918-1938,* 62.
[36] Orzoff, *The Battle for the Castle,* 59.

Czechs in Slovak bureaucracy, or the hated institution of secular education in Slovakia, Hlinka and the SPP tended to see all complications of Czech and Slovak integration as affronts to national dignity.[37] These complaints were certainly not all without substance; the Czechoslovak administrative system did not correspond to elected representation, budgetary planning was unilateral, and free-market policies created the impression that Czech businesses handled Slovakia like a colony. Moreover, the ham-handed attempts of Czechoslovak policymakers to foster a common Czechoslovak culture trampled Slovak religious sensitivities, for example in the elevation of reformation hero Jan Hus as a national martyr or the openly anti-Catholic attitudes of Czech civil servants employed in Slovak schools and administration. They only occasionally exacted concessions on minor issues, but the HSPP's convictions crystallized in a conservative opposition to centralist policies in the National Assembly.

Father Hlinka's populists soon proclaimed themselves the true voice of the Slovak people and by 1922 asserted autonomy as the only antidote to Slovaks' subjugation.[38] Their movement gathered strength, and from 1925 to 1929, the renamed HSPP achieved its highest level of influence in the Republic, netting 34.3 percent of the Slovak vote and even scoring two cabinet positions. Yet despite partnering with the Agrarians in the so-called Green and Black coalition, the SPP could not drum up enough support for autonomy in Parliament. Czechoslovak centralist and smaller statewide parties were still large enough to block the passage of any major Ľudák legislation and, even at its strongest, the Ľudák mandate represented less than a tenth of all votes cast in Czechoslovakia.[39] Furthermore,

[37] Krajčovičová, "Slovakia in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1938," 149.
[38] Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia,* 204n.
[39] Zprávy Státního úřadu statistického 1935/47; Annuaire statistique 1936, Table XV-4, 269; Felak, *At the Price of the Republic,* 209.

because autonomy initiatives implied a negation of the basic political and ideological framework of the state, the SPP became a party of permanent opposition bereft of allies.

Hope that Slovak grievances could be settled within the National Assembly narrowed after 1929. Allegations of treason, a split between moderate and radical wings within the party, and a disastrous economic downturn ended what had begun as an optimistic period for the autonomy movement. After two failed autonomy proposals, neither of which were seriously considered in the Czechoslovak parliament, the Ľudáks began using extraparliamentary tactics to achieve their aims.[40] As developments in Hungary and Nazi Germany destabilized the region, the HSPP's loyalty to a unitary Czechoslovak state grew increasingly tenuous.

Slovak Political Socialization and the Czechoslovak Leadership Triangle

If we adopt the view of many nationalist Slovak émigré scholars of the post-World War Two era, the HSPP's willingness in the 1930s to seek support for autonomy abroad was a justified, if subversive, response to Czechs' anti-Slovak chauvinism and general ignorance that the Slovaks "wanted to be treated as a nation, as a separate ethnic group."[41] Slovak authors of this stripe contend that a collective desire for national recognition was the defining political concern in interwar Slovakia. The former Ľudák radical and Slovak-Canadian exile Joseph M. Kirschbaum writes that "the seed of discord [in the First Republic] is to be found in the Czech tendency to create one single Czechoslovak people in the ethnic sense, with one language and one culture, ruled in a centralized Czech state."[42]

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[40] Felak, *At the Price of the Republic,* 211.

[41] Eugen Steiner, *The Slovak Dilemma* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 6.

[42] Joseph M. Kirschbaum, *Slovakia: Nation at the Crossroads of Central Europe* (New York: Robert Speller, 1960), 96. For a more recent example of this analysis, see Milan Ďurica, *Slovenský národ a jeho štátnosť* (Bratislava: Alpha, 1990).

For Kirschbaum and others, Slovak nationalists' growing refusal to identify themselves with the Czechoslovak state represents a popular reaction to Czech tyranny, and rooted in the defense of a Slovak nation that yearned only to demonstrate its ability to thrive as a distinct people.[43] Challenging this view, I attribute the HSPP's failure to achieve greater support for autonomy to the particular strategies by which it sought to mobilize the Slovak electorate, alienation from Slovak centralist parties, and an ultimate exclusion from the centers of administrative power in the First Republic.

From its foundation, the central government worked to expose the Czechoslovak public to a pro-regime agenda through education, media, and various organizations and associations. According to a Revolutionary National Committee report of January 1919, "the state was obliged to take care of the political education of the citizenry as the foremost and most majestic of all its tasks." Cultivating loyalty and support for the new *status quo* through education and propaganda was critical to forestalling nationalist tensions and generating political and social cohesion. In Slovakia, where the need for such political socialization appeared particularly acute in light of rural "backwardness," Masaryk claimed that a state-sponsored school system could sculpt Czechoslovak citizens from Slovak peasants, predicting that "in one generation, there will be no difference between the two branches of our national family."[44] National education was designed to instill popular identification with a Czechoslovak ethnicity, loyalty to the democratic system, and support for the economic modernization of Slovakia. The idealism behind this civic engineering project was reflected in the March 1919 renaming of Pozsony/Pressburg. The city's new name, Bratislava, had

[43] See: František Vnuk, "Slovakia's Six Eventful Months (October 1938 to March 1939)," *Slovak Studies* IV, *Historica* 2 (1964): 7-164.
[44] Masaryk, *Spisy,* 78.

been favored among Czechoslovak centralists and loosely translated as "Slavic brotherhood."

Despite great investment and enthusiasm (at least in the Czech lands), Czechoslovak state-building could not fully commence until government administration and infrastructure became more firmly established in Slovak regions.[45] In the meantime, the regime leaned on nationally conscious individuals to excite popular interest in the state and its destiny, calling on Czech officials, legionaries, and critically, the Slovak intelligentsia.[46] The "lone flashing lights"—particularly Catholic priests—became the most important agents of political socialization in Slovakia.[47] However, the priests proved unenthusiastic proponents of Czechoslovak ideology, and the politically inexperienced majority of Slovaks responded indifferently to a government system with which they had only sporadic contact. Hlinka and his followers encouraged a rural tendency to vote according to confession rather than identification with any party program or political values.[48] As the "central pillar of HSPP leadership," Catholic priests elided pastoral interests with those of the 'Slovak nation' as a whole, portraying intrastate politics as a "culture war" in which a centralist regime engineered "the destruction of Christian principles."[49]

The Slovak sociologist Juraj Benko suggests that the salience of traditional, local, and religious modes of identification inclined the Slovak voter to understand the political

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[45] "Report of the Cultural Committee of the Revolutionary National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Republic, January 22, 1918." Quoted in Juraj Benko, "The State and Its People: The Political Socialization of the Slovak Population after the Creation of the Czechoslovak Republic," in *Overcoming Old Borders: Beyond the Paradigm of Slovak National History,* ed. Adam Hudek (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2013), 78.

[46] The term "legionary" refers to Czech and Slovak troops on the side of Entente during the First World War who joined to win the Allies support for an independent state after the fall of the Habsburg empire.

[47] Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budovaní státu* (Prague: Lidové noviny, 1991), 134.

[48] Benko, "The State and Its People," 80-81.

[49] Yeshayahu Jelinek, *The Parish Republic: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party 1939-1945* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1976), 7; Tiso speech of 3 February1933 in parliament. Quoted in James M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 115.

world primarily in terms of Catholic fatalism, putting faith in a political party as something "saving 'immediately' or else rejecting it archaically as being a kind of elite forgery." Catholic elites' attempts to draw the Slovak provinces into participatory politics often relied on salvific but unworkable election promises, which, when unfulfilled, "led to disillusionment with politics as such and indifference to the political system itself."[50] Stagnation in the party's support following the Green-Black coalition in the late 1920s reflected the disappointment of over-inflated expectations amongst rural Slovak voters, particularly in the wake of economic depression.[51] Hlinka's populists could blame Slovak discontents on Prague's imperialism and even present autonomy as a panacea for Slovakia's problems, but they could not induce voters to define their interests purely in terms of a Slovak identity.[52] In this sense, the nationalist animus conjured by the HSPP reflected a religious response to the pressures of modernization and social change, not a broad-based movement for national recognition.[53]

Harnessing what Šrobár called Slovaks' "uncriticalness, exaggerated traditionalism [and] exorbitant religiosity" to the cause of national autonomy, the HSPP did manage to exacerbate the friction between Slovak elites within the Czechoslovak system.[54] The party's presentation of autonomy as a "miracle drug" to cure all Slovakia's social maladies, as well as its frequently incendiary rhetoric, only confirmed for critics that the Slovak population was politically immature and prone to manipulation.[55] Others grew concerned over growing anti-Semitism, Czecho-phobia, and even violence amongst HSPP supporters. For the

[50] Benko, "The State and Its People," 82-83.
[51] Ibid, 83.
[52] Ibid. See also: Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 120.
[53] Johnson, *Slovakia 1918-1938,* 332.
[54] Hlasist brochure entitled "Čo hatí Slovaky," reprinted in Albert Pražák, *T.G. Masaryk a Slovensko* (Prague: Edice Corona, 1937), 74. Quoted in Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia,* 205.
[55] Jelinek, *The Parish Republic,* 10.

Agrarians and other Slovak centralist parties, these trends reinforced a view that greater political modernization needed to take hold before the question of Slovak autonomy could be addressed.

The cornerstones of the HSPP's platform—parochial education, Catholic principles in marriage law, and Church property rights—represented a retrograde social vision that opposed the secular, progressive vitalization favored by centralists like Hodža and Šrobár. The reformer and Minister of Education Ivan Dérer, perhaps Slovakia's staunchest centralist, saw the HSPP's agenda as proof that the Slovak electorate was unprepared for self-rule and he opposed them with "crusading fervor." After Hlinka and HSPP deputies stoked Slovak crowds to "wild anti-government demonstrations" at a Czechoslovak state celebration in Nitra in 1933, Dérer bemoaned the HSPP's treasonous corruption of the unsophisticated Slovak voter and pushed the government, unsuccessfully, to outlaw the party.[56]

The kind of anti-regime rally which raised Dérer's ire at Nitra was repeated throughout the 1930s, each time producing greater alarm in Prague. Public demonstrations and the press, not parliamentary discussion, became the HSPP's preferred forum for advocating autonomy.[57] In the most generous contemporary analysis of the party's program and tactics, Hlinka and his followers were striving to protect their Catholic flock from Czech colonialism and re-center religion in Slovak national life. According to their harshest critics, the party cynically used traditionalism and *lumpenproletariat* discontent to attack the state.[58] Judging by an expanded censorship of Ľudák periodicals and attempts to limit the HSPP's

[56] Victor S. Mamatey, "The Development of Czechoslovak Democracy, 1920-1938" in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948,* eds. Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 151.
[57] Krajčovičová, "Slovakia in Czechoslovakia, 1918-1938," 154.
[58] Hugh Seton-Watson, *A History of the Czechs and Slovaks* (London, 1943), 280.

freedom of assembly, Czech and Slovak centralists adopted the former perspective.[59] In either view, however, it was evident by the early 1930s that strategic cooperation amongst Slovak elites during the period of Czecholovak liberation had given way to opposing conceptions of Slovakia's place in the Republic. Because the HSPP struggled to gain power through public appeal and agitation—in one prominent case, even subversive provocation—Slovak centralists and their Prague allies grew doubtful of their loyalty to the Republic. By 1933, the HSPP and its leadership had grown incompatible with centralist politics.[60]

As brazen, or perhaps desperate, as Ľudáks had become, the implications of an "intramural" divide amongst Slovak elites, as Skalnik Leff maintains, must be understood in terms of the long-established linkages between a core group of Slovak centralists and Czech leaders. Masaryk's and Beneš's personal ties with Šrobár and other Hlasists during the years of state-formation had endured throughout the interwar period and the Czechoslovak central government's reliance on Slovak centralists helped to sustain an impression of inclusivity in the Czechoslovak system. The reality was otherwise. Positions of statewide power in the Republic had rarely gone to HSPP members or other figures sympathetic to Slovak autonomy. Instead, Prague consistently favored anti-clerical centralists in filling cabinet positions and ministries. Dérer, Hodža, and Šrobár alone held more than half of Slovak ministerial portfolios from 1918 to 1938; 94 percent of the influential policy posts went to

[59] Elisabeth Bakke, "Doomed to Failure? The Czechoslovak Nation Project and the Slovak Autonomist Reaction," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Oslo, 1999), 443.
[60] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, 118-19. A prominent Ľudák deputy named Vojtech Tuka was convicted of treason and espionage in 1929 after claiming that a secret clause at Czechoslovakia's founding in 1918 had guaranteed Slovakia independence after a ten-year period.

Slovak centralists, while the autonomists received only two portfolios over the same period.[61]

The weak penetration of Slovaks in all levels of regional and statewide bureaucracy reinforced an impression of ethnic bias, which for the Ľudáks meant national oppression. This discrepancy, combined with the HSPP's talent for mass mobilization, exaggerated the centrifugal effect of a Czechoslovak leadership triangle: the more the Ľudáks pursued grievance politics rooted in nationalist and Catholic particularism, the more Czech authorities tapped Slovak centralists sympathetic to the Czechoslovak project. One Slovak faction's agreement with a Czech understanding of politics and society made it a convenient source of stability, particularly as the internal and external tensions posed by the "German question" threatened to boil over.[62] The lifeline provided by Slovak centralists in Czechoslovak government meant that Prague never really engaged, or needed to engage, the autonomists with any serious intent to negotiate. In turn, the influence of Slovak centralist elites helped confirm Czech views of Slovak nationalism as dangerous and intolerable.

September's Harvest: From Autonomy to Independence

Even if they were at loggerheads with Czechoslovak centralism, the HSPP did not turn rapidly toward separatism. Most of the party's leadership, including the leader who succeeded Hlinka after his death in August 1938, the Catholic priest Jozef Tiso, was supportive of some kind of joint Czech and Slovak state well into the 1930s. After the Austro-German *Anschluss* of March 1938 and Hungarian rearmament heightened anxieties

[61] Carol Skalnik Leff, "Inevitability, Probability, Possibility," in *Irreconcilable Differences? Explaining Czechoslovakia's Dissolution,* eds. Michael Kraus and Alison Stanger (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 33.
[62] Skalnik Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia*, 211.

over the Republic's security, the party's mainstream also recognized that isolated from the Czech lands, Slovakia could fall fatally vulnerable to its neighbors' irredentist ambitions.[63] Moreover, few, if any of its constituents had even considered the idea of Slovak independence.[64] Autonomy in a Habsburg-style dualist Czecho-Slovakia, rather than secession, remained the Ľudáks' chief ambition in the run-up to the Munich Conference. Indeed, Ľudák moderates argued, as Tiso did in August 1938, that autonomy would strengthen the relationship between the Republic's peoples during times of danger and uncertainty.[65]

The HSPP's loyalty was not entirely unqualified, however. In light of a failure to achieve autonomy through the parliamentary process and denied access to the *Hrad* and the *Päťka*, the Sudeten dilemma offered a chance to force Prague's hand on the autonomy question.[66] When Hitler began to champion the Republic's minorities during negotiations with President Beneš that summer, the party saw an opportunity. Following closely on the heels of an invasion scare in May, when Czechoslovak troops were mobilized to meet a supposed German threat on the Republic's borders, an HSPP rally in Bratislava on June 5 was staged to make new autonomy demands, the most wide-ranging to date. Fragmentation in Slovak party politics was once again on display, as a much larger, Agrarian-led counter-demonstration (using the motto "Slovak unity for democracy and Czechoslovakia") took place the following day, declaring solidarity against aggression and revisionism, whether

[63] Valerián Bystrický, *Od autonómie k vzniku Slovenského štátu* (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2008), 122.
[64] Ivan Kamenec, *Slovenský štát, 1939-1945* (Prague: Anomal, 1992), 5.
[65] Bystrický, *Od autonómie*, 132. I use the term "moderate" to denote a grouping of political forces in Slovakia generally supportive of the clerical, conservative, nationalist program advocated by Jozef Tiso.
[66] Felak, *At the Price of the Republic*, 215, 196.

they came from Sudeten German, Hungarian, or Slovak corners.[67] As the Agrarian journal *Zem* reported, "the Republican demonstration surpassed the Ľudák [one] in every respect."[68]

Even allowing for partisan exaggeration, there was more evidence that the HSPP was again cutting against the grain of Slovak opinion: disappointing results in May provincial elections, where a pro-Czechoslovak coalition garnered 44 percent of votes next to 27 percent for the autonomists, showed that their support had slipped several percentage points from 1935 levels. Still, diplomatic pressure, as well as Hitler's rhetoric about the Czech "annexation" of Slovakia and the great "lie" of Czechoslovak nationhood, emboldened the Ľudáks. The June 5 declarations became the Ľudák blueprint for future Slovak administration, calling for a separate Slovak diet and government, official status for the Slovak language in education and bureaucracy, and the constitutional recognition of a separate Slovak national identity.[69]

President Beneš and Hodža, who had gained the Prime Ministership in 1935 on a promise to resolve the "Slovak Question," negotiated with the HSPP over these proposals. Counter-offers and a new willingness to accede to many of their demands, including Hodža's plan for devolution of administrative power to the regional level, did not satisfy their opponents. It was only word of the four-party decision at Munich on September 28 that spurred the Czechoslovak government to accept far-reaching Slovak autonomy. As Hodža fell and Beneš resigned in the following days, even the Slovak Agarians, the HSPP's longtime, stalwart opponents, recognized that the perilous position of the Republic now required sacrifice. Facing rumors of an invasion by Poland or Germany, and attempting to

[67] Bystrický, *Od autonómie*, 134. Bystrický estimates roughly 8,000 attendees at the June 5 populist demonstrations, while roughly 25,000 particpated in the "unity" rally the following day.
[68] *Zem,* 20 June 1938, 1.
[69] Bystrický, *Od autonómie,* 135.

shore up a fractured economy, some leaders even concluded that the new era demanded immediate and radical political change—that, as the Czech historian František Kutnar claimed, Czechoslovakia had to be made anew "as a way out of the crisis."[70] Meeting in Žilina on October 6, 1938, the Agrarians and other Slovak parties reluctantly agreed to do just that, signing a document that established an independent Slovak parliament and recognizing a distinct national status for Slovakia within the Republic. On the conditions of the Žilina Agreement, the Czechoslovak Republic was to become the Czecho-Slovak Republic, and at least according to Tiso's assurances, the HSPP now regarded the Slovak question as definitively resolved within the framework of the Czechoslovak constitution.[71] As Tiso later claimed, the spoils of Munich had produced at Žilina the "climax of all [the Ľudáks'] political aims."[72]

Securing "New Slovakia": Jozef Tiso, HSPP Radicals, and the Hlinka Guard

The Žilina Agreement prompted a rearrangement of political forces that put the Ľudáks in charge of Slovakia. Although their 1938 proposals for autonomy had never even approached majority support—on the contrary, most Slovak party politicians openly opposed the October decision—a combination of fear and moral exhaustion had opened their way to power, and they wasted little time consolidating it.[73] All Slovak cabinet posts were now hand-picked by Tiso. Weakened by apathy and demoralization, other Slovak parties, including those Agrarians who had not already left the political scene, were corralled into

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[70] František Kutnar, "Naše nynější krise," *Brázda* 19: 40-41(1938): 630-31. Quoted in Melissa Feinberg, *Elusive Equality: Gender, Citizenship, and Equality in Czechoslovakia, 1918-50* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 162.

[71] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 157.

[72] Valerian Bystrický, "Slovakia from the Munich Conference to the Declaration of Independence," in *Slovakia in History,* Mikuláš Teich, Dušan Kovač, Robin D. Brown, eds, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 160. Bystrický cites this as a direct quote but does not provide the original source.

[73] Jörg K. Hoensch, *Die Slowakei und Hitlers Ostpolitik: Hlinkas Slowakische Volkspartei zwischen Autonomie und Separation, 1938/1939* (Köln, 1965), 103.

cooperation with the HSPP to form the new Party of Slovak National Unity (PSNU).[74] Some Agrarians, like Ján Ursíny, joined in the hope of tempering the Ľudáks' influence in the new government, declaring that an Agrarian "partnership" with the HSPP permitted "collective decision-making in all matters."[75] Over the coming months, HSPP tactics would reveal this as wishful thinking: a twenty-year history of multiparty parliamentary politics in Slovakia had come to an end.

That liberal democracy in Slovakia became "not only illegal, but also out of style" after Munich helps explain the rapid capitulation of the Slovak centralist opposition in 1938.[76] Political elites across the Republic had to contend with public disgust at the "short-sighted and selfish aims" that had produced the agreement. Abandoned by their allies and casting about for salvation, many Czech and Slovak politicians now resolved to shrug off "partisanship, prejudice, ideology, broken forms of thought [and] oversensitive humanism" in favor of more durable, authoritarian-style governance.[77] Not uncommon was the view that Munich, much like the events of 1918, pointed to a new era of European statecraft, with far-reaching implications. If the Republic was to survive, it was reasoned, the structures governing Czechoslovak politics and society would require "re-articulation."

For the Agrarians, the agreement meant organizational collapse and submission to the Ľudáks: their alignment with Beneš, whom many held responsible for the failed Franco-British alliance system, implicated them in the *diktát*. Hodža, too, as the first and only Slovak prime minister of the Republic and the most prominent Slovak centralist, was

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[74] Exceptions were granted for the Hungarian and Carpathian German national parties.
[75] *Slovenský denník*, 14 October 1938, 1.
[76] Ľubomír Lipták, *2,217 dní* (unpublished manuscript), 31. Quoted in Ivan Kamenec, *Spoločnosť, politika, historiografia* (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2009), 48.
[77] B.C. Newton to Lord Halifax, Prague, 36 October 1938. British Foreign Office: No. 365 (C13112/2475/12). Published in Bela Vago, *Under the Shadow of the Swastika: The Rise of Fascism and Anti-Semitism in the Danube Basin, 1936-1939* (Farnbourough, UK: Saxonhouse, 1975), 337.

regarded as an ineffectual liability. For the Ľudáks, who had declared themselves as the righftful voice of the Slovak nation since the early 1920s, a broken Czechoslovak democracy and the achievement of autonomy implied a right to govern unilaterally.

As Prime Minister and the party's chief ideologist, Jozef Tiso began reorienting Slovak society toward a new set of political and spiritual goals, shifting sharply away from the liberal culture of the First Republic. The first step in this process was the elimination of pluralism, and within months of Žilina, non-party affiliated civil organizations, trade unions, political parties, and even cultural organizations and sporting clubs were disbanded. The Communist and Social Democratic parties were outlawed. Censorship was introduced. "The unification of the Slovak nation," Tiso asserted in the party organ *Slovák* in October of 1938, "must be the bearer of our further development." Those who would oppose such a historic process, he continued, could now be counted as "the hooded enemy" of the people.[78] The new regime began persecuting these so-called "enemies," deporting 7,500 Jews to Hungary in November and 9,000 Czechs to the Czech lands the following month.[79] As Czech leaders wrung their hands over the situation in Slovakia, the US envoy to Prague George Kennan concluded that the Slovaks had "been won over [to fascism] by flattery, cajolery, and a display of force."[80]

The politics of race and coercion, along with a kind of *Gleichschaltung* for Slovakia, had indeed colored Tiso's rhetoric over the course of the late 1930s. But Slovakia's new leader insisted that the post-Munich changes in his province drew inspiration not from Nazism, but Christian solidarism. Instead of Adolf Hitler, Tiso emulated Austrian statesmen

[78] *Slovák*, 25 October 1938, 1.
[79] Igor Baka, *Politický systém a režím Slovenskej republiky v rokoch 1939-1940* (Bratislava: Vojenský HÚ, 2010), 24.
[80] Kennan, *From Prague after Munich,* 9.

like Engelbert Dollfuß and Kurt Schuschnigg, both Christian Socialists. He aspired toward a corporatist "New Slovakia," rejecting totalitarianism and secularism as well as bourgeois capitalism. Like many old guard Ľudáks, Tiso was motivated in this period by a tandem desire to protect the Church's influence over society and secure national justice for Slovakia, elevating Catholic teachings as the "regulator of public life [and] national, state, and international relations."[81] Brought to power, however, his conception of the nation as an homogenous Slovak body meant that there could be franchise for neither ethnic nor political out-groups. [82] Thus, while he spoke of Christian values like love and compassion, he also stressed an exclusive ethnic Slovak nationalism. As he opined in *Slovák* in July of 1938, because they did not belong to the centuries-long Christian tradition of Slovakia, Jews "could be citizens of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, but never Slovaks!"[83] Those who did not conform to the spirit of Christian nationalism had no place in a Catholic "Slovakia for the Slovaks."[84] The ideological core of Tiso's policies in 1938-1939 was thus more an extension of two decades of Ľudák politics than a Nazi imposition or wholesale adoption for fascist methods.

An intra-party political struggle did, however, push Tiso toward more extreme methods than he might have intended.[85] While his clerical-nationalist wing held the high ground in the party, radical pretenders to power within the party challenged the moderates' program. Hlinka had commanded a reverence that enabled him to balance the interests of the younger radicals and the older clericals, but after his death, Tiso was forced to confront

[81] *Slovák,* 25 December 1939, 1. Quoted in Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, 200.
[82] Jozef Tiso, "Ideológie slovenskej ľudovej strany," 1930, reprinted in *Slovenská otázka v 20. Storoči*, ed. Rudolf Chmel (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1997), 83.
[83] *Slovák*, 21 July 1938, 1.
[84] Kamenec, *Spoločnosť,* 46.
[85] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 165.

ambitious, often pro-German separatists within his party who opposed his and other moderates' plan to continue Slovakia's national development within Czechoslovakia. This new generation of HSPP members, dubbed the "young Ľudáks," changed the character of the movement, linking the "Slovak question" with German foreign policy and a disdain for democracy.[86] The jurist Vojtech Tuka, a cunning member of this faction, reappeared in the fall of 1938 after nearly a decade in prison for treason against the First Republic. Czech leaders regarded Tuka as a Magyar agent, but he also was one of the earliest and most forceful voices behind Slovak separatism.[87] Along with other radical party intellectuals with the nationalist journal *Nástup,* including its editor Ferdinand Ďurčanský, he began cultivating ties with Nazi Germany and advocating independence for Slovakia.

An even more visible source of radicalization was the Hlinka Guard (HG). Established in June of 1938 as a reincarnation of Tuka's *Rodobrana* of the 1920s, the HG was a quasi-fascist paramilitary brigade that originally served as the party's bodyguard. Its leaders, Alexander (Šaňo) Mach and Karol Sidor declared the group's mission to protect "Slovak national property," and "party interests" and serve as its "fighting detachment." Complete with black uniforms, high black boots, and a special salute, the HG adopted the familiar tactics of the Italian Blackshirts and Hitler's *Sturmabteilung.*[88]

The activities of the Guard did not have any official sanction in autonomous Slovakia. In fact, Tiso would soon try to limit their power—but it gathered strength amongst radicalizing and opportunistic segments of the population, which joined by the thousand

[86] Martin Pekár, "Štátna ideologie a jej vplyv na charakter režimu," in *Slovenský štát, 1939-1945: Predstavy a realita,* eds. Martina Fiamová, Ján Hlavinka, Michal Schvarc (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2014), 140.
[87] While editor of *Slovák* in 1929*,* Tuka was prosecuted for claiming that the Martin Declaration contained a secret clause which dictated that the Czechoslovak Republic dissolve ten years after its founding.
[88] Baka, *Politický systém*, 16. See also: Yeshayahu Jelinek, "Storm-Troopers in Slovakia: The Rodobrana and the Hlinka Guard," *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 6, no. 3 (1971), 104.

beginning in October.[89] Critics meanwhile rated the HG as little more than marauding bandits. Inciting anti-Semitism and Czecho-phobia, the HG often drew censure from moderates for lawless "wolfishness" and the denigration of Father Hlinka's legacy.[90] Still, the HG recruited successfully in many communities, often by casting Jews as proto-Bolshevik threats to security. In a scene repeated across Slovakia, inflammatory anti-Jewish speeches by party officials in the eastern townships of Michalovce and Sečovce in autumn of 1938 called upon Slovaks to harrass the region's Jews as well as to confiscate or destroy their property.[91] According to one observer, such enthusiasm was little more than "hooliganism," but it made an impression; the prevailing mood in the region was now pro-regime.[92]

A growing radical impulse, as well as intolerance for both Czechs and Jews in the period of Slovak autonomy—most noticeable in the rapid expansion of the Hlinka Guard—reflected both long- and short-term developments in Slovak society. Fascist-type extremisms gained currency almost everywhere in the German and Italian spheres of influence during the 1930s, and Slovakia was no exception. In part, Slovak radicalism was defined by the entry of a new generation into politics. At the movement's forefront was a small but growing class of intelligentsia that, born out of the same educational reforms designed to generate a Czechoslovak identity, grew disillusioned as economic depression limited their prospects

[89] Peter Sokolovič, *Hlinková garda 1938-1945* (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2009), 57. Estimates of the HG's expansion in membership from 1938-1939 are inconsistent, varying from 60,000 to 240,000 according to various German archival sources. See: Sokolovič, *Hlinková Garda*, 118.

[90] Anton Hruboň, *Hlinková garda na území pohronskej župy* (Banská Bystrica: Historia Nostra, 2012), 31.

[91] There is ample evidence to suggest that the Guard and other radicals, sometimes alongside Slovak *Volksdeutsche* activists, played a pivotal role in rousing Slovak civilians to anti-Jewish actions in 1938-1939, often through fear mongering or the promise of enrichment. See Eduard Nižňanský's case study of Piešťany, "Pogrom v Piešťanoch v roku 1939," *Z dejín demokratických a totalitných režimov na Slovensku a v Československu v 20 storočí,* ed. Edita Ivančiková (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2008), 79-81.

[92] Archív Múzea Slovenského Národného Povstania (AMSNP), fund 7, S239/84.

during the 1930s.[93] Czech domination of state administration, the armed forces, and teaching professions in Slovakia also produced a resentment that mushroomed after Žilina.[94] The frustrations of younger party acolytes frequently led them to the Guard, where they sought social status, career advancement, or profit in the expulsion of Czech nationals or the seizure of Jewish wealth.[95] In places like Michalovce, the HG's flurry of activity catalyzed local discontent over the persistence of interwar poverty, the fear that Jews posed a threat to internal security, and a tradition of rural anti-Semitism that had previously erupted during the turbulent years of 1918-19.[96] As was the case elsewhere in Europe, a trend toward illiberalism in Czecho-Slovakia also left many reluctant to speak out against radicalism due to tacit agreement or for fear of reprisal.

More than anything else, the volatile climate of autumn 1938 was engendered by domestic panic. The persecution and expulsion of non-Slovak "enemies" was a response to Slovakia's precarious position within the rump Republic.[97] Reactionary violence fed on a sense that the state was under attack. A redrawing of Czechoslovakia's borders required Slovakia to cede territories to its neighbors, Poland, Hungary, and Nazi Germany, inflicting considerable losses to her economy and territory. Javorina and Čadca, long-contested

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[93] See: Alexander Maxwell. *Choosing Slovakia: Slavic Hungary, the Czechoslovak Language, and Accidental Nationalism.* London: IB Tauris, 2009. Building on Owen V. Johnson's seminal study of the Czechoslovak education system's effect on interwar Slovak society, Maxwell argues that use of the Slovak language in Czechoslovak state schools produced a "nationalizing" effect on the Slovak middle class in the interwar period.

[94] Valerián Bystrický, "The Munich Conference to the Declaration of Independence," in *Slovakia in History,* eds. Mikuláš Teich, Dušan Kovač, Robin D. Brown (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 164.

[95] Sokolovič, *Hlinková Garda,* 143, 448.

[96] Hana Kubátová, *Nepokradeš! Nálady a postoje slovenské spoločnosti k židovské otázce, 1938-1945* (Prague: Academia, 2013), 82.

[97] In a recent analysis of the 1938 Vienna Award, James M. Ward argues that because the Ľudák authorities regarded the "ethnic principle" as integral to domestic security after Munich, the November deportations of approximately 7,500 Magyarone Slovak Jews was a measure designed to protect Slovakia against Hungarian irredentism, not simply an expression of blanket anti-Semitism or fealty to the Reich. See: James M. Ward, "The 1938 First Vienna Award and the Holocaust in Slovakia," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 76-108. Czechs, too, were treated as unreliable foreign agents, often subject to search and seizure at train depots and other inspection points. See: Sokolovič, *Hlinková Garda,* 111-17.

sections of the Polish-Slovak borderlands, went to Poland in October 1938, and the symbolically important Bratislava suburbs of Devín and Petržalka were surrendered to German military control under the terms of Munich. These losses, at approximately one percent of total Slovak holdings and roughly 20,000 of its citizens, were dwarfed by the Hungarian annexation of 20 percent of Slovak territory, as well as over 850,000 inhabitants and 40 percent of its arable land, decreed with the Vienna Award of November 2, 1938.[98] Like Beneš before him, Tiso had been forced to accept the revisions or risk the whirlwind. In the face of total annexation by Hungary, as he remarked in a radio address that evening, the fledgling Slovak government had decided to save what still could be saved.[99] Privately, Tiso and his government feared invasion and total insolvency.[100]

In search of stability, the fragile Slovak regime now worked diligently to expand its power. Further repression and *Gleichschaltung* followed. Anxious to neutralize the radicals, Tiso and the moderates realized that the HG offered utility beyond brigandage. Through sponsorship of mass rallies and marches, the censorship or elimination of non-Ľudák publications and organizations (and the installation of regime-sponsored organizations, such as the Hlinka Youth, as well as myriad party publications and other propaganda), or the establishment of new HSPP "national committees," the Tiso regime made the Guard a key means by which the party secured its influence in Slovak public life.[101] As the new, "organizational core" of the HSPP, Guard members could police political opponents in towns and villages of Slovakia, many of whom still held positions in government. The HG

[98] Vnuk, "Six Eventful Months," 38, 51, 62.
[99] Dorothea H. El Malakh, *The Slovak Autonomy Movement, 1935-1939: A Study in Unrelenting Nationalism* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1979), 126.
[100] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 166.
[101] Baka, *Politický systém*, 16-17; Martin Lacko, *Slovenská republika, 1939-1945* (Bratislava: Perfekt, 2008), 20; Sokolovič, *Hlinková Garda,* 86.

worked to rid Slovak libraries, cinemas, and schools of all elements "lacking the Christian and national spirit."[102] Critically, they also helped generate the appearance of support for the Ľudáks during the first elections to the newly established Slovak Parliament in December 1938. While officials had rigged candidate lists to include only HSPP nominees—and even framed the vote as a referendum on the simple question, "do you want a new, free Slovakia?"—the HG monitored the voting procedure, using intimidation to ensure that results returned 97 percent support for the regime.[103]

Along with their election victory, the November 22 codification of the Slovak Autonomy Law in Prague offered the Ľudáks at least a modicum of security. Despite its damage to Slovak infrastructure, the Vienna Agreement had also confirmed legal status for Slovak territory in post-Munich Czecho-Slovakia, and Nazi Germany signaled to its radical Slovak contacts that for the time being, Slovakia was of better use to them in the Second Republic.[104] Tiso meanwhile managed to limit the influence of radicals in his cabinet, gained some control over the Guard, and reinforced ties to Prague and the new Czechoslovak president, Emil Hácha.[105] As 1939 began, *Slovák* proclaimed, Slovaks could rejoice that God—"he who decides the fate of nations"—had guided the thousand-year struggle for Slovak autonomy to victory. The country stood on the edge of a new era, and Slovaks were urged toward work "for God and nation."[106] Calling for a new Slovak "national character" and encouraging the public to expel foreign influences to cultivate a purified (Catholic)

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[102] Ibid, 26.
[103] Robert Arpáš, "Od autonómie k samostatnosti" in *Slovenská republika 1939-1945 očami mladých historikov,* vol. IV., eds. Michal Šmigeľ and Peter Mičko (Banská Bystrica: Katedra História FHV UMB, 2005), 15.
[104] El Malakh, *The Slovak Autonomy Movement,* 127-28.
[105] Arpáš, "Od autonómie," 17.
[106] *Slovák*, 1 January 1939, 1.

national culture, *Slovák* sounded an optimistic, if tentative note.[107]

Even acknowledging the work ahead, the Ľudák regime could celebrate some modest successes after three months of autonomy: their moves toward political domination had met with no serious opposition; they had survived the gauntlets of Munich and Vienna, and finally won an autonomous Slovakia*,* as *Slovák* claimed, according to the wishes of the party's founder, Andrej Hlinka. As one party functionary reflected, the nation was like a "farmer who has just begun to cultivate new land." Through the grace of God, and with the guiding hand of the party, the Slovaks had "achieved an idyll beyond expectations."[108]

Adolf Hitler as Deus Ex Machina

Unfortunately for Tiso and the moderate Ľudaks, who still preferred a slow, evolutionary development of Slovak autonomy within Czecho-Slovakia, the newfound Slovak "idyll" lay in the path of a merely postponed Nazi campaign to dominate East-Central Europe.[109] Hitler's great foreign policy victory of September 1938, as has been well documented, had not satisfied his desire to completely dissolve the Czechoslovak Republic. The solution of Munich, in Hitler aide Martin Bormann's opinion, could only be temporary. Nazi Germany would never allow an independent Czecho-Slovakia to permanently occupy her flank.[110] From October 1938, Reich policy toward the Second Republic changed according to Hitler's designs on Poland, as well as his realization that the Slovak radicals could act as leverage to dissolve the sclerotic Second Republic. With the Poles' refusal of Nazi proposals for the

[107] *Slovák,* 4 January 1939, 1.
[108] *Slovák,* 6 January 1939, 1.
[109] Karol Sidor, *Takto vznikol Slovenský štát* (Bratislava, 1991), 128. The Czech historian Peter Demetz contends that this brief "hiatus" in Germany's aggression toward Czechoslovakia was effected only to assuage British public opinion. Peter Demetz, *Prague in Danger* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2008), 5.
[110] Theodore Prochazka, "The Second Republic" in *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic, 1918-1948,* eds. Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 265.

annexation of Danzig and the Polish Corridor in January, Hitler decided to resolve the dispute by force. An independent, German-allied Slovak state would be useful as a staging ground for the invasion of Poland and neutralize any potential military counterstroke from Czecho-Slovakia or her allies. Thus it was Tuka, though he held no official position in the Slovak government, who became the first Slovak leader to meet with the German Chancellor on February 12, acquainting Hitler with Slovaks' willingness to "place the fate of the….[Slovak] people in…. [his] hands."[111] The *Führer* in turn offered assurances of protection for an independent Slovakia, at the same time warning that continued loyalty to the Czechs would court catastrophe for the Slovaks. In a meeting with Slovak Foreign Affairs Minister Ferdinand Ďurčanský a few weeks later, Field Marshall Hermann Göring outlined the German position more bluntly, "So, what'll it be, then? Are you going to declare independence or should we let the Hungarians have you?"[112]

In early March, Tiso's willingness—or ability—to resist the radicals' separatism began to weaken. On top of subversion within his own party and a budgetary shortfall of over a billion crowns for the New Year, he faced Hungarian troop movements along Slovakia's borders, unrest amongst the Slovak *Volksdeutche*, and a propaganda campaign (launched by Ďurčanský) pushing for Slovakia's independence. Securing an agreement with Germany for economic aid could quickly end the most pressing of these crises, yet German officials insisted in late February that a declaration of Slovak independence was a

[111] Vojtech Tuka in Ladislav Karel Feirabend, *Ve vládách druhé republiky* (New York, 1961), 117. Quoted in Jörg K. Hoensch, *Slovensko a Hitlerová východná politika: Hlinková ľudová strana medzi autonómiu a separatizmom*, trans. Kristina Čaplovičová (Bratislava: Veda, 2001), 135.
[112] Slovenský národný archív (SNA), NS 9/46, 43. Quoted in Hoensch, *Slovensko a Hitlerová východná politika,* 139.

precondition for any cooperation with the Reich.[113] Highly publicized separatist speeches by Mach and other radicals coupled with Tiso's ambiguous assurances of loyalty to Prague meanwhile pushed the central government's trust in the HSPP leadership to the breaking point. After more news of dealings between Slovak and German diplomats in early March, the mood in Prague reached outright alarm. On March 10, after conferring with Slovak Agrarians, President Hácha dissolved the Tiso government, interned Mach, Tuka, and several other separatists, and dispatched federal troops to strategic points throughout Slovakia.[114] In what became known as the Homolov Putsch (named for the Czech general leading the central government's forces), Slovak territory now fell under martial law. Meanwhile, in spite of his reputation as a radical, Karol Sidor's anti-German orientation won him Hácha's confidence and Prague tapped him on March 11 to form a provisional government and replace Tiso as Prime Minister. With the Czechoslovak army now occupying the province, Sidor ordered the Guard to stand down. He also tried to neutralize the Germanophiles, cautioning the public "not to fall prey to slogans from irresponsible people."[115] Facing mounting pressure from Slovak radicals and threats from visiting German envoys, the embattled Slovak premier remained resolute; bearing "the burden of the Slovak nation on his shoulders in these difficult times," he refused to declare independence.[116] It appeared that the Second Republic might survive yet another crisis.

Frustrated at the radicals' hesitation and anxious to meet his own March 15 deadline for Czecho-Slovakia's dissolution, Hitler was nonetheless undeterred. He now shifted his attention to Tiso. On March 13, the priest was summoned to Berlin from his home parish in

[113] Bystrický, "The Munich Conference," 171. See also: Karol Sidor, *O vzniku Slovenského štátu* (Bratislava, 1945), 9.
[114] Lacko, *Slovenská republika,* 29-30.
[115] *Slovák,* 12 March 1939, 1.
[116] Ibid.

Bánovce nad Bebravou. The German Chancellor presented his terms without ceremony, challenging a reluctant but chastened Tiso to declare independence or face partition by Hungary, Germany, and Poland "Blitzschnell."[117] That night, as German provocateurs exploded bombs outside Slovak government headquarters, Tiso acquiesced, accepting a German guarantee of "protection" for "the political independence of Slovakia and its territory" (*Schutzvertrag*). At the same time, he strove to dress what was in reality a Faustian Bargain in the guise of legal procedure.[118] Tiso informed Hácha of the decision by phone, and then summoned a meeting of the Slovak legislature to rubber stamp a declaration of independence.[119] That night, threatening total destruction, Hitler forced Hácha to accept a Nazi occupation regime in the new German Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

There was little discussion as Tiso reported the facts in parliament upon return from his Berlin meeting on March 14, but the occasion was celebrated in the pages of *Slovák* the next day as a "realization of Hlinka's dream" and the work of statesmen and politicians who had labored for independence since Žilina. The party daily likewise criticized those who falsely claimed that the state was "a plaything in the hands of great European powers."[120] Germany's role in the affair hardly warranted mention, while Prague's misdeeds were underscored: the "military seizure of power" on March 9-10 had signaled that the Czechs "no longer desired peaceful coexistence with the Slovaks."[121] In the Ľudák-dominated Slovak parliament, the ratification of the *Schutzvertrag* on March 23 indicated the reverse; a newly independent Slovakia became a *de facto* anti-Czech state as an ally of Nazi Germany.

For Tiso and the Ľudáks, the acceptance of Hitler's offer derived from a combination

[117] Arpáš, "Od autonómie," 19.
[118] *Slovenský zákonník* 1939, vládne nariadenie 226/1940.
[119] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 181.
[120] *Slovák*, 15 March 1939, 1.
[121] Ibid.

of diplomatic pressure, a desire to safeguard plans for a future reordering of Slovakia, and personal ambition. According to Tiso's biographer, James M. Ward, Slovakia's new priest-president navigated a perilous "triangle of idealism, fear, and opportunism" in his dealings with Berlin.[122] Whatever Tiso's motivation, the inauguration of the Slovak Republic in March 1939 signaled the end of an era. As the German army occupied Bohemia and Moravia on March 15 under the pretense of protecting Czecho-Slovakia's threatened minorities, Slovakia ended its twenty-year partnership with the Czech lands. Caught between the Ľudáks' evaporating commitment to Czechoslovakia and Hitler's colonial designs, Slovakia had been transformed from a somewhat dysfunctional liberal democracy to a nominally independent, authoritarian party-state in the span of six months.

Conclusion

Opposing conceptions of national and ethnic identity amongst Slovakia's tiny pre-war political elite fueled a perpetual "politics of grievance" from the first days of the Czechoslovak Republic.[123] For Andrej Hlinka and his followers, the unique spiritual and national character of the Slovak people could never flourish under the control of a comparatively secular, Czech-dominated administration that propagated the "myth" of Czechoslovakism. The HSPP's decision to move away from Prague "at the price of the Republic," if taken at face value, must be attributed to a belief that autonomy was the given right of the Slovak nation and that centralism was a threat to the nation's survival.[124]

Czechoslovak centralists, meanwhile, feared and ultimately blocked the HSPP's crusade to rebuild Slovak society on the basis of Catholic and national particularism. For

[122] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 182-83.
[123] C.A. Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors* (London, 1937), 137.
[124] Felak, *At the Price of the Republic,* 132.

twenty years, the centralists' privileged status in the state's administrative hierarchy—an extension of their role in the foundation of the state itself—had allowed them to safeguard a unitary, liberalist vision of Czechoslovak statehood. When the balance of power in Europe shifted away from Prague and her British and French allies to Berlin, the Slovak centralists' dominant position became untenable and the Ľudaks stepped into the breach.

Munich laid bare the bankruptcy of parliamentary democracy in interwar Europe and opened the way for Slovak secession. The achievement of autonomy in 1938 and then independence in 1939, however, reflected the actions of interested political actors, not popular will or a "stab in the back" from the Slovak people. Slovak national consciousness had obtained amongst the Catholic ecclesiastical leadership and a group of newly educated bourgeois during the 1930s, but it never expanded beyond a limited stratum of Slovak society. Even discounting the significant decline in support for the party in the May 1938 elections, the Ľudáks' strategies for attracting voters relied on the mobilization of rural piety, clientelism, and messianic populism as the answer to economic problems, rather than civic engagement or deep-rooted Slovak national feeling. In one historian's frank analysis, the autonomists simply manipulated peasant naiveté to generate the appearance of a national movement.[125]

The Ľudák "revolution" of 1938-1939 was thus the work of a radical nationalist minority and their fellow travelers.[126] The "small Slovak faction" that had, as early as 1925, unnerved centralists like Masaryk with its "dreams of "God knows what kind of independence for Slovakia," was driven by a belief that they alone had the right to speak on

[125] Hoensch, *Slovensko a Hitlerová východná politika*, 17.

[126] The new regime's anxiety over Slovakia's dearth of experienced political elites required to run an independent state, as well as their reluctant appointment of "unreliable Czechoslovaks" underscores the limited base of their state-building project. See: Kolková, "Kontinuita alebo diskontinuita," 249; Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 181.

behalf of the Slovak nation. [127] That nation, they claimed, was under grave threat and could only be safeguarded with authoritarian rule. Growing anxiety, fueled further by the agitation of an extremist element—as well as many Slovaks' indifference to party politics and a willingness to profit by their neighbors' misfortune—culminated in a wave of persecution against Jews and Czechs. The "ethnic principle" proved politically useful, and it indicated that such handling of internal "enemies" was soon to be institutionalized. "Slovakness" became the key criterion for belonging in the new state.

If we accept Tiso's postwar claim that, in declaring an independent Slovakia, he had only hoped to rescue the country from foreign domination, he could hardly have enjoined a more dangerous benefactor than Adolf Hitler. And whether or not this "shield" defense measures up to the facts, his alliance with the Germans in exchange for some kind of national existence for Slovakia appears not wholly dissimilar to the kind of calculus the Slovak members of the CNC practiced in 1918. Indeed, strategies pursued by both the post-war Slovak activists and the Ľudák leadership in the years 1918-1919 and 1938-1939, respectively, demonstrate that the activism of political elites and the intervention of foreign powers, more than Slovak movements or mass politics, dictated Slovakia's political trajectory during the formation of the Republic and its dissolution.

The years of international crisis in which these states emerged—encompassing the dissolution of the Habsburg empire at the close of WWI and the collapse of the Versailles order after Munich—constituted major societal ruptures that allowed Slovak elites to pursue differing articulations of nation- and statehood. In 1918, the promise of parliamentary democracy and a balance of powers among nation states had helped generate support for a

[127] Tomáš G. Masaryk, *Svetová revoluce za války a ve valce, 1914-1918* (Prague: Čin a Orbis, 1925), 256.

Czechoslovak Republic at home and abroad. After Munich, the failure of diplomacy and waning faith in liberal institutions rendered those structures hollow and, to many, unworthy of salavaging.

Unlike Masaryk, Beneš, and Štefáník in 1918-1919, independent Slovakia and its leaders engaged this process of rupture and re-articulation in 1938-1939 without a broad-based elite consensus. Moreover, the State emerged on the brink of a major continental war rather than in the wake of one. As HSPP deputies prepared to remake Slovak society, the country's future was now tied to the fortunes of its imperial patron.

Chapter II.
The Slovak State, 1939-1943:
"Construction Work" Unfinished

...I was struck by two elements in Slovak political life: one was a real ambition to build the state as if it were an entity outside the complexities of the European theater; the other was an unbelievable credulity [...] in the capability for survival.

—Jozef Staško[1]

Though sometimes labeled "puppet regimes," the various national governments that appeared in Europe under Nazi rule did not always become loyal vassals overnight.[2] Nor were their ideologies, as is sometimes assumed, cribbed directly from the German or Italian fascist playbooks. To the contrary, as the Hungarian-American historian István Déak and others have convincingly argued, the modes of politics in Nazi-dominated Europe varied greatly over time and space, often correlating with a territory's degree of integration within the Reich and the course of the wider war.[3] Yet even in light of efforts to reevaluate the character of political and administrative control exercised by German administrators amongst subject populations, the domestic aims of "collaborationist" governments and the

[1] Jozef Staško, "Štefan Osuský's Attempts to Establish Contacts with Slovakia in 1939; A Personal Memoir," *Slovakia* 32, Nos. 58-59 (1985-86), 26.

[2] Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia*, 186.

[3] See the introduction in István Déak, *Europe on Trial: The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution in World War II* (Boulder, CO: Westlake Press, 2015), 1-14. See also: Tony Judt, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath,* eds. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, and Tony Judt (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 294.

endogenous social and political life in occupied or satellite territories between 1939 and 1945 remain underexplored.

Studies of wartime Slovakia pose no exception to this trend. The bulk of scholarship analyzing the first Slovak Republic (1939-1945), including the relatively scant literature available in languages other than Slovak, addresses questions of high politics and seeks predominantly to describe German influence on Slovak affairs.[4] With a few exceptions, Slovak authors in the decades following 1989 have preferred to treat the wartime state under the leadership of HSPP as either a "totalitarian" factotum or an idealized expression of Slovakia's national liberation.[5] Respectively, these interpretations claim that the Slovak population was overwhelmingly opposed to the state and its policies or, conversely, consistently supportive of them.[6] Other studies simply ignore the question of popular attitudes toward the state. Biographies of Jozef Tiso, while touching upon the priest-president's impact on Slovak politics, center on his participation or "collaboration" in Nazi conquest and genocide.[7] Other assessments have focused on Slovakia's complicity in the Holocaust or attempted to situate Slovak "clerical fascism" amongst other European

[4] Notable German works include: Johann Kaiser, *Die Politik des Dritten Reiches gegenüber der Slowakei* (Bochum 1969); Jörg K. Hoensch, *Die Slowakei und Hitlers Ostpolitik* (Köln-Graz 1965); Hans Dress, *Slowakei und die faschtische Neuordnung Europas, 1939-1941* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1971).

[5] In the previous chapter, I noted the opposing, if equally myopic, tendency among Slovak émigré authors to view the state as the expression of political emancipation for a long-oppressed "Slovak nation." An exception is the 1955 volume by exiled Slovak Agrarian politician Jozef Lettrich that describes the state as a fascist dictatorship in the Nazi model. See: Jozef Lettrich, *The History of Modern Slovakia* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1955). Members of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party are herein also denoted as "Ľudáks" or populists.

[6] For example, Lettrich notes: "The great majority of the Slovak people disapproved of Slovak separatism, of the ... Slovak People's party, of the Slovak Government's pro-Nazi policy, and its inhuman anti-Semitism." Lettrich, *The History of Modern Slovakia,* 193. Communist historians similarly claim that most Slovaks never supported the "totalitarian" HSPP regime. See: Samo Faltan, "Partisan War in Slovakia in the Period 1944-1945," *Studia historica slovaca*, V, Bratislava (1967), 91.

[7] Valerian Bystricky and Štefan Fano, eds, *Pokus o politický a osobný profil Jozefa Tisu*, Bratislava: SAP, 1992. James M. Ward. *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013.

varieties. The state's interior developments, the details of its domestic policies, and the *Alltag* experience of Slovak civilians have received little attention.[8]

In view of Czechoslovak Communists' restrictions on open discussion of the Slovak State's history, as well as their ritual denunciation of the HSPP, this sparse set of research foci does not seem surprising or unreasonable. The Communist regime's insistence that Slovaks were almost universally opposed to the State has, however, clouded our understanding of its place in modern Slovak national history. As an effort to address this lacuna, this chapter focuses on the following questions: What kind of society did the HSPP seek to create after gaining independence in March 1939? What role did the party-state play in the lives of the people, and what internal and external factors shaped its policies? Finally, how can we evaluate popular views of the party's agenda? Did Slovaks generally support the Ľudák vision for "New Slovakia"? These questions also supply a framework for considering the roots of resistance to the Slovak State, which I tackle in Chapter III.

Analyzing treatises by HSPP political theorists, the speeches and writings of state leaders, and the records of Nazi and Slovak security organizations, this research reveals that from March 1939 to July 1940, a re-articulation of Slovakia's socio-political structures indeed emerged at the intersection of HSPP politics and the coordinates of German foreign policy. However, challenging the conventional view of wartime Slovakia as a "fascist" puppet regime, I argue that the State's founding ideology reflected neither the wholesale application of German National Socialism nor the radically destructive brand of revolution

[8] For a summary of this discussion, see Marína Zavacká, "Crossing sisters: patterns of protest in the journal of the Catholic Union of Slovak Women during the Second World War," *Social History* 37, no. 4 (2012): 425-451.

usually associated with "totalitarian" regimes.[9] Rather, beginning in 1938-1939, the HSPP moderates' attempted to reshape Slovak society based on the eclectic ideological vision of its leaders. Marrying ethnic nationalism with Catholicism, corporatism, and some trappings of fascism, the HSPP sought the creation a "new Slovak man" in a "New Slovakia." During a period of considerable independence from Nazi Germany, this bid for a "revolution from above" embodied a rejection of "Czechoslovak" values and touched nearly every corner of Slovak public life, including political organization, the economy, and cultural policy.

In the summer of 1940, this independent course was altered: suspicious of political Catholicism, anxious for a speedier resolution of the "Jewish question," and requiring a more tractable ally, Hitler exploited an intraparty rivalry to force changes in the HSPP leadership, curtail Slovak sovereignty and confirm a tighter, pro-Nazi domestic political program for the state. The HSPP's attempt to "re-articulate" the structures of Slovak society was derailed. And, as the realities of Nazi suzerainty settled over Slovakia from 1941 to 1943, most Slovaks' already tentative allegiance to independent Slovakia and its government receded into apathy, clientelism, and self-preservation.

The Rites of Spring 1939: Fear and Exaltation, Fragmentation and Consolidation

On Sunday, March 19, 1939, scenes of state-sponsored jubilation unfolded in nearly every Catholic parish around Slovakia. The four-day-old Slovak Republic, officials announced, was to be celebrated with a national *Te Deum,* a gesture of thanks to God for securing independence. Catholic Church services across the country were embellished with the rituals

[9] Historians and political scientists have, with little to no theoretical grounding, consistently described the Slovak State in "fascist" terms. Two recent examples include: James M. Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013) and Bartek Pytlas, *Radical Right Parties in Central and Eastern Europe: Mainstream Party Competition and Electoral Fortune* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

of Slovak nationalism. In Bratislava, the new capital, parishioners were treated to a grandiose introduction of the representatives of state power: administrators, army officials, members of the HG, and HSPP leaders followed a parade route through the city and concluded with speeches and a "magnificent demonstration," including a rendition of the national hymn "Hej, Slováci!" and a high mass in the thirteenth century Cathedral of St. Martin.[10] Addressing a crowd assembled in Hviezdoslav Square, Minister of Propaganda and HG chief Alexander Mach began with an "expression of great joy at the unanticipated victory of the Slovak nation," before conceding that the recent developments had aroused trepidation at home. "Among many, there are worries," Mach allowed, but offered assurances that the dramatic events of preceding days had rescued the state and ensured a prosperous future.[11] From citizens around the country, as published in the HSPP party daily *Slovák*, came expressions of gratitude, one declaring that, aided by God's providence, "what was only a dream [had] become reality."[12]

The regime's pomp and pride betrayed only a hint of the deep insecurity that colored its inauguration.[13] A tiny, predominantly agricultural nation of only 2.6 million inhabitants, Slovakia had confronted for over six months a perpetual series of crises.[14] After weeks of domestic unrest and agitation from forces across the political spectrum, the Vienna Awards had shorn it of valuable territories and aroused fears of annexation by Hungary. Disruptions in commerce sparked inflation and speculation. The HSPP's authoritarian machinations and

[10] *Slovák,* 19 March 1939, 2. *Slovák*, 21 March 1939, 4.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Jelinek, *The Parish Republic,* 32.
[14] Ivan Kamenec, "The Slovak State," in *Slovakia in History,* eds. Mikuláš Teich, Dušan Kovač, Robin D. Brown (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 175. According to a 1943 estimate, roughly 57 percent of Slovaks were engaged in agriculture. See: Hermann Gross, *Die Slowakei in der Grossraumwirtschaft Europas* (Bratislava 1943), 4.

mounting suspicion in Prague of an anti-state conspiracy led to occupation and the declaration of martial law under the Czechoslovak Army in March, as well as the dismissal and imprisonment of the state's highest officials. Then, in the course of a few days, a Nazi-orchestrated Slovak secession and the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia dissolved the Czecho-Slovak Republic. A future of stability and prosperity was anything but assured.

Even as the March 19 festivities began, fresh developments confounded Jozef Tiso's moves to put the country on steadier footing. The Slovak Prime Minister sought its neighbors' recognition and fresh border guarantees from Nazi Germany, hoping to guarantee Slovakia's neutrality or demilitarization, but the *Wehrmacht* occupied a portion of western Slovakia as a so-called "protection zone" (*Schutzzone*) in line with plans to use it as a staging ground for the future invasion of Poland.[15] The confused situation permitted Hungary to press its irredentist claims, flaunting an earlier recognition of Slovakia's sovereignty. On March 23, the same day Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim Ribbentrop ratified the German-Slovak protection agreement (*Schutzvertrag*), a quickly armed HG and a frantically organized Slovak Army were dispatched to meet Hungarian units along the country's southern border. In the so-called "little war" that followed, HSPP leaders lionized the Slovak dead as valiant warriors in the centuries-old battle for Slovak rights, but privately worried that the conflict would end in Slovakia's total annexation by Hungary.[16] In *Slovák,* editorials inveighed against rumors of Hungarian advances, and as a peace deal with Budapest was reached on April 4, Ľudák minister Pavol Čarnogurský soft-pedaled the cession to Hungary of 1,900 kilometers and 75,000 inhabitants, many of them Hungarian

[15] Martin Pekár, "Slovensko medzi 14 marcom a1939 Salzburskými rokovaniami," in *Slovensko medzi 14 marcom a 1939 Salzburskými rokovaniami,* eds. Martin Pekár and Richard Pavlovič (Prešov: Universum, 2007), 11-22, 13.
[16] *Slovák*, 28 March 1939, 1.

Jews and Rusyns, as the desirable purification of nation. Now a "national state," rather than "a state of nationalities," Čarnogurský claimed, the time was now ripe "to consolidate internal conditions and to build our Slovak State."[17]

Čarnogurský contended that the Slovak State was now "fully united," yet the leadership remained deeply unsure of the population's loyalty to the new government. In an address to the Slovak parliament on the eve of the state's declaration Prime Minister Tiso reflected that "events are rushing forward, and I cannot say what will develop, if Slovaks will…quickly declare that they do not identify with this regime…."[18] A week later, a British diplomat described the collective mood as tenuous, observing, "the inhabitants of Bratislava are still unable to show great enthusiasm for the present state of affairs. The general impression is one of apathy or pessimism."[19] The popular press demonstrated a keen awareness of widespread uncertainty, and sought to quell readers' fears, cautioning that "moments of great trial" called for "national character," and that those who showed "an indomitable spirit… need not worry about the future."[20] "The new Slovak state [had been] born in very painful times," noted the party weekly *Štúrov hlas,* but once awakened, "the young nation [could not] perish."[21] *Slovák* struck a familiar, biblical chord in declaring the state safeguarded by divine benevolence: "Let no one fear the destiny of an independent Slovakia – by the grace of God, the Slovak future is provided for."[22]

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[17] *Slovák*, 5 April 1939, 1.
[18] Valerian Bystrický, "Zasadnutie Slovenského snemu 14 Marca, 1939," *Historický časopis* 47 (1999), 109-110.
[19] *Documents on British Foreign Policy,* 3rd Ser., 4:408. Quoted in Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 183-84.
[20] *Slovák,* 29 March 1939, 1.
[21] *Štúrov hlas,* 17 March 1939, 1.
[22] *Slovák,* 15 March 1939, 1.

Prime Minister Tiso worked to suppress doubt about the state's viability, ascribing anti-state sentiment and "whispering propaganda" to Slovakia's history of subjugation: "Our oppressors…inculcated in our souls [the belief] that we are not able to live independently….They raised us as slaves….Weaker Slovaks don't know how to shed this [slavish character]….Rumormongers claim…that [Slovakia] is not a viable unit, that she can't stand up economically, that she can't hold up politically….All this is aimed at keeping us in this slavish spirit."[23] Such "initial doubts and ambiguities," Tiso countered in a radio address on March 30, might "awaken a great deal of uneasiness in many Slovaks," without a "strong and healthy spirit in the nation."[24] The local party office in Tiso's home parish, Bánovce nad Bebravou, reminded all citizens of their duty to "become detectives, guards, and defenders of our dear, independent Slovak state."[25]

Beneath a preoccupation with eradicating doubt and defeatism, the new Ľudák government faced another major challenge to consolidation: a personnel shortage. Owing both to the removal of thousands of Czechs from administrative positions following the October 1938 declaration of Slovak autonomy, as well as a lack of qualified and experienced Slovak civil servants, the regime was forced to tap "unreliable elements," including known "Czechoslovakists," for government service.[26] Though the party reported a threefold increase in its ranks between October 1938 and December 1939, officials lamented the dearth of politically acceptable candidates for service to the nation.[27] The March

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[23] Miroslav Fabricius et al., eds., *Jozef Tiso: Prejavy a články,* vol. 2 (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2007), 119. Quoted in Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 187-88.
[24] Speech reprinted in *Slovák,* 1 April 1939, 3.
[25] Štatný Archív Nitra, Topoľčany branch, carton 55, 464/39. Quoted in Hana Kubátová, *Nepokradeš! Nálady a postoj Slovenskej spoločnosti k židovskej otázce 1938-1945* (Prague: Academia, 2013), 95.
[26] Baka, *Politický system,* 24. The extremity of this shortage explains why 2,700 Czech civil servants were exempted from earlier purges.
[27] *Slovák,* 31 May 1939, 1.

mobilization of the HG (whose previous role was restricted to border patrols and security duties) as a force "for addressing the various ills of Slovak society" indicated that the government was struggling to impose order.[28] This measure had a countervailing effect, as Guards used their powers to threaten, rob, and attack Jews, Czechs, and Protestants—all groups that were integral to the maintenance of the State's fledgling bureaucracy and weak economy. HG brigades also clashed with both Slovak Communists and the State's own troops, exacerbating an already chaotic situation.[29] Slovaks learned to resent the HG's disregard for the law, typified by confiscations of automobiles, unauthorized home searches, and the inspection of letters and other correspondence.[30] Disturbed at their activities, the Prime Minister had them disarmed in April.[31]

Tiso's move against the Guard hinted at deeper fissures in the Slovak political system and the party itself. In the fall of 1938, HSPP moderates (under Tiso) had led a takeover of the Czechoslovak Republic's administrative apparatus, stiffening it with a number of authoritarian measures, including censorship, the elimination of competing parties, and the persecution of political opponents.[32] Over the six months of autonomy, the more moderate, clerical leadership had sought, above all, domestic stability in an increasingly disordered international environment. Their aim had been gradually to advance automony according to Catholic and nationalist principles.

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[28] Sokolovič, *Hlinková garda,* 194.

[29] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, 3/71.

[30] Baka, *Politický systém*, 60.

[31] Sokolovič, *Hlinková garda,* 205-206.

[32] Along with a state security service to police the population, a prison camp was established at Ilava in 1938. A testament to the relatively half-hearted style of repression practiced by the regime, only an estimated 2,500 prisoners were interned there between 1939 and 1944. Examples of tolerance toward supposed enemies of the state (mostly Communists) abound. No death sentences were carried out over this five-year period and many of those who received prison sentences were released weeks later, often at the request of high-ranking state officials. The persecution, deportation, and eventual murder of Slovak Jews is, of course, the major exception to this "lenient" approach to repression. See: Lacko, *Slovenská republika,* 146-48.

For the radical wing of the party, Slovakia's declaration of independence in March 1939 offered an opportunity to pursue their own vision of "the Slovak revolution." In the minds of leading radicals Alexander Mach and Deputy Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka, this "revolution" meant the adoption of German-style national socialism, coupled with a complete alignment of Slovak policy with Nazi interests. [33] The radicals' control over the Guard provided the mechanism to impose Nazi-style policies, as well as to advance their own personal influence. Conservatives' occasional need to rely on the HG as the military arm of the party left them susceptible to these ambitions. [34] In the spring of 1939, and again after its revitalization for the Nazi invasion of Poland in September, the disputed role of the HG and its corollary organizations became the key battleground in a struggle between opposing conceptions of "New Slovakia" and its ideological character.

In certain arenas of policy, as demands for Slovak participation in the war on Poland made clear, Slovak politics would need to evolve according to Nazi interests. Reneging on earlier promises, the German High Command insisted on the mobilization of nearly 150,000 Slovak troops for the Polish front in September.[35] The wholesale reorientation of Slovak export markets toward Nazi Germany was also a key proviso of the Slovak-German alliance in 1939.[36] At Berlin's behest, Tiso dismissed the vocally anti-Nazi Karol Sidor as Minister of the Interior and introduced a Central Security Service (*Ústredňa štátnej bezpečnosti* [CSS]), which was ordered to cooperate with German intelligence organs, including the Nazi Sicherheitsdienst (SD).[37] This latter measure, as well as the HG's mobilization for what

[33] Kamenec, *Slovenský štát,* 31, 64.
[34] Kamenec, "The Slovak State," 184.
[35] Igor Baka, *Slovenská republika a nacistická agresia proti Poľsku,* (Bratislava: Vojenský HÚ, 2006), 80.
[36] Kamenec, *Slovenský štát,* 89. Products designated for Germany accounted for 70 percent of total Slovak exports over the course of the war.
[37] Matej Medvický, "Vznik Ústredne štátnej bezpečnosti," *Pamäť národa* 2 (2006).

became an unpopular war against Slavic, Catholic Poland, strengthened the radicals' hand and fostered an impression that independent Slovakia was merely an instrument of Nazi foreign policy in the hands of reckless party adventurers. "[These heathens] want to make of us nothing more than obedient servants of the Reich, ready to sacrifice even our lives for their next act of aggression," one anti-Ľudák flyer charged in 1939. "Get Hitler's hands off of our Slovakia! … Away with the government of Hitler's stewards! We don't want … an illegal guard! We want a government for the preservation of Slovak freedom!"[38] In June, the Ministry of the Interior ordered increased measures against those responsible for such "disruptive" agitation, highlighting among them certain "malcontented autonomists" whose "opposition to German protection [inspires] attempts to arouse mistrust in the existence of independent Slovakia.[39]

Traces of opposition to the German alliance would linger, but by the late summer of 1939, the threat of invasion or the state's dismemberment abated. Despite many "painful operations to [its] territory," in August 1939 German leaders signaled that Slovak statehood would be permanent.[40] In November, with the conquest of Poland complete, Hitler had turned his attention to securing a pliant Yugoslavia and, as a contented, "model" Slavic ally, Slovakia could serve a vital public relations role.[41] The HSPP now "acted stubbornly" to assert itself vis-à-vis the Reich and, as the German historian Tatjana Tönsmeyer has demonstrated, could proceed—at least temporarily—free of German meddling.[42] In a report

[38] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, 3/71.
[39] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, 179/60.
[40] *Slovák,* 4 April 1939, 1; *Slovák,* 15 August 1939, 5.
[41] Pekár, "Slovensko medzi 14 marcom," 13.
[42] Tatjana Tönsmeyer, "Slovak Nationalism and the Lessons learned from the History of the Slovak State, 1939-1945," presentation given at the conference "The Contours of Legitimacy in Central Europe: New Approaches in Graduate Studies," St. Antony's College, Oxford, 24-26 May 2002. Available online: http://users.ox.ac.uk/~oaces/conference/papers.html. Accessed October 8, 2016. See also: Tatjana Tönsmeyer,

to Berlin in December 1939, German Ambassador Hans Bernard expressed frustration at the weak penetration of Nazi security and intelligence in Slovakia, remarking that "the Slovaks are sensitive to interference in their internal affairs and therefore reject the various activities of the SD in Slovakia." SD and German police operatives assigned to Slovak posts were either ignored or relegated to impotent positions.[43]

Another important development in the fall of 1939 was Tiso's success in sidelining the radicals. At the October party congress in Trenčín, he reorganized the party presidium to force Tuka and other radicals into cooperation with moderate ministers and thereby dilute their influence.[44] The appointment of Tuka as Prime Minister, it was hoped, would pacify the Germans and the HG and pull him closer into line with the moderates. Tiso used his powers as chairman to transfer power from radical deputies to his favored lieutenants, notably the leader of the Ľudák nationalist intellectuals and party General Secretary Jozef Kirschbaum. Known as "*Nástupists*," the nationalist intellectuals were grouped around Kirschbaum's journal *Nástup* ("Line Up"). Their Catholic, fiercely nationalist, and anti-liberal view of Slovak statehood added theoretical depth to party. Though influenced by fascism, the Israeli-Slovak historian Yeshayahu Jelinek notes that the Nástupists' uncompromising Slovak nationalism drew them closer to the clericals and provoked conflict with the pro-German radicals.[45] The "new faces" in the party presidium were thus a step

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Das Dritte Reich und Die Slowakei 1939-1945: Politischer Alltag zwischen Kolaboration und Eigensinn (Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schoningh, 2003). The deployment of German "advisors" to "secure Reich interests in all parts of Slovak public and political life," the author notes, did not occur until the late summer of 1940.

[43] Politisches archiv Auswartiges Amtes Berlin, R100780, H. Quoted in Matej Medvický, *Spravodajské eso Slovenského štátu: Kauza Imre Sucký* (Bratistlava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2007), 29-30.

[44] Baka, *Politický systém*, 168.

[45] Jelinek, *The Parish Republic,* 63.

toward more thoroughgoing control for the clericals, and heralded an emphasis on the party (rather than the Guard) as the prime mover in Slovak life.[46]

The Slovak congress also strengthened the powers of the executive, clearing the way for Tiso's election as president later in October. HG chief Mach, meanwhile, regarded the subordination of the Guard to party power as a stinging setback, and likely surmised that only direct Nazi intervention could reverse conservative, clerical bent of the administration.[47] With the independent-minded moderate camp's hold on the government and the party secure, SD operatives likewise wrote to the home office with incredulity, "is this clerical state really under the protection of the Reich?"[48] To be sure, in the eyes of its German "protector," the newborn independent Slovakia was not quite turning out to be a "fascist puppet."

Building a New Slovakia, 1939-1940

Though it would prove short-lived, their consolidation of political power in late 1939 and the shift in German attention away from Slovakia provided the moderate Ľudáks room to conduct domestic politics relatively freely. Unlike its Czech and Polish neighbors, aside from the western *Schutzzonen*, Slovakia remained unoccupied by German troops and relatively unfettered by Nazi directives, and the conservatives labored to make good on their insistence that Germany's "protection" did not imply "encroachment on the Slovak state's sovereignty."[49] Those politically active Slovaks not opposed to independence—and there

[46] *Slovák,* 3 October 1939, 4.
[47] Baka, *Politický systém,* 170.
[48] Bundesarchiv Berlin (BArch), R70 Slowakei/146.
[49] *Slovák,* 19 March 1939, 4.

were many, as the Ministry of the Interior's June report hinted—were anxious to chart a uniquely Slovak course.[50]

As President and head of the party presidium, Tiso rejected the suggestion that the regime imitated Nazi Germany, often using the term *svojsky* ("our very own") when discussing internal policy.[51] Tiso earned a reputation for his opposition to "Nazi methods" and tirelessly invoked the nation's desire "to live for ourselves, according to our own will."[52] He denied that Slovakia "[could ever be ruled] by the government of another nation."[53] To establish continuity with the party's origins, the Ľudaks created a cult of personality around Father Hlinka and took up their mentor's old motto "For God and Nation," arguing that there could "never be any deviation from our old ideas… from our roots."[54] In Tiso's reasoning, because the state had been "born of the ever-unfolding political will of the Slovak nation to rule itself," it must be governed by the same "positive forces and values" which had shaped the nation's historical development.[55] The party journal *Nástup* likewise opined, "It is our good fortune that the basic principles of our ideology, which had led our Party in the struggle, need not be altered even now after victory. After completing the organizational structure of the Party, it will be necessary only to give a new form to this ideology and apply it to every sector of our state and national life."[56]

During this period of their greatest independence from direct Nazi control, the HSPP moderates' project for reorganizing Slovak society in fact comprised an amalgam of the

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[50] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, 179/60.
[51] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 190.
[52] Lipták, "Slovenské národné povstanie," 253.
[53] *Slovák,* 1 April 1939, 3.
[54] *Slovák,* 10 August 1940, 1.
[55] *Nástup,* 16 March 1939, 1.
[56] *Nástup* no. 19, 1939. Quoted in Stanley Kirschbaum, *Slovakia: Nation at the Crossroads of Central Europe,* (New York: Robert Speller and Sons), 174.

party's interwar populism, Christian corporatism, and the brand of reactionary "new thinking" then fashionable across Europe, hostile to liberal ideals and receptive to elements of fascism. At times *ad hoc* and contradictory, both their rhetoric and policies reflected a desire to enact Catholic social teachings and deepen Slovak nationalism, all while weathering crises, suppressing HG radicalism, and placating Berlin. Though sometimes apologists for Nazi ideas and drawn to anti-Semitism, Tiso and his allies were not at this time, as the Slovak émigré Jozef Lettrich contended in 1955, full-throated proponents of Nazism or fascism.[57] Nor were they, as some Slovak authors have asserted, "totalitarian" in their application of power: they neither sought nor achieved the domination and regulation of every sphere of Slovak life.

A more balanced description of Ľudák politics from March 1939 to July 1940 acknowledges that the restriction of personal freedoms (as opposed to their outright abolition) was part of a didactic program for moral reform in Slovak society. Furthermore, rather than demanding unlimited power and expanding its influence through the atomization of the populace and the destruction or all alternate forms of social organization, as Hannah Arendt suggested is the "very nature of totalitarian regimes," the HSPP not only permitted but promoted loci of authority and sources of social cohesion beyond their direct control.[58] Through their policy initiatives, far from seeking the "murder of the moral person," the regime aimed to imbue the "new, ideal Slovak man" with a particular set of nationalist and Catholic values.[59] President Tiso's explicit rejection of totalitarianism in 1939 was thus not wholly disingenuous: under his leadership, Slovakia's new government proclaimed its desire

[57] See: Jozef Lettrich. *The History of Modern Slovakia.* New York: Praeger, 1955.
[58] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 427.
[59] Martin Pekár, "Štátna ideológia a jej vplyv na charakter režimu," in *Slovenský štát 1939-1945: Predstavy a realita,* eds. Martina Fiamová, Ján Hlavinka and Michal Švarc (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2014), 137-152*,* 141.

"to reeducate Slovaks" in the mold of loyalty to the party, belief in God, and a love of nation.[60]

Party Authority and the Elusive Ideal of National Unity

As the nexus between God and the will of the Slovak collective, the party claimed to embody all national interests and provide the binding expression of nation and state.[61] The constitution of July 31, 1939 stipulated that, in order to ensure the "victory of Christianity and [Slovak] nationalism," "the Slovak people participate in political life through the medium of the PSNU."[62] In a formulation resonant of Italian fascism, Kirschbaum explained in an interview for *Slovák* in September 1939, "nothing outside the party, everything in the party, nothing against the party, everything for the party." The importance of party allegiance was in keeping with New Slovakia's already-entrenched aversion to democracy—within days of achieving autonomy in October 1938, the Ľudáks disbanded the Communist and Social Democratic Parties and swallowed the Slovak Agrarians. Redressing the damage wrought by "relentless class war" and the "fragmentation of political parties in the Czechoslovak Republic," Dr. Jozef Buday, a Slovak priest and a member of Tiso's presidium explained, the constitutional guarantee of "party unity" would permit the reconstruction of Slovak society on the basis of Catholicism, Slovak tradition, and social equity.[63] The bankruptcy of interwar politics had demonstrated that the only reliable source of stability in "new Europe," as Tiso's chief ideologist Štefan Polakovič argued in a 1939 political treatise, was national unity expressed in the dominance of one political party.[64] In Polakovič's view,

[60] Ibid, 151; *Slovák*, 22 November 1938, 3.
[61] *Slovák,* 15 October 1939, 5.
[62] *Slovák,* 8 July 1939, 1. Constitution quoted in Kirschbaum, *Slovakia: Nation at the Crossroads,* 158.
[63] *Slovák,* 12 July 1939, 1.
[64] Štefan Polakovič, *K základom slovenského štátu, filozofické esej* (Martin: Matica slovenská, 1939), 121-28.

the state and the party acted together as an "incontestable unit" in executing the Slovak national mission.[65]

Turning the party into a mass organization, it was reasoned, would cement this union—and at the same time negate the presence of "unreliable elements." Membership in the party and its various associated organizations was encouraged and in some cases compulsory. Party outposts and administrative offices were vastly expanded in October 1939. The replacement of the administrative system of *kraje* (lands) with smaller districts (*župy*), each under the supervision of a party secretariat, was planned for December.[66] Party printing presses drafted political manuals and an academy was founded in Bratislava for the preparation and training of new HSPP functionaries. The moderates regarded youth participation as essential to their hold on power and special attention was devoted to drawing younger generations into the party fold. The Hlinka Guard was enlarged as a branch of the party, with Tiso as supreme commander, and the Hlinka Youth (HY) claimed 50,000 members by mid-month.[67] Both measures were met with ambivalence, despite grandiloquent statements about these organizations' significance.[68] "Today, the building of our national life, our Slovak state, young people are of such immense importance," proclaimed HY leader Alojz Macek, "after all, the youth are the future of the nation… [and] we must use our methods to create good, passionate Slovaks and activists."[69] Membership in the HY and HG soon became requisite for Slovak students and adult men, respectively. In these paramilitary organizations, each and every Slovak was to labor as a "soldier for a more beautiful national

[65] Ibid, 66-68.
[66] *Slovák,* 11 July 1939, 2.
[67] *Slovák*, 3 October 1939, 4; *Slovák,* 14 October 1939, 4.
[68] Nedelsky, *Defining the Sovereign Community*, 98. See also: AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, 47/63.
[69] *Slovák,* 14 October 1939, 4.

future…and the programmatic construction and rationalization of the nation."[70]

Mass mobilization through the party did not entail meaningful popular representation, however. The radicals attacked constitutional provisions for the Slovak parliament (*Snem*) as a relic of Czechoslovak democracy, but the legislative branch was hardly a bastion of liberal praxis.[71] Only vetted party members were eligible for one of the *Snem*'s 63 seats, and the body primarily rubberstamped the party presidium's initiatives.[72] Elections scheduled for 1943 were never called and the *Snem*'s role grew marginal. The party presidium and the office of the President, after the preordained election of Tiso in October, became the engine of policy. Administrative power was further concentrated in the hands of the General Secretariat (GS) headed by party Secretary-General Kirschbaum, whose powers were second only to the President. From 1939, the GS became the mechanism by which the regime enforced "a single conception of foreign and domestic politics."[73] Propaganda and the press, gatherings and rallies (once under the purview of the HG) were to be authorized and sponsored by the Secretariat, with the primary goal to excite support for the party and its leaders. The GS appointed all district officials and preserved the right to "intervene" in the activities of any Ministry, district office, or enterprise to monitor the "national and spiritual character" of state employees, as well as to review and authorize their opinions or suggestions.

The Secretariat also emphasized self-discipline and individual initiative in place of institutional oversight. Engineering a "governmental hierarchy of responsible individuals with the power to decide and with the obligation to carry the responsibility for their actions,"

[70] *Slovák,* 24 March 1939, 1.
[71] Lacko, *Slovenská republika,* 50.
[72] Ibid. Special provisions were made for a privileged Slovak *Volksdeutche* party and a Magyar party, in line with German dictates.
[73] Jozef Kirschbaum, "Boj o autorativný systém," 1940, reprinted in Chmel, *Slovenská otázka*, 290-91.

Kirschbaum hoped to engender adherence to party interests in every facet of administration.[74] Here, Kirschbaum and *Slovák* frequently stressed the notion of "reliability" (*spoľahlivosť*). Party functionaries were, in accordance with this ideal, ordered to reject the "oligarchism" of the state's former masters (Hungarians and Czechs) and work on behalf of the new government, the people, and God.

The plan for a bureaucracy based on self-discipline and honor quickly showed itself flawed in execution, however.[75] GS "interventions" were designed to streamline administration and cultivate party cohesion, but in practice they proved largely inefficient and counterproductive; the sheer volume of activity routed through the channels of the Secretariat overwhelmed its capacities, and again exposed a lack of accountability and dedication to the party agenda. Despite handling over 6,000 such interventions by the end of September, the Secretriat became a clearing house for lucrative state appointments or pilfered Jewish property. Employees used "interventions" to pursue vendettas and line their pockets.[76] Secretariat official Miloš Babal defended the system's utility in "allowing officers...directors or heads of insurance companies and banks...to enforce the interest of the nation, not the interest of the individual," but others complained that it more often encouraged functionaries "to do simply as they pleased."[77] Beyond the arrogance and entitlement rampant among local party men, some Slovak intellectuals drawn into the civil service—many Protestants and former "Czechoslovakists" among them—resented the party organs' emphasis on Catholic ritual and showed themselves poor servants of the state,

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[74] Ibid.

[75] *Slovák,* 11 November 1939, 1.

[76] Baka, *Politický systém,* 23.

[77] SNA, fund 609, 609-3-7. Quoted in Igor Baka, "Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana od 6. októbra 1938 do salzburských rokovaní v lete 1940," in *Slovenská republika 1939 – 1945 očami mladých historikov,* vol. II, *Zborník príspevkov z druhého symposia Katedry histórie Filozofickej fakulty UCM Trnava Lúka 9. – 10. apríla 2003,* ed. Martin Lacko (Bratislava, 2003), 11-38, 21-23.

sometimes shirking their duties or quietly denouncing the regime.[78] Such "parasites" and "bacteria," the party brass affirmed, were the dangerous vestiges of the Czechoslovak Republic, and they had to be removed from the "collective body of a healthy nation" through vigilance and the subvergence of individual will.[79] In order to create the conditions for "productivity," the press constantly reminded readers, faith in the collectivist "new state thinking"—modeled by the party—would take the place of corruption, selfishness, and "allegiance to the old regime."[80] In the meantime, the state bureaucracy and civil service continued to rely on the talents of those who had long served in under Czechoslovak Republic, and in many cases distanced themselves from Ľudák politics.[81]

In light of fragmentation and inefficiency in state administration, HSPP propagandists' emphasis on national duty, party discipline, and political "reliability" as key attributes for "new Slovaks" demonstrates that leaders saw the political formation of the nation as a work in progress. Paternalistic in tone, their rhetoric betrayed the degree to which party control remained incomplete and complicated by exactly the kind of individualism and lack of adequate "national spirit" that they had hoped to eradicate. In response, the political elite claimed to act not simply as an expression of the national will, but as its very creator. By providing a vocabulary of virtues and guidelines for approprate "character," the party-state, shaped and guided by the GS and other organizations, was envisioned as essential for the moral nourishment of a uniting and "totalizing nation."

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[78] Jelinek, *The Parish Republic*, 46-47. The frequently arbitrary or career-motivated denunciation of local party functionaries for holding "Czechoslovak" or Jewish sympathies is illustrative of the intervention system's inefficiencies. See also: Kubátová, *Nepokradeš!,* 104-105.
[79] *Slovák,* 12 October 1939, 1.
[80] *Slovák*, 3 June 1939, 1.
[81] Ľubomír Lipták, *Storočie dlhšie ako sto rokov* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2011), 246.

A kind of circular logic was at the same time applied to justify the party's hold on power and the people's lukewarm response to its politics. As both the handmaiden and the instrument of the Slovak nation, the HSPP acted as the nation's "subordinate...supportive resource" while simultaneously "generating [its] unity and political will."[82] Here, Tiso's addresses ranged toward theoretical abstraction in portraying the party-state as the sole expression of the the people's interests; the nation, in his view, could be both greater than the party-state and subject to it.[83] Such convoluted explications further reveal the ideal of unity under party rule as both aspirational and elusive. In bonding their authority to the state apparatus and transforming the party into a mass movement, the Ľudáks had hoped to "[to build] first a Slovak nation, and thereby [a] Slovak state."[84] In truth, the HSPP came to act as both nation and state, claiming the right to rule unilaterally and structure government institutions to regulate national life from above.[85]

The "Slovak Golden Treasure": Christian and Ethnic Solidarism as Socioeconomic Modernization

If the goal of Slovak unity remained unfulfilled, the party saw initial success in economically modernizing the young state. The development of Slovakia's still weak and predominantly agricultural economy and the resolution of economic inequality were seen by regime circles as critical to creating the popular allegiance they fervently desired. In 1939, Štefan Danihel, an agricultural official, bluntly diagnosed this dynamic as the need "to first satiate our people and only then to demand of them certain responsibilities."[86] The propagandized image of "Smiling Slovakia" as an oasis of calm and prosperity in an

[82] *Slovák,* 3 October 1939, 1.
[83] Tiso's speech of 25 April 1940 reprinted in *Slovák,* 27 April 1940, 1-2.
[84] *Slovák,* 24 March 1939, 1.
[85] Nedelsky, *Defining the Sovereign Community,* 108.
[86] SNA, fund Úrad predsednictva vlady (ÚPV), 462/42. Quoted in Ivan Kamenec, *Spoločnosť,* 49.

increasingly war-riven continent also evidenced a recognition that popular attitudes toward the state would not necessarily spring from ideological or political conviction alone.[87] Long-term growth became an essential condition for the state's political viability and domestic tranquility. Moreover, given the HSPP's populist fixation on modernization and bread-and-butter initiatives for poorer Slovaks during the interwar period, as well as the chaos wrought by territorial revisions in 1938-1939, economic restructuring for Slovakia remained a logical concern for the party and society at large.

Much like the affinity for authoritarianism and collectivism that colored the new mass politics, the transformation of Slovakia's economy undertaken in 1939 embraced the ideological currents of post-Munich Europe. Elements of German and Italian corporatism were prominent: members of the party presidium repossessed state enterprises, and state monopolies were established in place of free markets.[88] The banking system, commodity pricing, and wage rates fell under the regulation of government ministries. Party committees formed to guide the economy according to state interests. As a privileged, "model state" in the Nazis' nascent "greater European economic space," the new continental order also promised certain advantages. The policy of close economic "cooperation" cemented with Nazi Germany largely resolved Slovakia's chronic struggle with unemployment, offering Slovaks work in burgeoning war industries and the opportunity to travel to Germany for relatively lucrative "guest worker" positions.[89] The relocation of German manufacturing concerns to Slovakia from 1939 to 1940 spurred investment growth and expanded infrastructure, while the widening conflict in Europe spiked Reich demand for Slovak agricultural produce, minerals, lumber, and other goods, boosting wages and purchasing

[87] Ibid.
[88] Jelinek, *The Parish Republic*, 119.
[89] Kamenec*, Spoločnosť,* 51.

power.[90] Meanwhile, Slovakia's finance ministry routinely celebrated German economic successes as blueprints for New Slovakia and linked Reich commerce with domestic wealth.

Behind the HSPP's domestic economic reforms—if not the whole of its state-building program—lay the ideal of a united national, Catholic community laboring faithfully for the betterment of the Slovak homeland (*vlasť*). In the hierarchy of collective virtues promoted by the regime, a universal dedication to "construction work" (*budovateľská práca*) took priority. True-blooded Slovaks understood, as Čarnogurský explained in July 1940, that "construction work is not only the task of the president, the parliament, and the government, but also [that of] the farmer, the worker, the artisan, and the shopkeeper."[91] In every sphere of industrial and agricultural activity, the party held up productive, disciplined labor as an act of Christian love. Work, inscribed within the realm of faith and Christian monism, provided the spiritual basis for day-to-day life in New Slovakia, "a holy mission in a prosperous, God-fearing world."[92] "Let's work only for God," Tiso explained in one address, "then the nation will be harmonious and unified."[93] Capitalist enterprises were to serve the "common good," while profit for its own sake was derided as divisive and alien to Christianity.[94] Charity contributions from individuals—particularly in the purchase of bonds and donations of jewelry and other valuables to the state's coffers—though often coerced, were commended as furnishing the bounty of a "Slovak golden treasure."[95]

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[90] Kamenec, "The Slovak State," 186-87; Stanislav Mičev et al., *Slovenské narodné povstanie 1944* (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum SNP, 2009), 33. See also: Peter Mičko, "Vplyv nacistického Nemecka na slovenské hospodárstvo vo rokoch 1939-1945" in *Slovenská republika 1939-1945 očami mladých historikov,* vol. IV*,* ed. Michal Šmigeľ and Peter Mičko (Banská Bystrica: Katedra histórie FHV UMB, 2005), 53.
[91] *Slovák*, 2 July 1940, 2.
[92] *Slovák,* 28 April 1940, 10.
[93] *Slovák,* 13 December 1938, 1. Quoted in Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, 170.
[94] Ibid, 186. *Slovák,* 11 October 1939, 8.
[95] *Slovák,* 13 October 1939, 5.

Drawing links between national prosperity and patriotic self-sacrifice, the policies of corporatism were enmeshed with Catholic theology. Tiso and many of his deputies, as both priests and Catholic theoreticians, looked to Church thinking on questions of equity and the social order in elaborating their plans for an ideal Slovak society. Pope Leo XIII's foundational writings on Catholic social justice, as elaborated in Pius XI's 1931 papal encyclical *Quadragesimo anno,* offered a kind of "third way" between communism and capitalism for the Ľudáks; party ideologues, who alloyed these Vatican teachings with various schools of political philosophy, invoked a theory of solidarism to assert the dominance of spiritual morality over materialism.[96] Guided by Biblical truths and administered by the party, this economic system purported to resolve the conflicts between capital and labor, while placing control over resources in the hands of the nation's rural poor. Contrasting their policies with the former regime, the priests and officals behind New Slovakia's economic policy extolled Christianity's potential to eliminate the "poisoned culture" of capitalism and individualism that typified the first Republic.[97] Part of what the historian James Ward has termed "a moral reform of capitalism," the reinvigoration of Christian ethical principles in Slovak economic policy, was offered as the antidote to class conflict and social inequality.[98]

Unveiled in the spring of 1940, the centerpiece of the Slovak-Christian socioeconomic revolution was the so-called estate system. Workers were divided according

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[96] The works of Austrian sociologist and economist Othmar Spann, French philosopher Maurice Blondel, as well as the model of Engelberth Dollfuß's Austria, gained currency among leading HSPP thinkers. See: Pekár, "Štátna ideológia," 141-42. The theoretical origins of "solidarism" can also be traced to Émile Durkheim, who argued that a set of agreed-upon moral norms and procedures was needed to address the social dislocation caused by conflict between capital and labor. See also: Antony Black, *Guilds and Civil Society in European Political Thought from the Twelfth Century to Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 223.

[97] *Slovák,* 30 April 1940.

[98] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, 206.

to six estates (agriculture, industry, trade, banking and finance, free trades, and civil service) and their union organizations dissolved and reconstituted under the association of "Slovak Christian trade organizations" (SCTOs). Obligatory for every Slovak citizen over the age of 18, membership in the association would, according to the constitution, "provide for [their] economic, social, and cultural needs…in the Christian spirit, increase efficiency and working standards, align and direct the interests between estates, between producers and consumers, [and settle] potential disputes between employers and employees."[99] Unencumbered by "particularism, which could be the seed of class war," the estates and their associations would "emerge from the understanding that production and labor, employer and employee are interdependent… that they must support one another in a spirit of Christian love and equity."[100] This "Christian solidarity" between worker and factory owner, farmer and merchant, promised increased productivity and abundance for all.[101] In some ways, the association's structure was unusually inclusive, and at least in principle, partly democratic: multiple interest groups were consulted, while union councils, with favorable representation for workers vis-à-vis their employers, were convened in a central committee independent of the government. To ensure that the estates remained "unified in the interests of a harmonious whole," their governing bodies needed to be "depoliticized" and placed outside of direct party control.[102]

The ornamental, scriptural language used to describe the estates system underpinned its moral and spiritual didacticism: "in the application of estate organizations we can fashion the kind of social body envisioned by the apostle of nations [St. Paul] in the body of Christ:

[99] *Slovák,* 1 April 1939, 3. Quoted in Baka, *Politický systém,* 187.
[100] Ibid; *Slovák,* 19 October 1939, 4.
[101] Ibid, 1.
[102] *Slovák,* 8 May 1940, 4.

'Every body coordinated and unified by the bonds of its members, each growing according to the level of his striving, and each improving in the spirit of love.'"[103] Just as Kirschbaum had appealed to reliability and individual responsibility in party governance, Tiso and the authors of the estates system anticipated that the Slovak worker could be guided by "self-regulation," good will, and a sense of duty as members of the SCTOs and the Christian-national community. And, much like the General Secretary's lofty hopes for a utopian bureaucracy, the ambitious scope of the estates plan was hindered in execution. Some party officials worried that more basic reforms were required before the entire foundation of economic life could be shifted, particularly during a time of war. While the Ministry of the Interior thought the plans for the system insufficiently elaborated, industry figures complained that it could hurt their bottom line. Members of recently disbanded free Slovak trade unions meanwhile resisted the curtailment of their bargaining power and the institution of state-determined wage controls. Because only Slovaks were eligible to become full members of the association, the German minority bemoaned the blow to their newfound position of social privilege. Officials sympathetic to the spirit of the reforms argued that the training and education of employees needed to be greatly advanced if the estates were to function effectively; a report from the Ministry of Education in 1940 noted that such "far-reaching changes to the structure of society must be preceded by meticulous ideological preparation in all segments of the population."[104]

Amongst the Slovak peasantry, a demographic remote from politics and often indifferent to national sentiment, the party-state therefore cast its role in economic affairs as pastoral, guiding the flock on a path toward social progress and better living conditions.

[103] Ibid.
[104] Baka, *Politický systém,* 189-91.

Under orders from the GS, local party organizations organized in November 1939 an annual state charity drive dubbed "Winter Help," targeting the poorer, more remote villages and towns of eastern Slovakia. Alms boxes and donation locations for clothing and food appeared on the streets of Bratislava. State employees contributed in the form of "donations," deducted directly from their wages, and government subsidies were allotted for childbearing families. Deploying SCTO workers, Winter Help campaigns sponsored the building of new houses and infrastructure.[105] Kirschbaum promoted the program under the motto, "Care for the Slovak Village," praising its modernizing potential. And although Winter Help resembled a state-sponsored handout, the Secretary General underscored its collaborative ethos; the population was to join together in "[beautifying] our towns, [repairing] our streams and roads, and [making] new use of our barren spaces."[106] "Ending the disparities in conditions from East to West," the expansion of rail and electrification networks, too, became emblematic of peasants' stake in Slovakia's progress.[107] In 1940, Minister of Labor Julius Stano earmarked six hundred million crowns for major public projects, including communications, postal services, hospitals, irrigation, roads and bridges—all to be realized through the "disciplined work" of the Slovak collective.

Another key initiative under preparation in the fall of 1939, land reform for farmers and peasants, signaled that "foreign elements" (chiefly Jews, who tended to be Magyarone) would be required to pay the price for the Slovak nation's new era of prosperity. The largest farming estates in Slovakia, an estimated 40 percent of which were owned by Jews, were to be divided and redistributed to those who could "manage them well and with honor" while

[105] Baka, "Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana od 6. októbra," 35-36.
[106] *Slovák,* 10 November 1939, 4.
[107] *Slovák*, 1 July 1939, 1; Stanislav Mičev, *Slovenské narodné povstanie,* 35. The results were not insignificant. Between 1939 and 1941, the number of electrified villages and towns in Slovakia climbed by nearly 25 percent.

guaranteeing the richest yield for the nation.[108] The evils of speculation, mismanagement, and exploitation—all attributed to the failed policies of the former regime and the reign of Czech and Jewish capitalists and the Magyar gentry —could be rectified by restoring ownership to Slovaks and "turning the poor into self-confident citizens and proud nationalists."[109] Peasants and farmers, as Minister of Agriculture Gejza Medrický explained in a 1940 interview, had everything to gain from the dispossession of their former masters: "From the beginning, the Slovak government, has regarded farmers….as one of the main pillars of the state….The basis of the new land reform can then be summarized: The Slovak field belongs to the Slovak farmer. Only he who works the land has a right to own it." [110] While promising to gradually exclude Jews from ownership, the Ministry argued that parceling out their land to Slovak smallholders would yield lower prices for milk and grain. The "aryanization" of Slovak agriculture, Medrický concluded, was another step toward a "healthy Slovakia, permeated by the Christian spirit….built for and by ourselves."[111]

The exclusionary spirit of the land reforms fit neatly with the HSPP's prewar politics, echoing Tiso's October 1938 commitment to securing "the unconditional first-order right of the Slovak to Slovak bread."[112] Indeed, the regime had acted in the past to defend Slovak interests against "internal enemies," whether in the deportation of several thousand Jews during the fearful days following the November 1938 Vienna Award or the seizure of Czech

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[108] *Slovák*, 17 October 1939, 1; Lacko, *Slovenská republika,* 65.

[109] *Slovák,* 2 April 1940, 1.

[110] *Slovák,* 11 January 1940, 3.

[111] Ibid. According to Slovak historian Samuel Cambel, these reforms proved more beneficial for the growing Slovak middle class and government officials than peasants or farmers. The amount of capital required to purchase aryanized land—50 percent of the plot's appraised value—far exceeded what the average farmer or peasant could afford. See: Samuel Cambel, *Slovenská dedina 1938-1944* (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 1996), 57.

[112] *Slovák,* 2 October 1938. Quoted in James Mace Ward, "The 1938 First Vienna Award and the Holocaust in Slovakia," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2015), 80.

property and removal of Czech officials from the Slovak civil service, still underway in the fall of 1939. The policies of "aryanization" introduced over the course of 1939-1940, however, represented a sharpening anti-Jewish impulse. Where regime propaganda had played to popular anti-Semitism before, in casting Jews as duplicitous moneylenders or threats to security on Slovakia's border with Hungary in 1938, for example, religion was now used to justify their economic exploitation and persecution, as well. Beginning with a March 1939 statute prohibiting Jews from manufacturing objects used for Christian worship, they quickly became subject to a series of laws designed to deny them participation in economic life based on their status as non-Christians.[113] By April 1939, "members of the Israelite faith" were barred from state service, while regulations dictated tiny *numerus clausus* for their employment in medicine and law, as well as in hospitality (pubs and hotels).[114] Little more than a year later, in June 1940, an "aryanization" law governing the gradual transfer of Jewish shops and businesses to ethnic Slovaks passed through the *Snem* with President Tiso's support.[115] The law, touted as a "decisive action in the resolution of the Jewish question," also promised "justice for Christians" by assuring them employment in formerly Jewish shops and capping Jewish employment in shops at 10 percent.[116] Denouncing Jews as foreign "masters of the economic and commercial world…whose only relation to the Slovak nation is one of capitalist exploitation," the law was billed as a righteous effort to "restore to Christians their rightful place in economic life."[117] With Jewish merchants removed from the marketplace, the act sought to strengthen the position of

[113] Kubátová, *Nepokradeš!*, 107-108.
[114] Ibid, 109.
[115] Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragedie* (Prague: Archa, 1991), 63-70.
[116] *Slovák,* 3 March 1940, 1.
[117] Ibid.

small and middle-sized Slovak businesses and guarantee that Slovaks would "serve the Jews no more."[118]

Synthesized in anti-Jewish and anti-Czech legislation, the understanding of Jews as both a religious out-group and a social problem provided an important tool for political and economic consolidation of New Slovakia. But it also pointed to ideological tensions between Christianity and Slovak nationalism. The Slovak historian Ladislav Lipscher has argued that the resolution of the so-called Jewish question "proceeded from [the regime's] recognition that the social groups who benefited by anti-Jewish measures would be more deeply connected with those who had offered them. In essence, [the measures] aimed at securing and spreading support for the government."[119] In this view, "aryanization" strengthened the perception of the state as a crusader for Slovak national rights and vindicator of past injustices, as well as a benevolent material provider. Paradoxically, the moral duty of the new Slovak man to "love God and neighbor" was supplanted by the command to "love oneself" and "love the nation."[120] Equating the latter two dictums, Tiso rejected accusations that the aryanization policies were un-Christian: "If I see that the nation could suffer vital damage….I as a Christian say, "first myself, then you"….for what the state or party does, we guarantee with our conscience because everything is done according to the principle of justice….Slovak property that was stolen in the past is returning to Slovak hands…."[121]

Furthermore, while Tiso and other members of the Slovak clergy cautioned against nationalism's potential to generate hatred, they also claimed that the measures protected the Christian community (and therefore the Slovak nation) from Jewish danger. The Jesuit priest

[118] *Slovák,* 14 September 1940, 3. The "aryanization" of Slovak commerce during the war provides the backdrop for the award-winning 1965 Czechoslovak film *Obchod na korze.*
[119] Ladislav Lipscher, *Židia v slovenskom štáte 1939-1945* (Bratislava: Print-servis, 1992), 42.
[120] *Slovák,* 9 May 1939, 1; Jelinek, *The Parish Republic,* 52.
[121] *Slovák,* 10 August 1940, 1. Quoted in Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 214.

Father Rudolf Mikuš told *Slovák* in 1939, "In areas where Jews govern through their infuence all public and economic life and thereby threaten non-Jewish society, the state can and must remove Jews from economic and public life. Otherwise, they will destroy the entire Christian community."[122] Still, Ľudák parliamentarians believed that the state needed to resolve the Jewish "problem" in gradual fashion, protecting the principles "of justice and decency, which must be the pillars of every well-ordered, especially Christian state."[123] The president himself claimed that Jews needed to be treated with a modicum of humanity, in accordance with natural law.

The economic agenda for restructuring New Slovakia from 1939 to 1940 made considerable strides. Prescribed to ameliorate the "failed policies" of the Czechoslovak Republic and protect the nation from predatory capitalism, the ideals of "construction work," fairness in commerce, solidarity in labor, and popular charity were firmly affixed in public discourse and cast the party-state as a benevolent, progressive force in day-to-day life. Guided by Christian solidarism, the state leadership pursued modernization and broad-based reforms to improve the lives of Slovak citizens and win their loyalty. The gradual "redistribution" of resources—the exclusively "Slovak golden treasure"—was meanwhile the fiscal application of putative Christian teachings and the well-worn Ľudák mantras of "Slovakia to the Slovaks" and "*suum quique*" (each unto his own).[124] Remarkably, the government favored ethnic, rather than racist or Social Darwinist, arguments in championing the aryanization measures. The German Ambassador to Slovakia Hans Bernard observed

[122] *Slovák,* 10 February 1939, 1.
[123] Kamenec, *Po stopách tragedie,* 92.
[124] *Slovák,* 7 July 1939, 1.

that aryanization was in fact Slovakization, as it targeted a variety of non-Slovak elements (including Roma, Hungarians, and Czechs), not only Jews.[125]

While it is hard to imagine the public looking unfavorably upon improved sanitation or infrastructure, it is also difficult to ascertain how deeply Slovaks identified with the anti-Semitic and Czechophobic politics behind these measures. There is evidence to suggest that, while many pursued aryanization, others—including some major Church figures—rejected it as immoral and anathema to Catholicism. Indeed, it appears that views on anti-Jewish measures in Slovakia were contentious.[126] The government also decided to proceed slowly with aryanization during this phase, heeding ministers' warnings that a more rigorous pursuit of Jewish expropriation would disrupt capital and investment flows. In any case, by the summer of 1940, the moderates had rebuked the radicals' criticism that anti-Jewish legislation was insufficient and overcautious, and decreed that existing laws had successfully resolved the "Jewish question."[127] Thus, while a "Slovakia for the Slovaks" remained their chief aim, the dominant clerical party faction seemed to recognize at some level both the practical limitations and the moral contradictions implied in a more radical, Nazi-style politics of ethnic exclusion and persecution.

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[125] Eduard Nižňanský, ed. *Holokaust na Slovensku 4. Dokumenty z nemeckej proveniencie (1939-1945)* (Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 2003), 39.

[126] Kubátová and Nižňanský argue that the most common response to these policies was "passivity" and a "silence of the majority," while both Ward and Nedelsky point to uncertainty about the extent of Catholic opposition to regime anti-Semitism. It is clear that Slovak Catholic bishops sought to protect Jewish converts to Catholicism and pushed, with some success, for their exemption from anti-Semitic legislation. Supported by the Vatican, which showed interest in the issue, Slovak priests also criticized the 1941 deportations of Slovak Jews, publicly declaring that Jews "are also people and therefore should be treated humanely." Nedelsky, *Defining the Sovereign Community*, 101; James Mace Ward, "'People Who Deserve It': Jozef Tiso and the Presidential Exemption," *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 4 (2002), 575; Eduard Nižňanský, "Typológia vzťahov majoritného obyvateľstva a židovskej minority v období holokaustu," *Národnostná politika na Slovensku po roku 1989*, Štefan Šutaj, ed. (Prešov: Universum, 2005), 204; Kubátová, *Nepokradeš!*, 113-15.

[127] Kamenec, *Po stopách tragedie,* 95.

"Hail the New Spirit!": Reforms in Culture and Education

As I noted in the first chapter, the HSPP's opposition to Prague centralism during the interwar period centered in large part on issues of culture. Where Czech and Slovak centralists rejected the notion that Slovaks constituted a distinct national community within the unitary "Czechoslovak" nation, Hlinka and the populists campaigned for state recognition of the Slovak language and the restoration of Catholic tradition, particularly in the realms of public education and administration. With the achievement of independence in 1939, the Ľudáks embarked on a more ambitious quest: the establishment of a thoroughly Slovak national culture. Much of the resulting activity has been well documented: Slovak academics have asserted that the Slovak State launched a creative renaissance that was energetically supported by the intelligentsia, sometimes in spite of their reservations about the regime's politics.[128] Many of the most celebrated figures in Slovakia's contemporary literary canon penned canonic works during this period, publishing nearly 4,000 volumes, from poetry to children's books.[129] The regime supplied Slovak artists and literati with material support, hoping to renew interest in Slovak traditions, which they located primarily in Catholicism and the Slovak National Awakening of the nineteenth century.[130] The Slovak historian Anna Magdolenová observes that through the expansion of the Slovak National Theater, the sponsorship of Slovak writers, artists, filmmakers, and musicians, and the foundation or enlargement of national museums and journals, the regime "managed to successfully pursue its own independent strategy for the development of Slovak culture."[131]

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[128] Mária Ďurkovská, "Kultúra ako jedna z dimenzií spoločenského života v Slovenskej republike v rokoch 1939–1945" in *Život v Slovenskej Republike: Slovenská republika očami mladých historikov,* vol. IX, Peter Sokolovič, ed. (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2010), 245.

[129] Ibid, 246. Kamenec, *Slovenský štát,* 100.

[130] Pekár, "Štátna ideológia," 141; *Slovák,* 2 July 1939, 1.

[131] Ján Bobák, *Slovenská republika 1939–1945* (Bratislava: Matica Slovenská, 2000), 145.

The thrust of this "strategy" was the establishment of a state-directed artistic program. By joining artists in sanctioned public associations, such as the Slovak Association of Artists, the HSPP curated the arts through selective patronage. In order to excise the "foreign tendencies" seen in the cultural productions of the First Republic, artists were paid only for works that communicated the "equality, depth, and balance of the Slovak spirit."[132] In May of 1939, musicians—with the notable exception of Jews—were required to join the Slovak Musical Association (*Slovenská hudobná komora*) in order to "ensure the healthy development of musical and artistic life of the Slovak state."[133] Czech performers were similarly excluded or ejected from the Slovak National Theater.[134] But though the HSPP managed to centralize and "Slovakize" artistic production, the Slovak historian Igor Baka argues that the generous subsidies offered by the state, as well as its tolerance for quiet political dissent amongst artists, revealed the intelligentsia as a stronghold of opposition to Ľudák politics and pointed to a dearth of skilled Slovak artists willing to create the kind of "politically correct" works that the regime hoped to solicit.[135]

The promotion and distribution of patriotic art, music, literature, film, and theater, led by the Ministry of Propaganda, was only one component of New Slovakia's cultural revitalization.[136] Much as it had done in the political and economic spheres from 1939 to 1940, the HSPP aimed to reshape the institutional bases by which the public understood and participated in a common national culture. The state sponsored religious organizations, cultural institutions (such as the Slovak Academy of the Sciences), and the public education

[132] *Slovák,* 4 December 1938, 10.
[133] *Slovenský zákonník* 1939, vládne nariadenie 116/39 Sl. z.
[134] Kubátová, *Nepokradeš!,* 102.
[135] Baka, *Politický systém*, 108-109.
[136] Júlia Chreňová, *Štruktúra ústredných orgánov na Slovensku v rokoch 1939-1945: Prehľad* (Bratislava: Archívna spáva MV SSR, 1977), 71-72.

system as essential mediums for transmitting the ideals of Slovak nationalism and Catholicism to society at large. In 1939, the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment (MENE) was furnished with funds approaching 15 percent of the nation's total budget to reform the nation's school system and, in Tiso's words, "cultivate appropriate character in our youth."[137] In part, the educational reforms were a long-desired response to the secularism of interwar Czechoslovak institutions, and the Catholic Church now exercised control over national education.[138] In the fall of 1940, with Tiso's support, the state placed a majority of the state's primary schools under Church control.[139] Basic and middle schools were organized according to confession and students were to be educated "on a religious basis as moral and faithful citizens of the Slovak State." Courses in religion formed the heart of the curriculum.[140] Moreover, in accordance with the President's public commitment to inserting Catholicism in all areas of public life, religion-based instruction extended beyond the school room.[141] Dozens of Church organizations, particularly the popular Catholic Action and Saint Vojtech Society, joined the laity and clergy in villages across the country to lead apostolic courses and missions, and published a plethora of journals and magazines designed to educate society according to spiritual principles. The Union of Catholic Students and the Association of Catholic Academics staged meetings and speeches and distributed literature aimed at "preserving the Catholic character of Slovakia"

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[137] František Neupauer, "Školská politika v období Slovenského štátu" in *Slovenská republika 1939-1945 očami mladých historikov,* vol. IV*.,* ed. Michal Šmigeľ and Peter Mičko (Banská Bystrica: Katedra História FHV UMB, 2005), 75; *Slovák,* 7 July 1939, 1.

[138] Igor Petranský, "Katolícka cirkev v období prvej Slovenskej republiky," in *Slovenská republika 1939 – 1945 očami mladých historikov*, vol. I, ed. Martin Lacko (Trnava: Katedra histórie FF UCM, 2002), 47. Kamenec, *Slovenský štát*, 61.

[139] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, 222

[140] Neupauer, "Školská politika," 80.

[141] *Slovák*, 2 July 1940, 1.

and "cultivat[ing] science and knowledge in the spirit of Catholic values."[142] Tiso described these organizations the foundation of New Slovakia's moral order and praised their potential to teach Slovaks how to "be true to…their culture."[143] HG leaders, meanwhile, complained that groups like the Slovak Catholic Youth competed with the more anti-clerical, militaristic HY.[144] Still, supported by the moderates, membership in confessional groups blossomed and, rooted in missionary activity, their role in advocacy and education remained outside the reach of party authority. Indeed, members of the clergy and Church associations occasionally used Catholic journals as a vehicle for criticisms of HSPP policies.[145]

Teaching in Slovak schools became nevertheless aligned with the ideology of Slovak ethnic nationalism.[146] Ľudák pedagogues, to the extent that they controlled curricula, articulated the regime's view of history—what the regime historian František Hrušovský termed the "Slovak national catechism"—as the wellspring of a new Slovak national identity.[147] In her study of textbooks published under the regime from 1939 to 1941, Deborah L. Michaels contends that the primary task of the education system was to raise Slovak national consciousness and that, using an oft-reiterated narrative, teaching materials depicted statehood "as the reward and destiny of a great nation that suffered through centuries of subjugation but remained loyal to its land and national character."[148] Because they confirmed the state as a historic entity and claimed primordial rights for Slovaks vis-à-vis their historical oppressors (Czechs and Magyars), textbooks established exclusive

[142] Igor Petranský, "Katolická cirkev," 35-40.
[143] *Slovák*, 2 July 1940, 2.
[144] Petranský, "Katolícka cirkev," 35.
[145] Ibid, 41; Zavacká, "Crossing Sisters," 425.
[146] As I have noted elsewhere, support for the HSPP moderates, and the Slovak nationalist agenda more generally, was widespread amongst the Slovak clergy.
[147] *Slovák,* 21 October 1939, 1.
[148] Deborah L. Michaels, "Revising the Nation through Schooling: Citizenship and Belonging in Slovak Textbooks, 1918-2005," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008), 93, 123.

conditions for national belonging in New Slovakia. Here, the importance of language was underscored: Czech-language materials were removed from Slovak classrooms and libraries, while the MENE put in place new measures to protect the "purity" of Slovak literature and grammar.[149] A new generation of Slovak teachers also rapidly replaced the old Czech-dominated cadre. Mandated to enroll in national and religious associations, the MENE held these educators to a strict set of standards. Basic and middle school teachers, who were in many cases priests, were expected to model a "positive attitude" toward the state and "behave in the spirit of national unity and Christian love."[150] In contrast to a bygone era "in which national discipline in [our] schools was *terra incognita* [and] spoiled by alien pedagogical forces," the "balance" of these reforms, wrote Ján Sedlák in the early summer of 1940, was transformative. By generating a "new spirit in national education," Sedlák argued, the state inspired the Slovak student with love "for his native tongue, for his history, for the fruits of the soul, for the heritage of his fathers, all bearing fruit in energetic work and sacrifice for the ideal of [our] national welfare."[151] As a neatly packaged expression of the HSPP's social vision, a thoroughly Christian, Slovakized classroom formed the crucible for the "new Slovak man."

To Salzburg and Beyond

On April 3, 1940, the back pages of *Slovák* announced a newly visible, quite literal signpost of success in the building of a "new Slovakia." Mirroring the ongoing ethnic homogenization of the city, nearly 70 of Bratislava's streets were officially renamed after

[149] *Slovák,* 24 April 1940, 7.
[150] Neupauer, "Školská politika," 84.
[151] *Slovák,* 28 June 1940, 7.

"native-born" notables, effacing older Czechoslovak and multiethnic urban topographies.[152] Central locations in the city took on the monikers of Ľudák heroes. The Square of the Republic became "Hlinka Square" and the statue of General Štefaník, now scrubbed as a pure symbol of Slovak nationalism, lost its Republican lion pendant.[153] Still, several Germans figured among the celebrated "locals," hinting at the practical limitations of a German-allied "Slovakia for the Slovaks," and surely reminding readers of the special status guaranteed by the regime for Slovakia's ethnic Germans and their *Karpatendeutsche Partei*.

Two of the daily's leading articles, one pledging the regime's allegiance to Slovak-German cooperation in New Europe (penned by the radical Tido Gašpar) and the other proclaiming the "Slovak nation's [wish] to live in peace with all nations" (from Minister of Foreign Affairs Ferdinand Ďurčanský) more vividly conveyed the growing contradictions of Slovak independence under Nazi suzerainty. The contrast in these two positions highlighted the continuing conflict between the radical and moderate wings of the party, as well as the persistent belief among the moderates that they could limit Slovakia's involvement in Nazi conquest and conduct their own politics, both at home and abroad. Rejecting the characterization of Slovakia as a Nazi colony and affirming Germany's "[guarantee] of Slovak integrity," Ďurčanský's faith in this possibility appears in hindsight either woefully optimistic or entirely foolhardy: "Our own foreign policy must be directed only to the goal of preserving peace. We shall conduct trade with the Germans as with anyone else. So long

[152] *Slovák*, 3 April 1940, 7.
[153] Henrietta Moravčiková, "Bratislava" in *Capital Cities in the Aftermath of Empires: Planning in Central and Southeastern Europe,* eds. Emily Gunzberger Makaš and Tanja Damljanović Conley (New York: Routledge, 2010), 184.

as we can be of benefit to superpowers, we can reasonably preserve peace for our own nation."[154]

Since the early spring of 1940, the Germans had become increasingly concerned by Ľudák moderates' moves to distance Slovakia from the German orbit and priotize Slovak interests.[155] They had lost confidence in Tiso and Ďurčanský. The campaign to place Jewish aryanized wealth in Slovak hands—rather than transferring it to German ownership—raised Reich complaints about the unsuitably slow "resolution of the Jewish question."[156] Ďurčanský's opposition to growing German economic demands on Slovakia and support for a détente with the Soviet Union also fueled Berlin's distrust.[157] Moreover, with the Nazi conquest of France nearly complete by mid-spring, a peaceful foreign policy for Slovakia was out of the question—Slovak men and *materiel* would be needed for an eventual invasion of the Soviet Union. The ideology of political Catholicism, which, in the eyes of some Reich representatives dangerously resembled communism and pan-Slavism, also hindered the complete alignment of Slovak domestic politics with German aims and gave rise to anti-German sentiment among the populace.[158] For German Ambassador to Slovakia Hans Bernard, the way forward was simple: "the time has come to make it clear that Slovakia lies in our *Lebensraum*, that is, that only our wishes matter."[159]

The clerical camp's move in spring 1940 to permanently neutralize the ambitious Mach and his radical allies in the Guard solidified German resolve for intervention in

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[154] *Slovák,* 3 April 1940, 1.
[155] Ľubomír Lipták, "Príprava a priebeh salzburských rokovaní roku 1940 medzi predstaviteľmi Nemecka a slovenského štátu" in *Historický časopis* 13, no. 3 (1965), 330.
[156] Eduard Nižňanský, ed., *Holokaust na Slovensku 4. Dokumenty nemeckej proveniencie, 1939 – 1945* (Bratislava: 2003), 39.
[157] Jelinek, *The Parish Republic*, 43.
[158] Baka, *Politický systém*, 272-73.
[159] Eduard Nižňanský et al., *Slovensko-nemecké vzťahy 1938-1941 v dokumentoch I: Od Mníchova k vojne proti ZSSR* (Prešov: Universum, 2009), 854. Quoted in Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, 211.

Slovakia. Tiso's October 1939 reorganization of the Guard had only temporarily stymied their demands for a more ruthless purge of Slovakia's Jews and a Nazi-style "permanent revolution" advocated by Mach.[160] Guard leaders continued to portray themselves as the leading force in Slovak politics, and demanded positions of greater power within the government while running roughshod over other agencies and state officers.[161] At the same time, the moderates worried that the Guard's appeals to violence also hurt the party's image. As Mach called on HG members to "liquidate all enemies of the state" and the paramilitary declared itself "on the attack" in January 1940, pamphlets began appearing in Bratislava and other cities decrying the godless brutality of the "Guardist terror" and denouncing Mach as a pro-German, Hungarian traitor.[162] Nevertheless, the Guard leader was emboldened by support from the Nazi elite during a March diplomatic tour of the Reich, and soon joined Tuka in a coup plot.

Still, Tiso managed to stay one step ahead of his rival. After Mach delivered an inflammatory anti-government speech in Ružomberok in May, the President dismissed him as Minister of Propaganda and Commander of the HG. A major shakeup in the Guard leadership followed. The paramilitary was placed under the control of the party presidium, limited to a civil defence role, and mandatory male membership was abolished. On May 31, the HG daily *Gardista* outlined new guidelines for HG members, explaining that the recent changes "are concerned only with the order and dignity of the Guard [and] anyone who is a friend and loyal soldier of the Slovak state and government is free to serve in [it]."[163] The government framed these steps as the nation's unified stand against disloyal adventurists,

[160] Kamenec, *Slovenský štát,* 65, 67.
[161] Sokolovič, *Hlinková garda,* 254.
[162] AMSNP, fund 15, carton 7, 33/82 and 59/63; *Gardista,* 1 January 1940, 1.
[163] *Gardista*, 31 May 1940, 1.

declaring in *Slovák* their intention to "complete the work of building the state in the spirit of March 14...and make every effort to remove the political bandits and egoists from political life."[164] For Berlin, the anti-Guardist, centralizing tack was a clear contradiction of German interests.[165] Ambassador Bernard left Bratislava at the end of the month, bearing with him a brief that catalogued the various offenses committed by the Slovaks, including a supposed betrayal of the German-Slovak protection treaty.[166]

Judgment came in July. The Salzburg conference, convened by Hitler July 27-28, 1940, broke the moderates' domination over the radicals, demanding and receiving a thorough reorganization of the government. Tiso and his cohort, acutely aware that Slovakia could face immediate dismemberment by its Hungarian neighbor at the Reich's behest, offered little resistance. The chastened Ďurčanský, whom Bernard described as "intolerable," was dismissed in favor of Mach as Minister of Foreign Affairs. Mach also regained his post as HG commander.[167] Tiso surrendered the Interior Ministry, where the Germans preferred Tuka.[168] Kirschbaum stepped down as General Secretary. With their favored Slovak radicals and the Guard ascendant, Hitler and Ribbentrop took other steps to bolster German control in the country. Teams of Reich "advisors" were installed in Slovak ministries and administrative offices.[169] The Slovak army and CSS were subjected to closer scrutiny from SD operatives, and the regime press stepped up production of pro-German

[164] *Slovák,* 31 May 1940, 1.
[165] Jelinek, *The Parish Republic*, 41.
[166] Kamenec, *Slovenský štát,* 72.
[167] Sokolovič, *Hlinková garda,* 266.
[168] Tiso remained the most prominent leader in Slovakia and retained his position as president. Hitler and Ribbentrop judged that no representative of the radical camp could match his popularity or competency as a statesman. See: Lacko, *Slovenská republika,* 46.
[169] Lipták, "Príprava a priebeh," 360.

propaganda.[170] Mach was flush with enthusiasm for the new order: "Today, the whole world knows what it means to receive the *Führer*'s trust and protection. We can thank God that we are among the first nations to join the battle for the realization of his ingenious vision."[171]

The changes imposed at Salzburg did not end the confrontation between the rival camps, but they did signal a new direction for the state's policy and ideology.[172] Immediately upon their return from the summit, Tuka and Mach announced "a new era of National Socialism" for Slovakia at a Bratislava rally.[173] Little more than a month later, the Slovak parliament followed suit, pledging to uphold the "new tempo and the new spirit" of National Socialist politics.[174] Tuka, reaching the zenith of his power, now more freely pursued a pro-Nazi line for Slovakia. He unveiled in 1941 a 14-point program for adopting Nazi policies and urged the public to continue the "unfinished National Socialist revolution."[175] The HG returned to prominence.[176] Tiso, anxious to outflank the radicals, also moved to the right, now favoring Nazi methods and a more radical tone to bolster his own position as head of state and the party.[177] Following Salzburg, his advisor Polakovič drafted a new set of theses advocating the "Führer principle" as the basis for leadership in Slovakia and Tiso took on the title *Vodca* ("leader") in October of the following year.[178] Polakovič's 1941 treatise, entitled *Slovak National Socialism* (*Slovenský národný socializmus*), adjusted (or distorted) the earlier emphasis on Slovak self-determination and Christian ideals to suit the conditions

[170] Pekár, "Slovensko medzi 14 marcom," 15-17.
[171] *Slovák,* 29 July 1940, 2.
[172] Miroslav Tížik, *Náboženstvo vo verejnom živote na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, 2011), 67.
[173] Kamenec, *Slovenský štát,* 73.
[174] Ibid, 75.
[175] *Gardista,* 21 January 1941, 1.
[176] Sokolovič, *Hlinková garda*, 448.
[177] Yeshayahu Jelinek, "Slovakia's Internal Policy and the Third Reich, August 1940-February 1941," in Central European History, vol. 4, no. 3 (Sept., 1971), 267.
[178] Pekár, "Štátna ideológia," 147.

of the Slovak-German alliance: "Slovak National Socialism is based on Hlinka's spirit, only its methods are Hitler's."[179]

The President matched this rhetorical shift with action, signing the Tripartite pact in November 1940, committing Slovak troops to the war on the Eastern Front in July 1941 and acquiescing to the Germans on their most pressing concern: the acceleration of Slovakia's anti-Jewish campaign.[180] Rigorous new aryanization measures were adopted immediately after Salzburg and, in September 1941, the regime announced race-defined restrictions on civil and human rights for Jews in Slovakia (a so-called "Jewish code"') based on the Nuremberg laws.[181] The culmination of these policies was the 1942 deportation of over 57,000 Slovak Jews.[182]

Life in wartime Slovakia thus entered a new stage. The moderates' assent to these and other German requirements, along with the introduction of an HG-led campaign for the "Nazification" of Slovak society, undermined the ideological pillars of New Slovakia, compromised confidence in its leaders, weakened its administrative and economic structures, and prompted slow but pervasive changes in the population's perception of the state and its potential for self-rule.[183] A great many Slovaks, who, whether out of burgeoning national feeling or respect for religion and Church authority, had shown cautious enthusiasm for the regime, were rid of illusions about the state's independence. Most now offered their

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[179] Štefan Polakovič, *Slovenský národný socializmus* (Bratislava, 1941), 21.
[180] Lacko, *Slovenská republika,* 106-107.
[181] *Slovenský zákonník*, 1941. Vládne nariadenie 198/1941 Sl. z.
[182] Ivan Kamenec, "The Deportation of Jewish Citizens from Slovakia in 1942" in Wacław Długoborski, *The Tragedy of the Jews of Slovakia 1938-1945: Slovakia and the Final Solution of the Jewish Question* (Oświęcim: Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum; Banská Bystrica: Museum of the Slovak National Uprising, 2002), 130.
[183] Ivan Kamenec, "Fenomény stráchu a alibizmu v kontexte kolaborácie a odboj na Slovensku v rokoch 1938-1945" in *Kolaboracia a odboj na Slovensku a v krajinach nemeckej sféry vplyvu 1939-1945*, ed. Marek Syrný (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum slovenského národného povstania, 2009), 26.

support for the HSPP and the Nazi alliance on the condition that Slovak territory remained undisturbed by the war and its attendant privations.[184] Supported by a relatively comfortable existence and certainty of Nazi Germany's victory in the war, this "demon of consent," argues Ivan Kamenec, particularly characterized the Slovak bourgeoisie's relationship to the Slovak government following Salzburg.[185] The HSPP's ranks expanded steadily during the following months, reaching 300,000 by the end of 1942. Cognizant of the privileges associated with party membership, the Slovak middle and elite classes' were very willing to support the regime during this period.[186]

Other evidence indicates that just as common among the various strata of the Slovak population was an attitude of passivity, mistrust of the government, and a retreat into self-preservation. SD and CSS briefs frequently describe the mood of the populace as apathetic, uncertain, or nervous.[187] As I argued in Chapter I, Slovakia's rural class in particular had, even before Slovak autonomy, not yet formed strong ties with any political party or platform. In the world of the Slovak village, the affairs of state still meant little in contrast with fluctuations in state-regulated wages, prices for goods brought to market, or the threat of foreign incursion. The spirited ideals and populist appeals of a New Slovakia had been designed to draw this largely depoliticized element into the party fold. But as plans for winning rural Slovaks to the corporate, Christian order receded into the shadow of radicalism and the demands of their German "ally," the Slovak leadership came to rely more on projections of a life secure from external threats and nourished by economic prosperity.[188]

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[184] Kamenec, *Slovenský štát*, 75.
[185] Ibid.
[186] Kamenec, "Fenomény stráchu," 24.
[187] See various reports from district offices in Prešov, Vrbov, and Kežmarok: AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, S10/79, 47/63.
[188] Pekár, "Slovensko medzi 14 marcom," 19.

The fact that material plenty was crucial in garnering the support and cooperation of Slovakia's peasantry was not lost on Tiso. In the summer of 1942, the President reiterated what had become a common theme in official government communiqués: "The consistent availability of goods for the population is of first-rank importance. Upon it depends internal peace and the uninterrupted construction work of our independent state."[189] The "dream of smiling Slovakia" under Slovak National Socialism often came to mean promises—and increased expectations—of better living conditions, as well as profit from aryanization and Jewish persecution. A fall 1940 report from the party office in Spišská Stára Ves neatly illustrates the disjuncture between the content of fascist rhetoric and the opportunities it provided for individual enrichment, observing that "here and there [we note] a certain uneasiness…. [The local farmers] understand neither the content nor the reach of the new regime and the concept of 'socialism' seems particularly foreign to them. But soon enough, when social and anti-Jewish measures follow, radicalism begins to appeal to the people…in so far as it leads to the breakup of Jewish economic power and the reapportionment of economic assets."[190]

In the central Slovak town of Kežmarok, officials found this cynicism more troubling, complaining that "the behavior of the public is very egotistical....The people want only to line their pockets, they respect neither laws nor officials, and they pursue only their own personal goals."[191] Otomar Kubala, a radical installed as the head of the HG after Salzburg, likewise bemoaned the disappearance of a Slovak "national idealism." In his view,

[189] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 19, S39/2007.
[190] Quoted in Kubátová, *Nepokradeš!,* 130-31. These ambitions were not always realized. In August 1942, an editorial in *Slovák* described the low mood of expectant village aryanizers: "People have survived many disappointments and now they are beginning to lose trust. Villagers have waited in vain for Jewish land, and when they see what they're likely to get they are still dissatisfied. [Those] who have gotten nothing are not convinced that they will ever get anything." *Slovák,* 20 August 1942, 1.
[191] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, 47/63.

by 1942, the values of the fledgling state had been eclipsed by petty self-interest in Slovakia's villages and towns.[192] The Ministry of the Interior's consternation over a lack of responsiblity and work discipline, forwarded to all regional party offices in early 1943, evidenced the same trend.[193]

Amidst this torpid climate, in most instances, pamphlets and other illicit tracts critical of the regime before 1944 emphasized pecuniary concerns rather than political or ideological objections. A flyer recovered by the CSS in late 1940 appealed to farmers, "The Slovak State has promised us bread and butter! How many of you have recieved it?....Now you see that...fascism means only privation, hunger and poverty...."[194] In 1941, a message similar in tone reflected on worsening conditions for rural Slovaks: "Farmers, you have come on hard times. Taxes, interest, exploitation, and grain prices are all on the rise. The Slovak regime promised you relief from the wounds of the harmful Czechoslovak government, but hasn't done anything but worsen your situation."[195]

Accusations of avarice and common indifference amongst regime officials and civilians alike spoke more generally to a state of moral dissolution in Slovak society. The state's complicity in the persecution and deportation of Slovakia's Jews and its cynical adoption of "Slovak National Socialism" by late 1942 was contributing to a kind of collective ethical crisis. One incisive take on this miserable situation came from the self-proclaimed "Voice of the People," offering "spirit, internal conviction" as the antidote for

[192] Kamenec, *Po stopách tragedia*, 248.
[193] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 2, 70/61.
[194] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 7, 524/58.
[195] AMSNP, fund 15, A6/2010.

"the inhumanity of these times." Reflecting on Slovak politics after Salzburg, the "Voice" mused, "after all, how can one create an unselfish society from selfish interests?"[196]

Conclusion

It is common practice in Slovak academic circles today to describe wartime Slovakia under the HSPP as a "totalitarian" state.[197] Subjected to a scholarly conception of "totalitarianism" like that posited by Hannah Arendt in the 1950s, the Slovak State cannot be designated as such. The HSPP moderates found themselves unable (or were perhaps unwilling) to dominate every sphere of public life and rule Slovak society through terror, both strategies which Arendt identified as intrinsic to totalitarian systems.[198] To the contrary, as I have shown, Slovak state authorities demonstrated a tendency to tolerate and even promote social forces outside their control, evidenced by a porous security apparatus, a lenience toward and a dependence upon former "Czechoslovakists" and other "unreliables" in various state organs, the free hand afforded the Catholic Church and its various associations, and the establishment of self-governed Slovak Christian Trade Organizations.[199] The moderates' success in clamping down on Guardist "excesses," as well as the central government's attempts to limit the violence and chaos surrounding "aryanization" further confirm that many of New Slovakia's architects preferred a more orderly, collaborative kind of "construction work."

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[196] AMSNP, fund 15, A193/59.

[197] Three of the most well-known and widely published Slovak historians of the Second World War routinely apply this term to the Ľudák regime. For examples, see: Marek Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati '44-'48: Kapitoly z dejín demokratickej strany na Slovensku 1944-1948* (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum slovenského národného povstania, 2010), 5; Kamenec, *Slovenský štát,* 6; Lacko, *Slovenská republika*, 46.

[198] Hannah Arendt, "Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government," *The Review of Politics* 15, no. 3 (1953), 310.

[199] Polakovič, *K základom slovenského štátu,* 124-26.

Less rigid approaches to the concept of totalitarianism, by contrast, permit a sharper understanding of the Slovak State and its ideology. Attention to the discrete historical origins and systemic features of "totalitarian" states, as the social theorist Johann Arnason has argued, may restore to this label some of its heuristic utility in the Slovak case.[200] Like Arendt, Arnason allows that the vision of a "radiant future" and the goal of completely reshaping man and society typify the "totalitarian" project. However, while these aims were pursued through terror and annihilation in Nazi Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, rule by dictatorship and a police state do not alone constitute the dominion of "totality." Instead, "totalitarian" aims might be achieved through a "manipulated consensus," manufactured by propaganda and the regime's monopoly on mass communications and political speech, though not enforced by outright terror. The creation of a sprawling state bureaucracy, in this view, provides the means to mobilize the population behind the attainment of a "radiant future" and mitigates the need for violent coercion.[201]

Whatever their methods, the system designed by the HSPP's clerical, ultra-nationalist Slovak elite was clearly designed to produce a "manipulated consensus" on their vision for New Slovakia's "radiant future" from 1939 to 1940. Yet the party's plans to reinvent Slovak society did not adhere solely to Italian or German fascist blueprints, instead finding expression in a diverse and unique set of ideological principles. An "authoritarian bureaucracy" was installed to direct all political activity, and though it fell short of achieving a durable form of national unity, the party took full control of the state apparatus and placed Slovak nationalism at the forefront of domestic and foreign policy. Seeking stability in an

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[200] Johann Arnason, "Totalitarismus und Modernisierung," in ed. Lars Clausen, *Gesellschaften im Umbruch: Verhandlungen des 27. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Halle an der Saale 1995* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1996), 154.

[201] Sigrid Meuschel, "Theories of Totalitarianism and Modern Dictatorships: A Tentative Approach," *Thesis Eleven,* no. 61 (May 2000), 93-94.

era of upheaval, the HSPP mobilized Slovaks in party organizations and attempted to orient them toward a particular set of spiritual and social virtues. Christian and ethnic solidarism delineated conditions for citizenship in the state and provided a new basis for the national economy, while the expropriation and persecution of out-groups (mainly Jews and Czechs) was used to propel the social uplift of Slovakia's rural peasant class and bring it under the party flag. Likewise, state culture underwent a purge of non-Slovak elements and an education system was established to mold a new type of Slovak citizen, loyal to a Catholic God and a "purified" nation.

Tracing the common themes among the various strands of Ľudák ideology—corporatism, fascism, nationalism, Christianity—we find not an imitation of National Socialism but a uniquely Slovak response to the failures of bourgeois democracy and capitalist modernization that shaped the European political climate during the late 1930s. In this respect, the HSPP program represented a thorough inversion of the Czechoslovak Republic's state-forming values: the rejection of individual rights in favor of the collective (versus republican democracy), the superior rights of ethnic Slovaks over their non-Slovak co-nationals (versus Czechoslovakism and cultural pluralism), and the primacy of Christian morality in commerce and day-to-day life (versus capitalism and secularism). Following Sewell's formulation,[202] the forces of political Catholicism and Slovak nationalism reacted to the great ruptures of Munich, the end of the Franco-British continental order, and a Nazi war of conquest with this "re-articulation" of the political, cultural, and economic structures defining Slovak society.

[202] Sewell, "Historical Events," 848.

Absent evidence of concerted resistance amongst the population, growth in party membership and state-sponsored organizations from 1939 to 1940 indicates that Slovaks in large number tacitly accepted, if not embraced, the party's plans for a "New Slovakia."[203] As the Slovak historian Ľubomír Lipták remarked, Slovaks, "in reality, were not opposed to the regime, but maintained a certain distance from it."[204] Many may have seen in the state, as was the case for the fictional Evelína Brtko in the famed 1965 film *Obchod na korze,* the promise of comfort and prosperity in aryanized wealth. However, particularly among the nation's educated classes, the quest for New Slovakia also nourished a fresh sense of self-determination and a belief in the nation's political viability. For the first time, Slovaks exercised considerable control over their own internal affairs.[205] Thus, while we cannot accept the claim that 1939 was the culmination of a popular struggle on behalf of a reified Slovak nation, it is erroneous to dismiss the Ľudák platform as a fascist "side-product of Hitler's aggression."[206]

The moderates' vision of Slovakia's "radiant future" was permanently altered by the Salzburg conference in the summer of 1940. Tiso and his allies would continue their efforts to raise Slovak national consciousness and expand the reach of Catholicism (and eventually win the power struggle with Tuka, Mach, and the radicals), but the state's full subordination to Nazi Germany and the turn toward "Slovak National Socialism" made much of the moderates' idealism ring hollow and superficial. The "iron logic" of Slovak national sovereignty and Christian morality grew transparent in light of Slovakia's servile

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[203] Mičev, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944*, 12-13.
[204] Ľubomír Lipták, *Changes of Changes: Society and Politics in Slovakia in the 20th Century* (Bratislava: AEP, 2002), 148.
[205] Martin Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944* (Bratislava: Slovart, 2008), 26-27.
[206] Dušan Kováč, "How Slovak Historiography Is Coming to Terms with a 'Dual Past'", in *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe: Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century,* Jerzy Borejsza and Klaus Ziemer, eds. (New York: Berghan Books, 2006), 112.

geopolitical position and the seemingly nihilistic policies that undergirded it.[207] While this change of direction suited the radicals in the party and the HG—and no doubt the "plebian" and "petty-bourgeois elements" that formed the core of its membership—it turned the Ľudáks' half-baked revolution into a farce.[208] Even state officials were not immune to the realization that, in the words of *Slovák* editor Jozef Paučo, "by 1942 [the party] had ceased to be a movement."[209] The leadership no longer proclaimed any long-term domestic program and its influence amongst the population steadily declined. As Tiso and his deputies became preoccupied with safeguarding the continued existence of an "independent" state, the auspices of Slovak national glory dissolved into a quest for material and territorial self-preservation.

Survival for the first Slovak Republic did not come cheaply. After Salzburg, Slovakia's leaders exposed the country's economy to increasing exploitation by a foreign power, firmly committed Slovakia to Nazi Germany's imperial agenda, and perhaps most damningly, invited Slovaks' complicity in the murder of the Slovak Jewish population.[210] While an anti-Ľudák opposition, as the next chapter discusses in detail, remained limited to the small-scale and uncoordinated activities of disparate groups through 1942, the Ľudáks had failed in the long-term to generate anything more than a tentative loyalty to their foundering articulation of New Slovakia, settling instead for a legitimacy based on a promised military German triumph and their ability to shield the population from more

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[207] Jozef Tiso quoted in *Slovák,* 1 April 1939, 3.

[208] Katarina Hradská, *Prípad Dieter Wisliceny: Nacistické poradcovia a židovská otazka na Slovensku* (Bratislava: AEP, 1999), 100. In his analysis of "clerical fascism," the British political theorist John Pollard also concludes that the adoption of fascist "trappings" in the wartime HSPP was not *sui generis*, but the product of Nazi pressure and geopolitical circumstance. John Pollard, "'Clerical Fascism': Context, Overview and Conclusion," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 8, no. 2 (June 2007), 439-40.

[209] Jozef Paučo, *Tak sme sa poznali* (Middletown, PA: Jednota Press, 1967), 163. Quoted in Kamenec, "Fenomény stráchu," 26.

[210] Peter Mičko, "Vplyv nacistického Nemecka," 63.

drastic Nazi interventions and the hardships of the war itself. The permanence of these conditions, as we will learn, not even Divine Providence could guarantee.

Chapter III.
Maturing Resistance:
Slovak Society from Dislocation to Rupture

> *....the question of an independent state, autonomy or federation with a brother Czech nation is now a secondary question, which will be solved only after the defeat and destruction of German imperialism. We must put all our strength into this, since it is the main and decisive task at present.*
>
> —*Hlas ľudu,* September 1941

The events that consumed Slovakia in the summer of 1944 have, over the past seventy years, never ceased to generate discussion.[1] Whether celebrated or condemned in politics, scholarship, and popular culture, what is known today as the Slovak National Uprising has informed—perhaps more than any other episode in the country's history—perceptions of Slovakia's modern political culture.[2] Across the region, and indeed across the continent, the SNU has also gained recognition as an important act of European resistance to Nazi imperium: only the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 and the Yugoslav partisan movement exceeded its dimensions.[3]

Outside of Central Europe, by contrast, scholars have largely ignored or remained ignorant of the SNU. No major monograph or journal article of scholarly rigor on the subject

[1] Lipták, "Slovenské národne povstanie," 242; Miroslav Michela, "Slovak Uprising 1944 – Celebrated as Well as Condemned," *The Visegrad Revue*, 1 September 2014. Available online: http://visegradrevue.eu/slovak-uprising-1944-celebrated-as-well-as-condemned/. Accessed October 21, 2016.

[2] Ibid.

[3] German scholars were the first among European scholars outside the former Czechoslovakia to address the SNU. See: Wolfgang Venohr. *Aufstand in der Tatra: Der Kampf um die Slowakei* (Königstein: Athenäum, 1979), and *Aufstand für die Tschechoslowakei: Der slowakische Freiheitskampf von 1944* (Hamburg: Wegner, 1969). Since 1989, dozens of edited volumes and published conference proceedings (including contributions published in Polish, German, and other regional languages) have established the SNU as an important area of study for military, diplomatic, and political history for scholars of East and East Central European history.

has ever appeared in English. Excepting a cursory chapter in a recent edited volume, the events of 1944 in Slovakia have become merely "noteworthy" and most work on the region relegates them to a footnote or a few comments based on limited or antiquated sets of sources.[4] The American political scientist Carol Skalnik Leff offered in 1988 what has become the most familiar claim about the Uprising, describing it as an attempt to restore to Slovak nationalism "a partial respectability" lost in Slovakia's secession from Czechoslovakia and alliance with Nazi Germany in 1939.[5] More recently, the British political scientist Karen Henderson similarly argued that the "moral victory" of the Uprising opened the way for a renewed state of Czechs and Slovaks by winning guarantees for Slovak national self-determination in the postwar era.[6]

A fixation on the SNU's implications for a renewed Czechoslovak (or Czecho-Slovak) state and the subsequent status of a Slovak nation in part reflects the influence of a polarized Slovak émigré diaspora. As the most ardent proponents of Slovak nationalism in the postwar years, Ľudák apologists, Slovak Czechoslovakists, and a new generation of Slovak nationalists living abroad have each, in turn, shaped the Anglo-American literature on this period. The Canadian-Slovak political scientist Stanislav Kirschbaum is the most recent representative of a faction which views the Uprising as a "black day," a "tragedy" unleashed on the Slovak people by President Beneš and the centralist London government-

[4] The Czech historian Vilém Prečan's work (translated from the Czech) on the Uprising is the only current, balanced, and substantive treatment of the subject available in English. Vilém Prečan, "The Slovak National Uprising: the most dramatic moment in the nation's history," in *Slovakia in History*, eds. M. Teich, D. Kovač, and M. Brown (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Victor S. Mamatey and Radomír Luža's outdated but excellent edited volume *The History of the Czechoslovak Republic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973) has done much to shape Anglo-American scholars' understanding of the Uprising and its aftermath.

[5] Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia,* 93.

[6] Karen Henderson, *Slovakia: Escape from Invisibility* (London: Routledge, 2002), 14.

in-exile.[7] Slovak "democrats" abroad like Jozef Lettrich have conversely claimed it as a testament to Slovaks' pro-Czechoslovak orientation and a penance for the sins of the Slovak state.[8] Perhaps the most romantic of these assessments has come from the British-Slovak émigré Eugen Steiner, who described the SNU as an "act of sacrifice...to gain national freedom" in a new Czechoslovak Republic.[9]

The polemics surrounding the SNU's legacy (about which I'll speak more in Chapter IV), as well as the lack of in-depth research on the topic, have left important questions inadequately addressed: When and how exactly did the desire for a rebellion in Slovakia emerge? Who was behind the Uprising, and what were they seeking to accomplish? The following discussion seeks answers to these questions while eschewing categorical, hagiographic, and censorious claims about the Uprising's origins and aims. Rather, making use of "situation reports" recorded by the Slovak and German security organizations, various forms of both government and anti-regime propaganda, and the correspondence between exiled Czechoslovak officials and the domestic resistance, this analysis takes a more holistic view of the conditions that precipitated the events of August 1944.

Beginning with a look at the origins of Slovak resistance during the war, I examine how a small, weakly unified group of conspirators found common ground in their desire to topple the HSPP government in 1943. A nation-wide armed uprising, they agreed, would place Slovakia on the side of the victors and preserve some national rights for Slovaks in a

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[7] Stanislav J. Kirschbaum, *A History of Slovakia: The Struggle for Survival* (Basingstroke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 208. Kirschbaum's father, Jozef Kirschbaum, served as General Secretary of the HSPP during the war and fled to Canada in 1949. The most influential formulation of this thesis can be found in the Australian-Slovak émigré František Vnuk's *Neuveriteľné sprisahanie,* Middletown, PA, 1964. See also: P. Bielik and P. Mulík, eds., *Dies ater. 29. august 1944,* Bratislava, 1994. Milan Ďurica, a Italian-Slovak émigré historian who returned to Slovak after 1989, is a proponent of the "black day" interpretation of SNU. See: Milan Ďurica, *Slovenský národ a jeho štátnosť* (Bratislava: Alpha, 1990).

[8] Lettrich, *A History,* 194.

[9] Steiner, *The Slovak Dilemma*, 75.

postwar settlement. Though this resistance coalition proceeded to draw up plans for a major revolt that counted on the support of the populace and the Slovak Army, they could only debate and speculate on their chances for success. Turning to an examination of Slovak society in the months preceding the Uprising, I demonstrate how the Ľudáks had meanwhile lost their ability to shield the populace from the encroaching destruction of the war. As fear and desperation fell over the country in early 1944, Slovaks began to distance themselves from the political and cultural structures of the HSPP's Slovak State.

The Revival and (Partial) Consolidation of pre-War Political Forces

As I detailed in Chapter I, the foundation of independent Slovakia five years earlier had come on the heels of a major rupture in Czechoslovak society. Reeling after Munich, the Ľudáks' main political opponents in Slovakia suffered complete organizational collapse. The *diktat* dealt Slovak Social Democrats and Agrarians a crippling blow: their support for the concept of a unitary Czechoslovakia governed by liberal democracy now proved a serious liability. Moreover, the parties' earlier failure adequately to address, much less resolve, the "Slovak question" in parliament weakened their standing even among those opposed to the HSPP.[10] While the Communist Party went underground, the Agrarians responded to the geopolitical sea change of 1938-39 with a "conjuncturalism" of their own, with many falling in behind the Tiso regime's program for building Slovakia anew.[11] In some sense, this acquiescence was schizophrenic. Though they may have disagreed with regime policies, the assumption that the Nazi conquest of Europe was inevitable and a genuine belief in the need for a new national order drove many to trade their convictions and affiliations for positions

[10] Valerián Bystrický, *Od autonómie k vzniku Slovenského štátu* (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2008), 103.
[11] Jozef Jablonický, *Z ilegality do povstania: Kapitoly z občianského odboja* (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum SNP, 2009), 13.

in the state bureaucracy or party-aligned businesses and institutions.[12] A "symbiosis" between the new ruling party and other interwar elites sapped the potential for concerted resistance to the HSPP and its ascendant Nazi ally.[13]

Whose Resistance and for Whom—or What?

The most audible voice of Slovak resistance in the early days of the war belonged to Slovak émigrés in the London government, though internal divisions, a lack of organization, and distance rendered it ineffectual.[14] Former Premier Milan Hodža and members of a Slovak National Council continued to spar with Beneš over the "Slovak question," the former pushing for a decentralized postwar government or even a federation. Hodža and the former Czechoslovak ambassador to France Stefan Osuský, both former Czechoslovakists, had determined that only a new arrangement for Slovakia could secure its stability in a future Republic. Beneš and other members of his Czechoslovak National Committee brooked no compromise, insisting that the country would reunite with the Czech lands on the model of the centralized pre-Munich republic. Beneš did not even allow Slovaks in the London government to have direct contact with Slovaks at home. The exiles' radio broadcasts offended Slovak national sentiment and provided the Slovak state's propaganda with ammunition.[15] The London National Council and the National Committee's plans for Slovakia were of no consequence, anyway. The major players in the anti-autonomy camp had fled abroad and those who stayed home had gone underground.[16] Communication links

[12] Ibid. See also: Ivan Kamenec, *Spoločnosť,* 75-76.
[13] Ľubomír Lipták, *Storočie dlhšie ako sto rokov* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 1999), 243.
[14] I define resistance broadly here as any action undertaken with the goal of thwarting Nazi or Ľudák activities in administration or the war effort.
[15] Yeshayahu H. Jelinek, *The Lust for Power: Nationalism, Slovakia, and the Communists, 1918-1948* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1983), 44.
[16] Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati,* 10.

between the exiles and domestic contacts were unreliable and there was little capability or motivation to seek direction from London for activities in Slovakia.[17]

Back at home, the earliest seeds of non-Communist resistance appear more confessional than political. Slovak Protestants were the first to oppose the regime, usually through civil disobedience or sporadic anti-regime propaganda on an individual level.[18] State security policies and rhetoric, while not always confrontational (the moderates made sporadic gestures to win them over), had alienated and angered Protestants by insisting on the primacy of Catholicism in society, questioning their "Slovakness," and labeling them as "unreliables."[19] The Hlinka Guard and the radicals harassed Lutheran bishops, seized Church property, and defaced Evangelical monuments.[20] As their criticism of the party's radical activity took a stronger tone after Salzburg, Evangelical publications became the target of surveillance and censure.[21] A once-influential Protestant minority also resented the loss of privileges held in the interwar period. According to an SD source in late 1944, Slovak "Evangelical circles [made] the charge that the government has put them in a bad

[17] Suzanne Polak, "In the Spirit of Democratic Unity: The Slovak Democratic Party and the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks, 1945-48" (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, 1999), 53.
[18] Daniela Baranová, "Evanjelickí antifašisti v odbojových skupinách," in *Slovenský národný povstanie 1944: Súčasť antifašistickej rezistencie v rokoch druhej svetovej vojny*, ed. Miroslav Pekník (Bratislava: Ústav politických vied SAV, 2009), 107.
[19] Lacko, *Slovenská republika,* 152. The state and its propaganda organs appropriated Lutheran religious and historical figures, including M.R. Stefánik and Ľudoviť Štúr, stripping them of any "Czechoslovak" associations. The Ľudák press also periodically pled the case for "national unity" among Catholics and Protestants. See: Miroslav Tížik, *Náboženstvo vo verejnom živote na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Sociologicky ústav SAV, 2011), 65.
[20] Karol Fremal, "Odboj v Turci do vypuknutia povstania," in *Slovenská Partizánska Brigáda M.R. Štefanika*, ed. Martin Uhrín (Banská Bystrica: Muzeum SNP, 2009), 21.
[21] Lacko, *Slovenská republika*, 153. Slovak Protestants accounted for roughly 15 percent of the population in a December 1938 census.

position," treating them poorly "despite the fact that they, too, have struggled for Slovak rights."[22]

Still, the overlap between the mostly secular-minded Slovak Protestant elite, anti-Ľudák, and pro-Czechoslovak political organizations makes the exact genesis of the "Civic" opposition difficult to parse. What is clear is that organized non-Communist resistance in Slovakia was mostly composed of small, autonomous cells of Protestant intelligentsia that expressed a variety of views on Slovakia's future. Composed of no more than a few friends or colleagues, these groups were less focused on action than on mulling over their options in the postwar world. Perhaps the largest among them, the group *Flóra* included Slovak general Rudolf Viest and a web of bureaucrats in various branches of the Slovak government and military.[23] *Flóra* established contact with London and voiced its support for a renewed unitary Czechoslovakia in February 1943.[24] Likewise, the group gathered around former cabinet minister Vavro Šrobár, who became active in the domestic resistance at age 75 in 1943, reaffirmed the idea of Czechoslovak centralism with a few provisos.[25] In communication with Beneš, Šrobár drew up blueprints for a revolutionary national council to take over in Slovakia after the war, with Šrobár himself at its head.[26] Once this committee was in place, Beneš and Šrobár planned to appoint the provincial leaders for the government

[22] BArch, R70 Slowakei/320. Other *Abwehr* sources designated Slovak Protestants the "backbone" of Slovak resistance. See: Martin Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie,* 24.
[23] Baranová, "Evanjelickí antifašisti," 110.
[24] *Slovenské národné povstanie: Dokumenty*, ed. Vilém Prečan (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, 1966), 734-35.
[25] Polak, "In the Spirit," 56.
[26] Ibid. For more on Šrobár's activities during the war, see: Josette Baer, *A Life Dedicated to the Republic: Vavro Šrobár's Slovak Czechoslovakism* (Stuttgart: Idibem, 2014), 187-238.

and military.[27] Their approach more or less rehashed the Czechoslovak centralists' designs for the First Republic from 1918-1919.

Neither *Flóra* nor the Šrobár group, much less Beneš, had deep support amongst other opponents of the Slovak regime. Much of the Slovak middle class no longer accepted Czechoslovakism, and a younger generation of Slovak patriots, disillusioned by both the Ľudáks and the Czechs, were loath to return to the Republic without Slovak home-rule. The Social Democrats even sent a message to Beneš in September 1943, refusing to support any revolutionary government headed by Šrobár.[28] Around the same time, a so-called "Democratic Club," comprised of former members of pre-war parties (the Slovak National Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party) as well as exiled Czechs and active members of the HSPP began to meet in Bratislava. All of these figures, including a few high-ranking officials in the Tiso government, denounced the party's ideology and dismissed independence as unviable for a future Slovakia.[29] The "club" debated various formulations that would provide political and national equality for Slovakia within some sort of joint Czecho-Slovak framework. They were joined by a handful of military officials and other bureaucrats who, awakening from the idyll-turned-nightmare of "Smiling Slovakia," regarded themselves as Slovak patriots but saw some form of partnership with the Czechs as an unpalatable necessity.[30]

Leadership for the “Democatic Club" fell to two prominent Agrarians, both Protestants, who had opposed Slovak secession in March 1939. Ján Ursíny, a former church dignitary and Hodža ally, had taken a more conciliatory approach to Slovak nationalist

[27] *Dokumenty,* 725-27.
[28] Ibid, 734-35.
[29] Polak, "In the Spirit," 59.
[30] Martin Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 34.

politics. He had accepted autonomy as a way out of the Munich crisis, but opposed the HSPP "consolidation" of Slovak parties after Žilina. This stance very quickly landed him a stint in the Ľudák prison at Ilava. The jurist Jozef Lettrich had also been arrested several times, but unlike Ursíny had opposed the autonomists from the beginning. Discouraged by the course of the war, Lettrich, Ursíny, and the "Democratic Club" seem to have spent much of 1939-1942 dodging the CSS and awaiting optimal conditions for active resistance.

Two opportunities for concerted action were found wanting. Suspicious of their "monopolist aspirations," Ursíny rejected a 1942 offer for collaboration with the Slovak Communists working in the underground.[31] In the summer of 1943, when contacted by the exiled Karol Sidor and his moderate followers in the Slovak government, Ursíny dismissed their plans for a Polish-Slovak federation as, in the words of one historian, "an unrealistic political basis for establishing [Slovakia] on the postwar political scene."[32] With the war entering its fourth year, the politically amorphous, uncoordinated, and isolated "Civic Bloc's" opportunities for resistance were thus limited: beyond smuggling fugitives, intelligence-gathering, haggling with London, and issuing impromptu denunciations of regime figures, the group did little except to speculate on what options remained for Slovakia after a Nazi defeat.

Slovak Communists: The Weak Vanguard of the Slovak Resistance

Communists had never performed particularly well in Slovak elections, but they established a cohesive and centrally directed network of operatives almost immediately following

[31] Ibid; Jelinek, *Lust for Power,* 49.
[32] Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati*, 10-11.

Žilina.[33] A new Slovak Communist Party (CPS), founded in the spring of 1939 after being cut off from its Czech parent organization, had about 3,000 members in over a dozen Slovak cities within the first two years of the war.[34] Early Communist propaganda attempted to generate social unrest by casting the Slovak State as part of a bourgeois capitalist empire fueled by exploitation. Factories provided the natural habitat for the Communists; party cells demanded wage raises and improved conditions—"a bigger and more dependable slice of bread" for the Slovak worker.[35] Their involvement in a large 1940 miner's wage strike in Handlová was probably minimal, but the first generation of party leadership, dominated by Moscow-trained hardliners like the leader Ján Osoha, nevertheless labeled the government's liquidation of the strike as "terror" against the working class and proclaimed themselves the pioneers in a Slovak "struggle against fascism."[36]

Even if their impact was marginal during the years of Nazi Germany's presumed invincibility, evidence suggests that the party was consistently stronger than other forces—or at least the Tiso regime and the SD seem to have regarded them as such, particularly after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June of 1941. Fear and hatred for the Communists led authorities to devote significant energy to stamping them out.[37] The HSPP Office of Propaganda even organized, with German help, a touring exposition to warn the nation of Bolshevism's evils.[38] Hlinka Guards and Slovak intelligence also mimicked *SD* and Gestapo

[33] In 1935 national elections, the Communists (under the umbrella Czechoslovak Communist Party [CPC]) finished fourth with roughly 13 percent of the vote, behind about 14 percent for the Christian Socialist/Magyar bloc, 18 percent for the Agrarians, and over 30 percent for the Autonomists. Support for the CPC in rural areas was weak. *Statistická ročenka republiky Československé 1936* (Praha: Orbis, 1936), 260.

[34] Marek Syrný, *Slovenskí komunisti v rokoch 1939-1944* (Banská Bystrica: Belianum, 2013), 197.

[35] AMSNP, fund 15, carton 7, 331/58.

[36] Syrný, *Slovenskí komunisti*, 48, 172. The October 1940 Handlová strike was the largest organized challenge to the Tiso regime before August 1944. The Slovak Army deployed several tanks, armored troop transports, and at least 200 troops to face down hundreds of demonstrating workers and end the three-day strike.

[37] Jelinek, *Lust for Power*, 49.

[38] AMSNP, fund 8, 287/61.

techniques to arrest, imprison, and occasionally torture suspected Communists in the underground. The most successful of these operations came in the summer of 1941. Nearly the entire underground leadership of the party was rounded up, along with scores of its footsoldiers.[39] The CPS stumbled on in a "Leninist" campaign for "proletarian revolution," trying and failing to recruit other resistance cells to their "Central Liberation Committee" in 1942.[40] The isolated leadership worked to stay a step ahead of the CSS, and here they failed as well. Twice after 1942, police raids netted Central Committee members and spoiled their efforts to train guerillas and launch sabotage missions.[41]

By 1943, only the most junior figures in the CPS leadership had escaped capture, spurring a change in the party's orientation. The party's Old Guard had come up under the tutelage of the Czechoslovak Communist Party's overwhelmingly Czech leadership and tended to defer to their comrades in Moscow and Prague. The younger Gustáv Husák (not yet 30 in 1942) and his partner Ladislav (Laco) Novomeský were more willing to act independently. Moreover, Husák (a lawyer) and Novomeský (a surrealist poet) distanced themselves from former CPS chairman Ján Osoha's motto of "Soviet Slovakia," a view which maintained that the real fight was against imperialism and that the war should culminate in a socialist revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat.[42] For these intellectual leaders of the Fifth Central Committee of the CPS, national liberation and socialist revolution were not mutually exclusive, and they saw the war's resolution as a chance to answer the "Slovak question." The CPC Central Committee in Moscow, with

[39] Syrný, *Slovenskí komunisti*, 198.
[40] AMSNP, fund 15, carton 7, 83/66.
[41] Amongst these was Štefan Dubček, father of Alexander Dubček. A member of the Third Central Committee, the senior Dubček took part in the creation of Slovakia's first partisan group "Janošík." Dubček and his group, consisting of ten to fifteen militants armed with pistols and grenades, were arrested near Bratislava in July 1942. Syrný, *Slovenskí komunisti*, 110.
[42] Jelinek, *Lust for Power,* 53-54.

Klement Gottwald at its helm, seems also to have accepted this view around late 1942. CPC propaganda was by then more sympathetic to Slovak nationalism. Czech Communists saw that the situation in Slovakia was changing: some Slovak elites were warming to the idea of a renewed Czechoslovakia, but only if it offered a real chance for Slovak national development. Seeking to bolster opposition to "Fascism" in Slovakia, the Cominform Executive passed in January 1943 a measure supporting equality for the Slovaks in a new Republic.[43]

That summer, two "Moscow" Communists parachuted into Poland and crossed into Slovakia, delivering a new action plan for the underground. Karol Šmidke and Karol Bacílek's deployment in Slovakia revealed the CPC's lingering mistrust for Novomeský and Husák, as well as the Kremlin's frustration over the resistance's lack of results. The Fifth Central Committee was ordered to give up its earlier slogans and propaganda and to prepare for battle. According to Husák, their ambitious new aims included expanding the party into the countryside, establishing Revolutionary National Committees, and building a nationwide partisan movement.[44] This was a tall order, not least because the Communists' ranks had been severely thinned by the CSS. Between 1941 and 1943, more than 2,500 members had wound up in Ľudák prisons or detainment camps.[45] Their decimation had two important results. Firstly, it strengthened the party's reputation. As the Slovak historian Marek Syrný writes, "through their suffering, stubbornness, self-sacrifice, selflessness…and (despite all repression), [the Communists'] constant activity won them supporters and collaborators outside the Party."[46] Secondly, it led the CPS leadership to consider more genuine

[43] Polak, "In the Spirit," 51.
[44] Gustáv Husák, *Svedectvo o slovenskom národnom povstanie* (Bratislava: Pravda, 1964), 60-61.
[45] Syrný, *Slovenskí komunisti*, 130-31. This number represented over half their 1939 membership.
[46] Ibid.

collaboration with non-Communist opponents of the Tiso regime. This latter development coincided with the Comintern's 1943 decision to encourage an inclusive mobilization of all "antifascist forces" in Slovakia. With Moscow's blessing, in the fourth year of the war, the CPS had positioned itself as the fulcrum for a wider, coordinated domestic partisan movement.

The Christmas Agreement

Diplomatic developments abroad also strengthened the case for Communist and non-Communist groups' (often described as "Civic" [*občiansky*] in Slovak historiography) cooperation in 1943. Most importantly, in June, President Beneš formally reoriented Czechoslovakia to the East by signing the Czechoslovak-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. The President, a purported admirer of Stalin who believed in the "tremendous progress" being made in the Soviet Union, hoped this pact would preempt a postwar confrontation with the dictator.[47] In return for allowing exiled Communists a stake in Czechoslovakia's future, Beneš received promises of Soviet cooperation, non-interference, and protection, and he hoped these negotiations would also give him leverage over the CCP.[48] Together with his stubborn declarations that Slovaks still belonged to a single Czechslovak nation in a unified Czechoslovak state, the Soviets' support for Beneš convinced the nationally-minded politicians in the underground that they would find themselves vassals to London's annointed centralists (*Flóra* and the *Šrobárovci*) when the dust had settled.[49] Without swift and decisive action at home, the chances for some form of Slovak sovereignty after the war were surely poor.

[47] Edward Táborský, "Beneš and the Soviets," *Foreign Affairs,* January 1949.
[48] Lettrich, *Modern Slovakia*, 229.
[49] Polak, "In the Spirit," 63.

It was under these circumstances that Šmidke, Husák, and Novomeský sat down with Lettrich and Ursíny to discuss the formation of a domestic governing body in late 1943. The Agrarians initiated contact and the two factions began meeting regularly in the Bratislava apartment of the Slovak National Socialist Matej Josko.[50] Ratified sometime in December, the document they hammered out was comprehensive. The so-called "Christmas Agreement" established a Slovak National Council (SNC) as the sole organ for coordinating domestic resistance and determining the parameters of the postwar political field. The immediate goal, the authors asserted, was to fight "the domestic usurpers of political power" and their Nazi ally; more significant, though, was the establishment of a domestic poltical authority in Slovakia independent from Moscow, London, and all other forces abroad.[51] Indeed, the document's most striking proclamation was clearly directed toward London: jettisoning the idea of a Czechoslovak nation, the authors stated that a future Czechoslovakia should comprise "a common state of Czechs and Slovaks based on the principles of "equal with equal" (*rovný s rovným*). Moreover, both domestic groups determined that Slovak national rights were a condition of any arrangement with the London government.[52]

By all accounts, the negotiations unfolded with few disagreements and in egalitarian spirit. The SNC decided on a clause deferring future decisions to the "freely elected representatives of the Slovak nation," while the vague proviso "equal with equal" recontextualized the Czech and Slovak relationship to sidestep earlier debate over "autonomy" and "federation."[53] Membership in the Council was based on parity between the

[50] Ibid, 64. The Czechoslovak National Socialists were a moderate left-wing party, not to be confused with the German party of a similar name.
[51] Jozef Jablonický, *Z ilegality,* 170.
[52] Polak, "In the Spirit," 66.
[53] Jablonický, *Z ilegality*, 173-74.

two camps and, according to Ursíny's memoirs, differences in their respective programs were minor:

> We differed only in opinions on the separation of Church and state. We [the non-Communists] were against it. We also had different ideas on the position of Slovakia in the Czechoslovak Republic. In their view, it should be more federated, despite the fact that we never used this term. According to them, it should be written with a hyphen (Czecho-Slovak). I spoke out against it…and they backed down. After many, many meetings…we came to an agreement, though in economic questions, we had some slight differences, which we also resolved….[54]

It is remarkable that, almost a year and a half before the end of the war, major representatives of the Slovak political class had jointly and independently committed to a pro-Soviet foreign policy and major economic and agrarian reforms.[55] Slavic brotherhood under the patronage of the Soviet Union and the progressive ideal of "human dignity" were likewise envisioned as touchstones for a postwar democracy.[56] Moreover, the National Front outlined in the agreement suggested that, from the crucibles of Munich and HSPP rule, Slovak Communists had finally garnered a substantial share of political power in Slovakia.

In other respects, the Christmas Agreement was less foundational than it appeared. Firstly, because it was a splinter group, the SNC could not speak for other resistance groups or political actors in Slovakia. The Civic Bloc was dominated by the Agrarians and excluded *Flóra*, the *Šrobárovci*, and anti-Ľudák circles in the Slovak military and government.[57] Moreover, in late 1943, the body could certainly not accurately be said to "represent the

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[54] Ján Ursíny, *Spomienky na Slovenské národné povstanie* (Liptovský Mikuláš, 1994), 48-49.

[55] The agreement supported progressive measures and a “more just“ distribution of wealth, but did not elaborate detailed policies."

[56] AMSNP, fund 6, carton 1. Text of the agreement can also be found in Lettrich, *Modern Slovakia*, 303-305.

[57] Mičev, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944*, 72; Jablonický, *Z ilegality*, 174-77. According to Jablonický, Josko, Lettrich, and Ursíny could represent only, at most, a narrow section of the Agrarian Party and the Slovak industrial class. Their group omitted most importantly those Slovak Social Democrats, who had been popular in the interwar Republic and outspoken critics of the HSPP regime.

opinions of all strata of the Slovak Nation."[58] The document was made public only nine months later in September 1944. Secondly, the partnership met with some opposition from members within both factions. Some Communist cells rejected the notion of centralized cooperation with the "bourgeois" parties on grounds of ideological purity. Other elements of the CPS preferred to govern on the basis of "Red Guard" partisan formations or the "Revolutionary National Councils" (RNCs) they were beginning to form in various cities and towns.[59] Finally, the enthusiasm for common goals embodied in the document seems to have papered over other motivations. For example, though Lettrich argued in 1955 that the document proved the Communists had relinquished their ambitions for a "Soviet Slovakia," Slovak historians have suggested that this is both unclear and unlikely.[60] One leading member of the Council, Fedor Thurzo, later characterized the SNC's partnership as pragmatic, not political: "[The non-Communists] joined up with the Communists in the belief that [they] could lean on one another …[They] didn't collaborate with [them] in the resistance…."[61] Another Slovak historian in exile judged the "formal unity of the [groups]" even more skeptically, noting that each "was ready to drop its partner as soon as its need for the partnership ended."[62]

Ambitious, but partial, provisional, and ambiguous: such were the terms of "unification" in the Slovak resistance at home. The years from 1938 to 1943 had nourished the national aspirations of both the Slovak "Democratic Club" and the Slovak Communists, at the same time that the relative success and stability of New Slovakia limited popular

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[58] Jablonický, *Z ilegality*, 172.
[59] Jelinek, *Lust for Power,* 63. Polak, "In the Spirit," 66.
[60] Lettrich, *Modern Slovakia*, 199; Syrný, *Slovenskí komunisti,* 138; Martin Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie,* 153.
[61] Fedor Thurzo, *Spomienky* (unpublished manuscript, 1986). Quoted in Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati*, 11.
[62] Andrew Elias, "The Slovak Uprising of 1944" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 1963), 63.

support for their platform. In late 1942, after it became clear that the Axis would certainly fall, the two camps realized that any future rights for Slovakia depended on a real show of force against the Axis. In one view, the Christmas Agreement of late 1943 was a sign of principled opposition to a corrupt and malignant system. In another, it was merely the *Realpolitik* of domestic political minorities hoping to outflank the London exiles in a push for Slovak sovereignty. Either way, the agreement masked a lack of consensus and, more importantly, operational capability. The SNC would play a key motivating and organizing role in the uprising to come, but for several months it remained just one small locus of discontent. Facing internal divisions and lacking popular support and—most critically—an army, it more resembled a conspiratorial clique than a resistance movement.

Prelude: When the War Came

During the first days of spring 1944, the Red Army reached the eastern approaches of the Carpathian Mountains; Stalin's troops took a well-deserved rest before regrouping for another round of offensives on the Ukrainian front. The tide of war had shifted decisively in their favor. After scoring spectacular victories at Stalingrad and Kursk, the Soviets had shattered the *Wehrmacht* in the East, and German forces had begun a slow but permanent retreat.[63] In occupied Europe, German propaganda still guaranteed *Endsieg*, but the Third Reich was courting catastrophe in the West, as well: Italy had fallen, and an Anglo-American invasion of Europe was anticipated in the season to come.

Little more than 100 miles from Soviet encampments in Ukraine, word of these developments had already started to upend the peace that had enveloped the Ľudáks' "Smiling Slovakia" since 1940. Much like in Nazi Germany, the regime-controlled Slovak

[63] John Keegan, *The Second World War* (London: Penguin, 1990), 475-76.

press still fixated on "successful German counter-attacks" and the near-perpetual "stabilization of the front."[64] Short-wave radio transmissions from the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London had long been a more reliable source of information. Listeners to London and Moscow broadcasts were familiar with the Beneš camp's refrains—"so-called 'independent Slovakia'" was "nothing but a toy in the hands of Adolf Hitler"—but these dispatches had a more disquieting impact by spring 1944.[65] "News of the Russian front," wrote a CSS official in March, "now dominates debate and public opinion."[66] Carried on the airwaves, word of the Red Army's advances, mingled with anticipation, rumor, and "provocations," spread in pubs and restaurants, perpetuating the belief that "war would soon swallow the country."[67] The Slovak Ministry of the Interior's order that anyone caught listening to or discussing foreign broadcasts would face punishment did little to quell this "whispering propaganda."[68] A "portion of the population," ran one CSS report from Trstená, "now expects invasion" and "reacts to every new piece of news like a seismograph."[69] HSPP propagandists' attempts to discredit enemy radio broadcasts only won London and Moscow a greater audience.[70]

A more visible harbinger of destruction also arrived by air in late spring. The hum and drone of Allied aircraft had been heard regularly in parts of the country since April, but

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[64] *Slovák*, 21 March 1944, 1; *Slovák,* 6 April 1944, 1. The Slovak dailies' euphemistic description of events at the front were typical in the months before August 1944. See in particular the spring issues of *Slovák, Gardista,* and *Národné Noviny*.

[65] Erica Harrison, "Special Research Project Report: Broadcasting by the Czechoslovak Exile Government in London, 1939-1945," *Media History*, vol. 21, no. 4 (Aug. 2015), 465.

[66] *Situačné hlásenia okresných náčelníkov. Január – august 1944*, ed. Martin Lacko (Trnava: Univerzita Sv. Cyrila a Metoda, 2005), 74.

[67] Ibid, reports from Piešťany, Revúca, and Poprad, 41, 159, 165.

[68] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 2, 70/61.

[69] *Situačné hlásenia,* 163-64.

[70] Ondrej Podolec, "Ticho pred búrkou: Sonda do nálad slovenskej spoločnosti na jar 1944," in *Slovenská republika 1939 – 1945 očami mladých historikov,* vol. III: *Povstanie roku 1944*, ed. Martin lacko (Trnava: Univerzita Sv. Cyrila a Metoda, 2004), 23.

the bombs dropped over Bratislava on June 16 were the Slovak homeland's first taste of the war. The HSPP party organ *Slovák* proclaimed that the Anglo-American "terrorist aviators" had "merely strengthened the bold determination of [every Slovak] to bravely fulfill his duty to nation [and] state." The view from the *banlieue* was of disorder, however, as those who had "lived in the hope that the city would avoid bombardment" fled for safer ground.[71] Refugees from the city and evacuated eastern districts of Slovakia soon clogged smaller towns and villages, sparking complaints of overcrowding and a housing crisis.[72] Farmers worried that, as air raids continued throughout the month, vital crops would be burned or ruined.[73] Reports from Banská Bystrica described the raids' ill effects on bureaucracy and commerce. With employees "struck with fear during air-raid alarms," the bombings "frequently disrupt those working in district offices. In shops, nightly raids are hurting worker performance, and workers are moving away out of fear…they handle themselves more cautiously, but demonstrate little discipline."[74]

German authorities in Slovakia regarded this breakdown of "discipline" with greater concern—and with good reason. As spring turned to summer, the Nazi Abwehr noted waning support for the war effort. Morale in the Slovak army was low and anti-German sentiment had grown rife. "The atmosphere is very strained….Slovak officers complain openly about the war in train cars, they warn of a possible general mobilization," noted one German officer. "When it comes to the Slovaks in general, at least the workers and the half-

[71] *Slovák*, 18 June 1944, 1; *Situačné hlásenia*, reports from Malacky and Modra, 184-85, 187.
[72] *Situačné hlásenia,* reports from Nové Mesto nad Váhom and Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš, 110, 165. See also: Podolec, "Ticho pred burkou," 27; United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) RG-57.001M.0001.00000259, USHMM RG-57.001M.0001.00000260.
[73] *Situačné hlásenia*, report from Nitra, 139-40.
[74] Ibid, 196.

intelligent, all you hear is grumbling and blame for the war."[75] Slovak veterans had done much to sour their comrades on the war effort, returning home exhausted by the futility of bloodshed in the East.[76]

In Slovak towns and garrisons, antiwar attitudes spilled over into insubordination. Many men, like those in the small eastern town of Gelnica, refused to register for mandatory service.[77] As a troop transport left Trnava for the Front in July, "many soldiers boarding the train began drunkenly shouting…'Again they take only the poor for the front! Why don't the big shots go fight!'" Defying officers' orders, the men jumped from the moving train as it departed the station. "Such scenes" were particularly harmful to the public interest, wrote a CSS operative, because they "produce all kinds of comment amongst the population and harm not only military discipline, but civilian discipline, as well. It's embarrassing… and, on top of the situation at the front, very depressing for the public."[78] As thousands more Slovak men were drafted, London propagandists were happy to attribute their "dissatisfaction" to craven Ľudák leadership. As one flyer from London had it, the Slovak president had "betrayed his people, sold [them] to the Germans, made [them] slaves," and was now sending Slovaks' "compatriots, fathers, brothers, and sons in large numbers" to their deaths.[79]

Developments far from the battlefield had also begun to take their toll. Though Slovakia had remained well-provisioned through the war's early years, shortages, supply disruptions, and increased rationing now afflicted most communities. In the outskirts of Bratislava, as around the country, cold weather had delayed the planting season and left

[75] BArch, R70 Slowakei/318.
[76] BArch, R70 Slowakei/73.
[77] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, 239/59.
[78] *Situačné hlásenia*, report from Trnava, 221.
[79] BArch, R70 Slowakei/74, pamphlet discovered March 1944.

consumers desperately short on potatoes, a staple food source.[80] Worrying that there wouldn't even be enough for seeding, farmers kept their stocks from market.[81] Mandatory government purchase and requisitions of foodstuffs also frustrated producers, bringing a glum and obstinate mood to villages: "People around the towns brood about the shortages even though they should know that during war, one can't acquire everything," an official wrote from Nitra, adding that "as if it is going out of style, they refuse to bring their goods to [district] offices."[82] Even if "the sacrifices of war" fell hardest on the peasantry, "pressured to hand over their grain, straw, feed, and potatoes," the overall standard of living in Slovakia grew meager. Shoes, leather, iron, cereals, animal feed, and meat products almost disappeared from the marketplace.[83] Responding to their exploitation, many farmers and shepherds turned delinquent, leaving their fields and flocks untended.[84] Other plots lay fallow as more and more men were drafted into the army or lacked proper equipment to till them.[85] Slovak workers remained steadily employed in German war industries, but a faltering supply system, "out-of-control inflation," and skyrocketing costs for basic goods on the black market took their toll; by July, men in factories across Slovakia were demonstrating or striking for higher wages.[86]

The new economy of scarcity brought into relief the contrasts between "haves" and "have nots." Condemnation for black market profiteers and regime bureaucrats grew in

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[80] *Situačné hlásenia,* reports from Trenčín and Bratislava, 111, 79.
[81] Ibid, reports from Veľká Bytča and Bratislava, 71, 79.
[82] Ibid*,* report from Nitra, 74.
[83] Ibid*,* report from Modra, 219. Podolec, "Ticho pred búrkou," 26.
[84] *Situačné hlásenia,* reports from Revúca, Trstená, and Nové Mesto nad Váhom, 159, 163, 199-200.
[85] Ibid, report from Banská Bystrica, 190.
[86] Ibid, reports from Topoľčany, 224-25, and Ružomberok, 242; *Slovenské národné povstanie: Nemci a Slovensko*, ed. Vilém Prečan (Bratislava: Epocha, 1970), 451. By 1945, the amount of currency circulating in Slovakia had increased tenfold over 1939 levels. Over the same period, the national debt had multiplied more than 450-fold. See: Ludoviť Hallon, Miroslav Sabol, Anna Fališová, *Vojnové škody a rekonštrukcia Slovenska 1944 – 1948: Hospodárstvo, infraštruktúra, zdravotníctvo* (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2011), 14.

parallel with calls for more equitable distribution of goods and resources.[87] Residents in some cities and towns continued in an obsessive quest for Jewish property. Those who had not benefitted from such plunder decried the privileges of more fortunate "aryanizers."[88] Local officials, in the interest of quelling rural unrest over deteriorating conditions, called on the central government to streamline provisioning, eliminate the black market, and answer peasant demands for "aryanized wealth."[89] Yet, even as *Slovák* railed against those "ruthlessly exploiting supply difficulties to rob their fellow citizen," anti-regime propaganda played on the notion that requisitioning and "aryanization" benefitted only Germans and the Slovak elite. Shopkeepers and traders were encouraged to sabotage the economy:[90] "Let us stir up the greatest disruptions possible in provisioning so as to cause the complete collapse of the home front," read an anonymous letter mailed to Slovak merchants, "our nation will be grateful for the lives saved on the Russian front….Do not pay taxes! Give out neither required nor voluntary contributions! In the interest of conscience and the future of a Slovak nation….let us work against this rotten system…!"[91]

Such appeals did little to arouse active resistance, but by late spring, Slovaks were drifting further and further from politics. Neither the HSPP nor Slovak "independence," the public gradually realized, would survive the imminent Nazi military defeat and Soviet occupation. A near-hysterical "psychosis" generated by bombing and forecasts of calamity coupled with privation eroded faith in the government and poisoned the political climate,

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[87] The satirical underground magazine *Kocúr*, published in central Slovakia, gave potent voice to such critiques. Regime authorities in Slovakia noted the magazine's prevalence, alongside other "tendentious" articles, in February-March 1944. See also: AMSNP, fund 8, carton 19, S39/2007 and *Situačne hlásenia,* reports from Kremnica and Nitra, 54, 74.

[88] Ibid, reports from Piešťany and Skalica, 40, 72.

[89] Ibid, report from Topoľčany 107-108.

[90] *Slovák,* 30 April 1943, 1.

[91] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, 3/71.

according to situation report from Ružomberok.[92] Pessimism began to infect even the most radical proponents of the regime. Milo Urban, editor-in-chief of the paramilitary daily *Gardista*, looked to the future with dread in a 1944 New Year's editorial. "New Year's wishes…I'm not going to offer those to anyone, neither bounteous nor merry," he wrote, "because good fortune and happiness in these turbulent times lie somewhere hidden away and can only be rare guests."[93] The HG, once the proud elite of New Slovakia, had lost its *élan*; interest in Ľudák-led military or cultural activities waned and most HG organizations and training facilities operated only formally.[94] Whether shedding them as an outmoded fashion or fearing a reckoning to come, many civilians began to abandon the rituals of the HSPP's Slovak nationalism:

> The population has wavered in its belief that the hardships of war will not affect us directly. Now, as the Russians near our borders, many are losing their heads, giving themselves over to pessimism or even scaremongering….there are villages…where less than 30 percent of the residents still use the usual greeting of "On guard!"...favored by exponents of the Party and the Guard, and have returned to other greetings….[95]

The party, though surely aware of an increasing sense of crisis, retreated into its usual scriptural soft-soap and fatalistic formulas. "The Slovak nation, which has always relied on God's righteousness," party Secretary Karol Mederly assured the public in May, "shall in this historic test rely on the same essential support. [The nation] believes that the Almighty, who has never left it in difficult times of bondage, will certainly not abandon it now."[96] Admonished to "be united and loyal" in the face of "coming events," the populace was nonetheless growing "less and less interested in political matters" and enthusiasm for

[92] *Situačné hlásenia,* report from Ružomberok, 242.
[93] *Gardista*, 1 January 1944, 1.
[94] *Situačné hlásenia,* report from Poprad, 27; Podolec, "Ticho pred búrkou," 28.
[95] *Situačné hlásenia*, report from Kremnica, 85.
[96] *Slovák*, 28 May 1944, 1.

the party-sponsored celebrations of the anniversary of the state's independence was lackluster at best.[97] Local officials turned "nepotistic" and "superficial," while measures implemented to preserve party power and regain Slovaks' hearts and minds fell short. [98] Attempts to repair "a rickety and volatile" system of municipal administration under stricter party supervision met with apathy and resistance, as some voters disputed or changed names on prepared party candidate lists for March elections to local government offices.[99] Others avoided elections altogether.[100] Voter disinterest and disgust for the jockeying between radicals and moderates, which was often fueled by personal ambition and thirst for plundered Jewish property, beleaguered a state apparatus already riven by instability.[101] "Once again," a district head wrote from Turčianský Sväty Martin two months after elections, "conflict and mutual suspicion have become rampant among leading members of the HSPP and the HG, as well as leaders of villages and offices. There are allegations of weakness, excessive radicalism, [treason]....this undesirable condition can be attributed to the fact that the local party organization here hasn't had a chairman for a few months now….[102]

Indeed, the "turning away from political life" described in communities around the country by mid-year stemmed in part from decay at the core of the party itself.[103] In state offices, enthusiasm for the ideals of New Slovakia was replaced by desperation. Those who

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[97] *Situačne hlásenia*, report from Považská Bystrica, 79.
[98] Ivan Kamenec, "Fenomény stráchu a alibizmu v kontexte kolaborácie a odboj na Slovensku v rokoch 1938-1945" in *Kolaboracia a odboj na Slovensku a v krajinach nemeckej sféry vplyvu 1939-1945*, ed. Marek Syrný (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum slovenského národného povstania, 2009), 26.
[99] Podolec, "Ticho pred búrkou," 29-31.
[100] *Situáčne hlásenia*, reports from Bardejov and Banská Bystrica, 213, 87.
[101] For more on the treatment of Jews, anti-Semitic policies in the Slovak State, and the systematic theft of Jewish property, see Chapter II.
[102] *Situáčne hlásenia*, 162.
[103] Ibid, 244.

had worked for, and benefitted from, the Ľudák regime began to abandon and in some cases undermine it.[104] This was a reality that even the party organ *Slovák* bitterly acknowledged, heaping disdain on those "turncoats" who, "when they thought they might need something from the party, cut the figure of the most convicted, most dedicated Ľudak," but "[became] open opponents of the state and the party when the situation [looked] different on the fronts."[105] The SD catalogued the bolder anti-party stance among civil servants, full of venom for the Germans and doomsday predictions for "those beasts who collaborate with them."[106] State employees and bureaucrats responded to increasing disorder by "treating their duties superficially, either half-fulfilling their responsibilities or altogether neglecting them." These "egoists," fumed Tiso, no longer "think of the nation, but only themselves, their families, and their inner circle."[107] By late summer 1944, the regime threatened prosecution to force Slovak employees to remain at their posts.[108]

Some German and Slovak authorities derided these trends as "conjuncturalism" and "alibism," but we can perhaps more accurately diagnose them as rational responses to encroaching peril: most Slovaks, like many Europeans caught up in the war, became more concerned with survival than ideological convictions.[109] Facing a likely Soviet invasion and the regime's collapse dictated a disengagement from the politics of New Slovakia. A Poprad official described this phenomenon in early August:

> True, no one is as yet proclaiming himself a Czechoslovak, much less a communist. Each man is an opportunist and so at such a turning point…must take a cautious approach, fearing that any rash conversion might make him persecuted under the

[104] Kamenec, "Fenomény stráchu," 23.
[105] *Slovák,* 25 April 1944, 1.
[106] BArch, R70 Slowakei/86, SD reports on anti-German or pro-communist behavior and personnel in Slovak institutions.
[107] SNA, fund Národný súd (NS), 49/45. Quoted in Kamenec, "Fenomény stráchu," 26.
[108] Mičev, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944*, 191.
[109] Kamenec, "Fenomény stráchu," 26.

> next regime. He also fears showing devotion to the present system, cautious of finding himself blamed for any (whether feared or anticipated) changes… Under these conditions there can be no interest in politics…but instead in hammering out individual plans – mainly for how to protect one's own life.[110]

After five years of independence, Slovaks' relationship to the Tiso regime came to be characterized by neither loyalty nor opposition, but by fear and apprehension; as one Banská Bystrica official saw it, "a wait-and-see attitude."[111] As the state and its structures figured less and less in their daily experience, people grew more indifferent to them. Somewhat ironically, given the role Hitler had played in rolling back Slovak sovereignty and damaging the HSPP's credibility, German observers still blamed the party for this "failure," noting "the Slovak state has not been able to fully develop and nurture the national self-awareness of its people....the collective attitude...[is] unsettled and unstable, and even in political circles the will toward political independence [is] weak." Instead of devotion to the Slovak *Volksgemeinschaft*, the nation was ruled by "instinct" and could only "behave according to its needs."[112]

Whether due to the stresses of impending invasion, shortages, or administrative frailty—or all three—Slovaks fell into a state of deep insecurity and distanced themselves from the corporatist, theocratic nationalism of New Slovakia. Indeed, as government minister Ján Ďurčanský remarked, by 1944, people "only very timidly [subscribed] to the ideals which are the pillars of the Slovak state."[113] At the same time, they anxiously anticipated a new, but unknown source of political and social order.

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[110] AMSNP, fund 8, carton 3, S10/79.
[111] *Situačné hlásenia,* report from Banská Bystrica, 196.
[112] BArch, R70 Slowakei/319.
[113] SNA, fund Úrad predsednictva vlady, 1839/1944. Quoted in Kamenec, "Fenomény stráchu," 28.

The disorientation that gripped the French countryside in the summer of 1789 provides an instructive analogue to the developments in Slovakia during the spring and summer of 1944. The social theorist William Sewell, Jr. has argued that, as the established norms and practices of daily life in Bourbon France became increasingly dislocated by food shortages and violence, the cultural political structures that defined life under the Old Regime—divine right, the Estates system, feudalism—became unstable and open to transformation. Just as the protracted "standoff between the king and the National Assembly" meant that the French civilian could no longer "be entirely sure what actions were safe or dangerous, moral or wicked, advantageous, or foolish, rational or irrational," the Slovak, too, struggled to rectify the contradictions between HSPP rhetoric, the saber-rattling of London, and an impending Soviet invasion.[114] "Smiling Slovakia," once securely in the care of its priest-president, was for the first time forced to grapple with grave threats to its survival; the structures supporting the Slovak State's material, cultural, and political existence—as was the case for France in the summer before the Bastille—had become seriously vulnerable to rupture.[115]

Sweltering Summer: Slovak Society from Dislocation to Rupture, July-August 1944

If, as many Slovak Communist historians have argued, the Slovak partisan movement was robust from the early years of the war, the guerilla groups' activities seem to have gone largely unnoticed by the population.[116] Brigades formed in the forests and mountains during 1942 consisted of a few CPS members on the run from HSPP authorities. Persecuted Jews,

[114] Sewell, "Historical Events," 848.
[115] Ibid, 845.
[116] See, for example: Ján Zeman, "Partizánske hnutie na Zvolensku," *Slovanský přehled,* no. 6 (1958), 211-14. In contrast, Jablonický notes that before the spring of 1944, Slovak police organs reported virtually no partisan presence or related disturbances. Jablonický, *Z ilegality,* 294.

deserters from the Slovak Army, Red Army soldiers, and political prisoners escaped from Nazi and Ľudák prison camps gradually joined them. With few weapons, meager supplies, and poor communications, these groups accomplished little beyond survival and their numbers were negligible—typically between ten to fifteen men per group, scattered in not more than a few dozen camps.[117] The Slovak Army and security forces had little trouble chasing them off or capturing them.[118]

This situation changed dramatically in the spring of 1944. As the Red Army extended its control over Ukraine, a Soviet Central Partisan Command (SCPC) established at Kiev began to deploy Soviet guerilla commandos into eastern Slovakia by parachute and over land through Poland. As part of a coordinated effort between the Ukrainian front commander Nikita Khrushchev and CPC chief Gottwald, small numbers of Slovak and Czech fighters from the Czechoslovak or Red Armies received training at camps in Ukraine and were added to the nearly thirty Soviet-led units on the ground in Slovakia by August.[119] Their commanders' primary objective was to supply the leadership around which larger groups could be organized.[120] They were also to "activate" the dormant groups still in hiding, including pockets of Polish, French, Slovak, Czech, and Hungarian partisans. The approach of the Front and the growing capabilities of the Red Army were integral to the

[117] Mičev, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944*, 90.
[118] Jablonický, *Z ilegality*, 294.
[119] According to German estimates, about 3,000 "Bolshevik" guerrillas arrived in Slovakia by September 1944. BArch, R70 Slowakei/319. Jozef Jablonický puts the number of Czech and Slovak men working with them at 230. Jozef Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend* (Bratislava: Obzor, 1990), 67.
[120] Elias, "Slovak Uprising," 46. Using both Soviet and Slovak sources, Elias estimates that they managed to establish at least 14 groups during the spring of 1944.

growth of guerilla forces in Slovakia, and Soviet-dominated units were soon operating from camps in the central and eastern parts of the country.[121]

Soviet commandos and their Czech and Slovak comrades also became political commissars. As committed Communists, they regarded themselves as the footsoldiers for a new order, and their mission included the "political education" of all partisans and through them the general public.[122] Pavol Baranov, a Soviet partisan leader operating in the Nitra valley in February 1944, supplied his group of about 50 men with a tract entitled, "Aims of Revolutionary Measures in the Fight Against the German Occupier." The text details the horrific brutality of Nazi occupation in the USSR and points up the heroism of the Red Army in the war against fascism. But it proffers a slightly subtler message, as well. Certain "other states" led by the "workers, peasants, and intelligentsia" could be models for a future Slovakia, and with a reminder of the Red Army's speedy approach, the "Czech and Slovak" nations are invited to join the liberation of Europe, under the leadership of the Communist party in a brotherhood of Slavs.[123]

Above all, Soviet partisan leaders like Baranov had orders to stress the fight for freedom and socio-economic justice. They also learned to soft-pedal their message to avoid offending the traditional, religious mores of Slovakia's rural class. Commissars and party organizers advanced the notion that each individual had a personal stake in the struggle: jobs, land, and opportunity were attractive promises for potential recruits in depressed rural areas.[124]

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[121] See also: Roland Valko, "Počiatky partizánskeho hnutia na Slovensku" in *Partizáni a Slovensko,* eds. Anton Hruboň and Juraj Krištofík (Krakow: Spolok Slovákov v Poľsku, 2013), 108.
[122] Elias, "Slovak Uprising," 49.
[123] AMSNP, fund 7, carton 1, S29/75.
[124] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 62.

It is unclear exactly how much this platform appealed to the citizens of towns and villages in Slovakia's rural areas in the summer of 1944. German SD reports claim that, as early as July, the Slovak population in some areas was "supplying all possible support for the partisan bands," which was bolstered by their "generally friendly and well-behaved presence" amongst the people.[125] Leaders enthusiastically wired news of their reception in Slovakia back to Kiev.[126] The Slovak historian Jozef Jablonický describes instances in which villagers, aided by local gendarmes, concealed Soviet paratroops from CSS and army patrols.[127] Partisan propaganda encouraged young men to join their ranks, appealing to a sense of honor and a fear of retribution. One pamphlet found throughout eastern Slovakia in July made the terms explicit: "Slovaks! Farmers, workers, and intelligentsia! The hour has come for you to begin the war against the German robbers and their Bratislava collaborators! Do not be afraid! Go into the woods and in a few days the Red Army will join you.... Gendarmes and soldiers! If you take up arms against us, we will deal with you like the Germans!"[128] These carrot-and-stick tactics were apparently common. The larger "Čapajev" group operating near Bardejov had in this way recruited hundreds of local gendarmes and were buying off locals with money and other goods.[129] Payouts were also offered for food, alcohol, and arms; in some cases, women even received sums for agreeing to join a unit as "helpers."[130] For some merchants, like those near Turčianský Svätý Martin, partisan activity supported a lively underground trade business.[131]

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[125] BArch, R70 Slowakei/318.
[126] Jelinek, *Lust for Power,* 70
[127] Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend,* 65.
[128] BArch, R70 Slowakei/73.
[129] AMSNP, fund 7, 767/58; AMSNP, fund 4, carton 2, A101/76.
[130] BArch, R70 Slowakei/87.
[131] BArch, R70 Slowakei/84.

With the help of a fresh batch of Soviet paratroops in late July, partisan activity spread widely in the first week of August. Daily attacks grew more brazen at the same time that Slovak security forces became more reluctant to engage.[132] Striking armored trains, disabling communications, raiding Slovak garrisons—and sometimes killing gendarmes and Hlinka Guards—the fighters defied the Tiso regime's attempts to root them out.[133] On August 4, the Čapajev group, commanded by an escaped Soviet prisoner of war named Ivan Baľuta-Jagupov, blew up a rail line connecting eastern Slovakia to the front. Two days later, the unit surprised a column of German armored cars east of the High Tatra mountain range, destroying eight vehicles and carrying away mines, explosives, ammunition, and machine guns.[134] After a brigade surrounded and disarmed a Slovak Army work detail on the night of August 8-9 in the region of Liptov, an expedition of Slovak soldiers and gendarmes was finally sent to give battle.[135] Elements sympathetic to the Slovak resistance in the military, however, tipped off partisan leaders about the preparations and they slipped away the following day.[136] The two Slovak generals charged with bringing the partisans to heel, Augustín Malár and Ferdinand Čatloš, balked at sending their troops into a "fraticidal and senseless" struggle against Russian partisans.[137] Sentiment was much the same amongst the rank-and-file. Soldiers in eastern divisions of the Slovak army were fraternizing with guerillas flowing into the country from Poland. "There is real friendly contact with the Russians," reported a Slovak Army informant in Medzilaborce. "Some soldiers will stay

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[132] Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend*, 67.
[133] Jablonický, *Z ilegality*, 298-99; Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend,* 74.
[134] Ibid, 72; Jablonický, *Z ilegality*, 298.
[135] *Dokumenty,* 302.
[136] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 66.
[137] Jablonický, *Z ilegality*, 300. Despite his experience as a Czechoslovak legionary, Čatloš had become an ardent supporter of the Ľudák autonomy movement and served as the Slovak State's Minister of National Defense beginning in 1939.

with them for weeks at a time...sharing chocolate with Slovak nationals [among them]."[138] Even worse, according to the German foreign office, "the communist message had found its way into the [Slovak] garrisons" by way of various "infectious agents."[139]

Meanwhile, the partisans exacerbated a wave of terror already unleashed by the Hlinka Guard in Slovak towns and villages. Intelligence officials noted the "strengthening of the resistance by criminal elements," while informants told stories of kidnapping and murder. In one case, a Slovak teacher was assassinated for "selling out fellow Slavs"; his killers left behind a note (in Russian) promising that others who do so "will be judged and murdered in the name of the people."[140] *Volksdeutsche* and German officials were also targeted for vicious treatment and "liquidation." When Slovaks complained, Soviet commandos sometimes blamed "fake partisans" among the Slovak population for the rash of assassinations, robbery, and sabotage unleashed in towns and villages.[141] Many unconnected with the guerillas took advantage of "partisan fever," selling out others to the bands and joining in the bedlam. Reports of roadside robbery, purloined livestock, and raucous Russian-led "booze-ups" in pubs cropped up all over the country.[142] Partisans units sometimes supplied themselves by robbing the populace at gunpoint.[143] In some places, the lawlessness spilled over into festive exuberance: a Slovak military transport driven by drunken soldiers waving a red flag was spotted tearing through the streets of Ružomberok in July, stopping occasionally to shout oaths to "Stalin's glory."[144]

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[138] BArch, R70 Slowakei/84. See also: Jelinek, *Lust for Power,* 70.
[139] BArch, R70 Slowakei/319.
[140] BArch, R70 Slowakei/318.
[141] BArch, R70 Slowakei/84.
[142] Ibid; *Situačné hlásenia,* reports from Trstená, Žilina, and Ilava, 207, 211, 234.
[143] AMSNP, fund 8, box 3, S10/79.
[144] *Situačné hlásenia,* report from Ružomberok, 242-43.

Any awareness that the country was already in ferment could hardly be observed in the press during July and early August. *Slovák* dismissed war panic and defeatism as "pyschological errors"; the editor (and Tiso's personal secretary) Jozef Paučo told restive Slovak peasants to "thank God that things [in Slovakia] are still good" compared with the rest of Europe.[145] However, after the August 10 Liptov incident, Interior Minister Alexander Mach and other prominent Ľudáks could no longer ignore the threat to Slovak infrastructure. Even more, they worried about partisans' inroads with the Slovak military.[146] On August 12, Interior Minister Mach had walls and fences throughout the country papered with notices declaring martial law in order to "disable the criminal bands" behind the havoc.[147] The Ministry ordered the military and local party offices to recover control by "any means necessary," and demanded citizens report any partisan activity immediately or face "the heaviest penalties."[148] Mach explained the decision in *Gardista*: "Calm and order are not just our concern—it is a wholly central European question, even one for the whole European continent. If we are unable to secure order alone, or do not know how to ensure it, in the interest of the European community, it will be necessary that others help us do our duty."[149] Unfazed, the Soviet-led partisan movement charged toward open confrontation with Bratislava and Berlin.

The "Military Center" and Plans for a Rebellion

HSPP ministers weren't the only ones vexed by the "criminal bands." The SNC and leaders in the Slovak military saw continued partisan operations as an invitation to German

[145] *Slovák*, 11 August 1944, 1; *Slovák*, 13 August 1944, 1.
[146] Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend*, 76-77.
[147] Ibid; *Slovák*, 14 August 1944, 1.
[148] AMSNP, fund 6, carton 4, 5/71.
[149] *Gardista*, 13 August 1944, 1.

occupation. For the military, such a turn of events would be particularly ruinous. While the SNC had spent months trying to win other Slovak resistance cells to its program, Lieutenant Colonel Ján Golian and a clique of Slovak officers had, with London's support, been working out a plan to topple the Slovak state using the Slovak Army in the summer of 1944.[150] Golian, like many of his co-conspirators, was a former Czechoslovak Legionary and a career officer in the Army who remained in his post after the HSPP seized power.[151] Service on the Eastern Front seems to have awakened in him pan-Slavist sentiments, and in mid-1943, radio contact with London allowed him to begin work "[preparing] an internal political takeover" in cooperation with the Czechoslovak Ministry of Defense (CMD).[152]

Exactly what drove Golian and his circle to end their deference to Beneš and the CMD, "crossing the Rubicon" into the SNC camp, remains obscure. It was only after repeated overtures and extensive negotiations with the SNC that Golian eventually broke with the President, finally agreeing to the former's request that he lead an uprising to install them as the new government. His compliance is somewhat puzzling: for former Czechoslovak officers, partially due to their training in the First Republic and for some, their experience as legionaries in the First World War, the ideal of Czechoslovak unity had traditionally resonated well. Perhaps mindful of the failures at Munich, perhaps frustrated with the impotence of the centralists, or even recognizing, as scores of Ľudák fellow travelers were beginning to do, that Slovakia's chances to exit the war in good standing with the Allies were rapidly dwindling, Golian accepted the conditions of the Christmas

[150] See Jablonický, *Z ilegality,* 47-60.
[151] Many Slovaks who served in the Czechoslovak legion during the First World War supported the Czechoslovak project, but also expressed discomfort with Czech dominance in the movement. See: James Krapfl, "Sites of Memory, Sites of Rejoicing: The Great War in Czech and Slovak Cultural History," in *Remembrance and Solidarity*, no. 2 (March 2014).
[152] Jablonický, *Z ilegality*, 182-84, 191-93.

Agreement as the best way forward. For other former supporters of New Slovakia now in search of an alibi, the SNC's program was not a wholly bitter pill.[153] The Council had smoothed their cause with ambiguity: the conditions of a renewed Czechoslovak Republic under the mantra of "*rovný s rovným*" were vague enough to recruit any patriotic Slovak looking to distance himself from the Slovak State.[154]

Calling itself the Military Center (*vojenské ústredie*) (MC), Golian's team became a sort of balance point between the SNC and the exile government, helping to facilitate the camp's cooperation. By the end of June, they both accepted the Center's plan for a military revolt *cum* political coup. The MC's basic blueprint counted on a chancy set of circumstances. As the First Czechoslovak Army and Soviet troops advanced on Kraków from western Ukraine, two eastern divisions of the Slovak army would secure the Dukla Pass, allowing the attackers to bypass German defences and the Carpathians to sweep across the country and reach Vienna in a matter of days. Slovak reserves and gendarmes garrisoned in central Slovakia, with the help of the partisans, would expell or imprison leading Ľudáks and install the SNC as the new government.[155] A second, "defensive" variant of the uprising plan, which Golian did not share with London, envisoned a doomsday scenario. If the Germans occupied Slovakia, all rebel forces would be withdrawn to the strategic "iron triangle" of Banská Bystrica-Zvolen-Brezno in central Slovakia, to hold out until rescue by the Red Army.[156]

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[153] Kamenec, "Fenomény stráchu," 27.

[154] Even Beneš budged a little in this regard by accepting the terms of the Christmas Agreement in late March 1944. The SNC's call for a renewed Czechoslovakia and recognition of the government-in-exile appealed to him, but he approached national issues more cautiously: "Regarding terminology: Czech, Slovak, Czechoslovak nation...in my opinion should be for now and until the end of the war observed with *abslolute tolerance and full respect* of each other's views and beliefs." *Dokumenty,* doc. 54, 179. Italics in the original.

[155] *Dokumenty*, 218.

[156] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 50.

As the summer wore on, Golian's cohort and the SNC used sympathetic contacts in the Slovak military and state ministries to make the necessary provisions. The scale of the preparations suggests the involvement or at least complicity of dozens of civil servants and functionaries, none of whom seem to have ever betrayed the plot.[157] Under the pretense of training exercises, Slovak army divisions under Colonel Augustín Malár were in place in eastern Slovakia by July. Slovak Defense Minister Ferdinand Čatloš equipped these 45,000 troops—the cream of the Slovak Army—with dozens of tanks, airplanes, anti-aircraft guns, and artillery.[158] Imrich Karváš, head of the Slovak national bank and the Slovak government rationing office, transferred over 3.5 billion crowns (roughly two-thirds of the state's total currency reserves) to a branch in Banská Bystrica.[159] A Ľudák parliamentary deputy and economic minister, Peter Zaťko, also arranged stockpiles of grain, sugar, rice, and medical supplies to be sent to the city, which was to serve as the seat of the rebel government. Over a million liters of gasoline were set aside in area storehouses. The director of the large Baťa shoe works provided, among other items, 20,000 pairs of boots. A factory in Trnava contributed building materials and hundreds of tons of metal.[160] It was estimated that with these supplies the rebels could subsist unaided for about three months.[161]

The conspirators recognized, however, that their project stood little chance of success absent coordination with the Soviet military command. Carrying plans for the uprising, delegations from the MC and the SNC were organized and flown to Moscow from

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[157] Lettrich, *Modern Slovakia*, 201-202.
[158] Július Nosko, *Takto bojovala povstalecká armáda* (Bratislava: NVK international, 1994), 26; Mičev, *Slovenské národné povstanie,* 81.
[159] Robert Arpáš. "Každodennosť v SNP" in *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944: Súčasť európskej antifašistickej rezistencie v rokoch druhej svetovej vojny*, ed. Miroslav Pekník (Bratislava: Ústav politických vied SAV, 2009), 131.
[160] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 50-51.
[161] Ivan Kamenec, "Civilný sektor a každodenný občiansky život na povstaleckom Slovensku" in *SNP 1944: Vstup slovenska do demokratickej Európy,* ed. Dezider Tóth (Banská Bystrica: Adade, 1999), 129-30.

Banská Bystrica's Tri Duby airfield in the first week of August. The aim behind these missions was twofold: the Slovaks needed pledges of strategic cooperation, weapons, and air support from the Red Army and Airforce, but they also wanted the SCPC to subordinate the Soviet partisan movement to the MC. The Communist Karol Šmidke and an officer named Mikuláš Ferjenčik, after braving anti-aircraft fire over Ukraine, arrived at their destination with little fanfare—indeed, their Soviet hosts treated them to a series of delays and held them incommunicado. While the MC anxiously anticipated an answer back in Banská Bystrica, it seems that, with characteristic paranoia, officials in the Kremlin were sizing up the representatives and weighing their plan's potential.[162]

The story of the delegations' time in Moscow remains shrouded in mystery and speculation. Slovak historians have made much out of the so-called "Čatloš memorandum," a move by the Slovak Minister of Defense to convince the Soviets (unbeknownst to London, the SNC, or the MC) to replace Tiso and the HSPP with a military dictatorship friendly to the Allies. Čatloš' covert envoy traveled with the delegations, but upon reviewing his communiqué, the Soviets and Czechoslovak military dismissed it as a quisling's play for amnesty.[163]

The uprising plan itself was ultimately judged as unrealistic. Soviet and Czechoslovak strategists doubted that Malár's divisions would be strong enough to open the Dukla Pass; even if well equipped, they did not see them as a match for the seasoned and heavily armed Nazi divisions securing the area. Nor did they think poorly armed Slovak regulars in central Slovakia would be able to hold down a *Wehrmacht* force sent to crush them; Red Army commanders had faced the Slovak army in battle and were not overly

[162] For more detail on the suspicious and at times hostile treatment endured by visiting delegations in Stalin's court, see: Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1962).
[163] Jelinek, *Lust for Power,* 69.

impressed with the skill and spirit of the Slovak soldier. Finally, King Michael's coup in Romania on August 23 altered the thrust of the Soviet advance, opening a salient to the south and drawing the focus away from the push into Poland, which Golian had counted upon. For these reasons, the Soviets did not promise large-scale collaboration and the delegations failed to accomplish their most important goal.[164]

Most Slovak historians agree that the reasoning behind the Soviets' decision not to commit major resources to Slovakia was pragmatic and responded to the rapid and complex developments of the larger war effort. Nevertheless, it has been occasionally suggested that their delay and eventual refusal was an intentional act of sabotage to prevent Slovakia from liberating itself and, as happened in Warsaw, to neutralize potential opposition to Soviet control in the postwar period.[165] This view is undercut by the following facts: Soviet authorities deferred to Czechoslovak military personnel in Kiev and London (both of whom had endorsed the rebellion in principle), Slovak Communists had contact and sometimes cooperated with Soviet partisan bands operating in the country, and Soviet authorities had limited communication channels with which to direct those Soviet guerillas active in Slovakia. But whatever their reasons, without any major commitment from Moscow, the Slovak rebels would face long odds in any battle against the Germans.

Partisan Fever

Developments back in Slovakia were proving inauspicious, as well. For the second time since the declaration of martial law, the MC and SNC found themselves pleading with the guerillas to protect their plans for the uprising. After agreeing to a ceasefire during the third week of August, leaders of the ever-growing partisan movement were restless; they did not

[164] Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend*, 118.
[165] The historian Martin Lacko proposes this theory in his monograph *Slovenské narodné povstanie,* 195-206.

wish passively to await further developments to wage war on "Fascists." A Soviet parachutist Peter Alexander Veličko, heading up the M.R. Štefánik partisan group, had captured a small hamlet called Sklabiňa and proclaimed the surrounding region of Turiec a "Partisan Zone." On August 21, Veličko and other partisan leaders hoisted the Czechoslovak flag over Sklabiňa, convened a Communist Revolutionary National Committee, and declared a renewed Czechoslovak Republic.[166] As word spread, CPS functionaries, Slovak gendarmes, and officers began converging on the area. The brigades also recruited civilians from the surrounding villages.[167]

With the MC and SNC delegations still mum in Moscow, Husák was alarmed and emerged from hiding in Bratislava to consult with Veličko in Martin. The CPS leader revealed everything: the conspiracy in the Slovak Army, the Red Army's role, the plan to depose Tiso. He explained the need to await the return of the delegation before launching any more operations so that everything could be fully coordinated with the approach of the Soviet military.[168] Veličko was defiant. "Their appetite was increasing after every successful operation," Husák noted of Veličko and his comrades a year later. "They were having combat successes—without an enemy, because the population wouldn't do anything against them….They reaped the benefit of what we'd sown [amongst the population] and assumed that it was they who were awakening Slovakia."[169] Still, without a reply from Moscow, the

[166] Mičev, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944*, 91.
[167] AMSNP, fund 9, A70/63. The group was led by Soviet Russians, but its rank and file was predominantly Slovak—at least after the outbreak of the Uprising. According to statistics recorded in mid-September of 1944, the group's second brigade (led by a Slovak named Viliam Žingor) comprised 1,087 members, 995 of whom were Slovaks. See: Martin Uhrín, "KSS a druhá partizanská brigada generala M.R. Stefánik," *V tieni červenej hviezdy: Prenikanie sovietizácie do slovenskej (československej) armády v rokoch 1944-1948* (Bratislava: Istropolitan, 2007), 105.
[168] *Dokumenty*, 964-65.
[169] Ibid.

SNC and Golian were powerless to rein in the partisans. No agreement was reached, and Golian's requests that Kiev call them off also apparently went unheeded.

The partisans had no grounds to respect the MC, the SNC, or even the Slovak Communist Party. Perceiving themselves combatants behind enemy lines, their mission was to inflict the greatest damage possible to the German war effort, and under orders from the SCPC, their campaign expanded despite the meeting with Husák. From August 23 to August 28, joined by more and more Slovak soldiers and gendarmes, they destroyed major railway tunnels, attacked garrisons, occupied towns, and freed political prisoners from Ľudák jails. With the help of local CPS committees unaligned with the SNC, the brigades captured Martin and Liptovský Mikuláš. Handbills were distributed in captured towns, calling "all patriotic Slovaks" and "true Slovak citizens" to battle against the "treacherous collaborators." Rumors spread that the "Bratislava government" had "given the Slovak army over to the Germans" and that an occupation was already underway.[170] Panic spread; towns and villages expected to be plundered and burned at any moment.[171] Czechoslovak tri-colors and makeshift red flags began to dot the hillsides of the low Tatras and scenes of vigilante violence followed the expanding Partisan Zone.[172] Exponents of the Tiso regime and ethnic Germans in this region were summarily executed or killed in shootouts.[173] On August 27, after "liberating" the symbolically and industrially important city of Ružomberok, brigades joined by "volunteers singing enthusiastically" marched into Brezno and executed several

[170] Flyer reprinted in *Zborník Ústavu SNP,* vol. I (Banská Bystrica, 1949), 172.
[171] *Situačné hlásenia*, report from Myjava, 263.
[172] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 74.
[173] One brigade is thought to have murdered more than 100 Slovak *Volksdeutsche* and Reich Germans in the village of Biely Potok near Ružomberok on August 27. Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend,* 161; *Slovák,* 28 August 1944, 1; Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 75-77.

local Ľudák officials, including a parliamentary deputy.[174] The next day in Martin, Veličko and his unit, again aided by Slovak gendarmes, seized and shot two dozen members of a German diplomatic delegation (including women and children) returning from Romania to the Reich. In the eyes of Veličko and other partisan commanders, the rebellion had already begun.

Earlier in the summer, Bratislava had been able publicly to dismiss the tumult gripping parts of the country as the work of faceless "criminal bands." But the failure of martial law made it clear that large portions of the population supported or were at least indifferent to the partisans. Local officials petitioned the Ministry of the Interior for help, claiming that the mood in whole regions of the country was "excited and rebellious."[175] In other places, communications links with regional party offices had been cut and, ignoring orders to engage, the Slovak army had done almost nothing to quell the violence. Once content to downplay the threat posed by the partisans, regime circles gave in to hysterics. *Slovák* fulminated: "The enemy is attempting to derail our traditional order and subvert the Slovak man and his healthy and sober mindset.... Let us keep order!"[176] After the events of August 27-28 in Ružomberok, Brezno, and Martin, however, Tiso and his inner circle realized that achieving "order" was beyond their capability. They concluded that elements of the Slovak army were under the influence of the partisans and constituted an enemy force.[177]

The events of late August rattled German officials, as well. Stung by developments in Warsaw and Bucharest, they feared a palace coup or worse in Slovakia.[178] The Reich's

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[174] Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend*, 165-74; *Slovák,* 28 August 1944, 1. Ružomberok was the birthplace of Andrej Hlinka. It was also the location of an important arms concern supplying the German war effort.
[175] Elias, "Slovak Uprising," 61. See also: *Situačne hlasenia*, reports from Skalica and Modra, 257, 260.
[176] *Slovák,* 28 August 1944, 1.
[177] *Tiso a Povstanie: Dokumenty,* ed. Anton Rašla (Bratislava: Pravda, 1947), 43-45.
[178] *Dokumenty*, 1112-13.

strategic interests—the Dukla Pass, supply lines to the front, German arms factories in central Slovakia—were no longer secure. German personnel and Slovak *Volksdeutche* were being terrorized and slaughtered.[179] After conferring with Ambassador Hans Ludin, President Tiso agreed to authorize a German occupation and the disarmament of the Slovak military in the east to preempt a revolt.[180] On the evening of August 29, Slovak Defense Minister Čatloš stepped to the microphone in Bratislava to explain the occupation as an intervention against the "greatest enemies of a free and peaceful Slovak nation."[181] Once again, the country was placed under martial law; Čatloš told Slovak soldiers to hand their weapons over to the Germans.[182] Citizens were ordered to welcome the occupiers, but regard anyone who sides with the partisans as a "traitor to his birth and his ancestors," bound to destroy "everything connected with Slovak freedom." All "heroic and reliable Slovaks" were supposed to "join and help the German army eradicate the partisan plague and preserve the honor and glory of our freedom and our Slovak state."[183]

The Slovak historian Ján Stanislav argues that Čatloš played a pivotal role in preparing Slovak forces for the Uprising and, despite his public reversal on August 29, he remained sympathetic to the revolt. According to Stanislav, insurgent command and political leaders in the SNC, as well as the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile, denied him a commanding role due to his autonomist sympathies and close relationship with Tiso. Under pressure from the President, and perhaps out of a belief that the military action would mean

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[179] Valdis O. Lumans, "The Ethnic German Minority in Slovakia and the Third Reich, 1938-1945," *Central European History*, vol 15, no. 3 (Sept. 1982), 292-93. Berlin also learned in August that entire villages of Slovak *Volksdeutsche* were joining the partisans as "communists." See also: Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie,* 74.

[180] *Dokumenty*, 317-18; Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend*, 179.

[181] *Tiso a povstanie*, 46.

[182] USHMM RG-57.001M.0001.00000207.

[183] *Dokumenty*, 354-55.

the pointless sacrifice of his soldiers' lives, the General agreed to deliver the speech ordering Slovak forces' disarmament.[184]

Whatever Čatloš's motivations, his speech inverted reality: the invasion closed the loop on the HSPP's pledge of fealty to Nazi Germany at Salzburg in 1940 by handing any control over Slovak affairs still exercised by Tiso and his cohort over to occupation authorities. The German Gestapo, Einsatzgruppen, and SD usurped the Slovak police and security services. SS generals Gottlob Berger and Hermann Höfle became the state's highest authorities.[185] In short order, the Nazi administrators would absorb what was left of an independent Slovak economy. Slovakia even agreed to provision occupying German forces. The Slovak presidency, the parliament, the bureaucracy, and the press were retained to give the impression of Slovak autonomy, but the government's composition was subject to German advisors' approval. Reminiscent of Salzburg, the arrival of German forces also meant renewed influence for the radicals.[186]

For civilians, the preceding months' premonitions of calamity were coming to pass. A district head from Modra, one of the few towns still reporting to Bratislava in late August, described the resulting "chaos": "People have stopped working and stand about in crowds shouting and debating."[187] Elsewhere, people went into hiding or fled for the forests.[188] In some villages, life was brought to a complete standstill. "The German occupation has paralyzed [the population] in fear and nervousness," wrote one witness, "they expect the

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[184] Ján Stanislav, "Ferdinand Čatloš v perimetri kolaborácie a odboja" in *Kolaboracia a odboj na Slovensku a v krajinach nemeckej sféry vplyvu 1939-1945*, ed. Marek Syrný (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum slovenského národného povstania, 2009), 347-52.
[185] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator,* 249.
[186] James M. Ward, "Jozef Tiso: No Saint, 1887-1947," (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, June 2008), 473.
[187] *Situačné hlásenia*, report from Modra, 260.
[188] *Situačné hlásenia,* reports from Myjava and Veľká Bytča, 263-64, 265-67.

worst [and]….are pushed past the breaking point...."[189] The Nazis' reputation preceded them: word spread that civilians would either be killed outright or dragged away to forced labor in the Reich.[190]

The German occupation no doubt brought profound terror to Slovakia, but it is difficult to discount the partisan movement's contribution to this "unhinging" of Slovak society in late August 1944.[191] Fear and hunger had already dislocated the routine practices of Slovak communities and denuded the contradictions between Ľudák statements and reality, but the guerillas had a powerful compounding effect. Their activities stirred up mass panic, enfeebled the Slovak army, and invited Nazi intervention before the MC's preparations for an uprising were complete. Air raids, supply shortages, enemy propaganda—all of these disruptions could be softened, explained away, or otherwise reabsorbed into the Ľudák cosmos. But because the structures of the HSPP's New Slovakia were in late 1944 entirely dependent on the thinning illusion of domestic independence and "splendid isolation," the party's failure to subdue the partisans and avoid occupation dealt a mortal blow to the party's legitimacy. The HSPP was forced, five years after setting the country adrift on the winds of Nazi conquest, to surrender the last pillar of its legitimacy: the promise of an unmolested home beneath the Tatras. As German SS and Einsatzgruppe divisions streamed into the country on August 29, Slovaks found themselves in an untenable situation, deeply unsure of "how to get along with life."[192] As noted in the previous chapter,

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[189] *Situačné hlásenia*, report from Modra, 260.
[190] BArch, R70 Slowakei/319; BArch, R70 Slowakei/194.
[191] Jan T. Gross, "War as Revolution," in *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949*, eds. Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 33. Gross argues that Communists in East-Central Europe in 1944-1948 successfully induced peoples to "incapacitate" or "dissolve" the ties binding them together in communities or associations. I suggest that partisan warfare worked to a similar effect, severing Slovaks' remaining connections to the Ľudák order.
[192] Sewell, "Historical Events," 845.

the Ľudáks had long since lost the ability to provide Slovaks with a collective sense of meaning; by August 29, 1944, the Slovak "Parish Republic" could no longer guarantee them order or security, either.

Conclusion

Three intersecting developments made an uprising possible in Slovakia during late 1944: the thorough moral, administrative, and economic decay of New Slovakia, the arrival of the Second World War in East-Central Europe, and an international politics conducive to the consolidation of a domestic resistance movement.

In late 1943, a small group of pre-war elites—not a deeply rooted national resistance movement—joined together in order to plan an armed rebellion against the regime. Though they held differing views on the "Slovak question," Slovak Communists, former Agrarians, Social Democrats, and even some erstwhile Ľudáks agreed in late 1943 that overthrowing the Slovak State was the only way to salvage some form of sovereignty for Slovakia after the war. Hoping to hasten a Nazi defeat, the Soviet leadership and the Czechoslovak government-in-exile eventually gave their blessing to this tiny rebel coalition, known as the Slovak National Council, despite reservations about its political character and chances of success.

In the spring of 1944, Allied air raids, supply disruptions, and the increasing likelihood of Soviet invasion began to further dislocate the already brittle political and cultural structures of New Slovakia. A Soviet-led partisan movement, which had some support in pockets of the Slovak population, was in full swing by midsummer. Partisan mayhem, sponsored in part by the Soviet Union, did much to further “unhinge” public life in Slovakia by stoking hysteria and panic. Finding themselves helpless to resolve this

escalating series of crises, the Ľudáks gave citizens little incentive to remain committed to the Nazi-allied "independent" state.

As we shall see, the Military Center's plans for the uprising were indeed optimistic and ill-fated. But their chances were also darkened by partisan warfare, which alarmed Ľudák and Nazi leaders before preparations for the rebellion had been completed. Nevertheless, the HSPP government's request for—or acquiescence to—German occupation forced a rupture with the theocratic, nationalist dictatorship that was New Slovakia. Led by the SNC, the Slovak resistance now launched an operation that they hoped would entirely remake the Slovak nation; the contours of Slovakia's political future were, however, still very much obscure.

Chapter IV.
The Slovak Uprising of 1944:
Slovak Society from Rupture to Re-Articulation

The Uprising stands as an indisputable fact
that bears a truth of immense meaning.

—Alexander Matuška

The Slovak National Uprising represents a contingent point of transformation in Czechoslovak politics and the evolution of a Slovak nation-state. For this reason, it has remained a divisive topic lending itself to various conflicting interpretations over the past several decades. Czech and Slovak Communists sought to correlate the SNU with a Soviet-led push for Communist revolution in the wake of the Second World War. Under Czechoslovak Communism, Slovak dissidents and émigrés challenged them with both liberal and right-wing nationalist interpretations of the Uprising. Variations on these frameworks came to the fore after the revolutions of 1989: in the 1990s, the SNU became suffused first with assertive ethnic nationalism, then with dreams of European integration. Museums in Slovakia today tout the "international" character of the resistance and leading scholars have called it the country's "entrée to democratic Europe."[1] The rise of Euro-skepticism has since given life to right-wing, isolationist critiques of the SNU,[2] but such

[1] Dezider Tóth and K. Kováčiková, eds., *SNP 1944: Vstup Slovenska do demokratickej Európy. Zborník vystúpení z medzinárodnej konferencie k 55. výročiu SNP, 8-10 June 1998* (Banská Bystrica: Adade, 1999), 11. See also: Ladislav Takáč et al., *We were not alone*, Banská Bystrica: Múzeum SNP, 1994.

[2] In 2014, the regional Governor of the Banská Bystrica region and head of the far-right People's Party — Our Slovakia (*Ľudová strana—Náše Slovensko* [LS-NS]) Marian Kotleba used the seventieth anniversary to publicly protest the country's membership in NATO. The following year, in a move regarded by many as a

views are confined to the margins; they are not supported by most professional historians.[3] A largely positive, triumphantly liberalist view of 1944 remains dominant in the Slovak Republic today.

This chapter explains how, in part, the course of the Uprising itself engendered such a variety of interpretations. In Chapter III, we explored how several developments in the summer of 1944 rendered the continued existence of a Slovak State untenable, inducing a rupture with the structures of the Slovak State. Here, we follow that analysis by examining the subsequent emergence of a rebel state in central Slovakia from late August to early October 1944. Begun on August 29, 1944, the creation of a revolutionary "Uprising Slovakia," governed by a small group of military and political elites, supplied the context for a kind of a brief but transcendent moment of unified opposition to Nazi occupation. The popular experience of this "collective effervescence" permitted new conceptions of, as the social theorist William H. Sewell, Jr., has written, "what is good...and what is possible" in Slovak society.[4] I conclude that what is described today as the Slovak National Uprising comprised a sequence of events which generated a re-imagining of Slovak nationhood and

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"fascist" provocation, Kotleba and his party hung black flags from the county hall during SNU anniversary celebrations. Kotleba and his party represent a faction of Slovak nationalists inspired by the legacy of Jozef Tiso and the Slovak State. "Oslavy 70. výročia SNP: Kotleba sa povstalcom do očí nepozrel, „hrdinsky" vešal transparent!" *Čas,* 30 August 2014. Available online: http://www.cas.sk/clanok/291952/oslavy-70-vyrocia-snp-kotleba-sa-povstalcom-do-oci-nepozrel-hrdinsky-vesal-transparent.html. Accessed February 4, 2016; "Pri Múzeu SNP oslavy, na úrade hanba: Kotleba vyvesil na výročie Povstania čierne vlajky." *Čas*, 30 August 2015. Accessed February 4, 2016. Available online: http://www.cas.sk/clanok/328377/pri-muzeu-snp-oslavy-na-urade-hanba-kotleba-vyvesil-na-vyrocie-povstania-cierne-vlajky.html. Accessed February 4, 2016.

[3] Kovač, "Coming to Terms,"112-14.

[4] Sewell, "Historical Events," 861. "Collective effervescence" lays at the heart of Emile Durkheim's theory of religion, described in his 1912 work *The Elementary forms of the Religious Life.* Durkheim argues that, in moments of great excitement or danger, the bonds formed between community members allowed new forms of the sacred to emerge. See: Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xix-xx.

cultural and political ideals, and novel interpretations of the Slovak past, present, and future.[5]

Touching on the Uprising's aftermath, this chapter also describes some of the ways in which war and occupation altered political and economic practices, patterns of social interaction, and demography. The historian Jan T. Gross's contention that the experience of war is "endogenous"—just as much defined by forces emerging from within societies as by occupying regimes—invites a number of questions about public life during the Uprising:[6] Where did Slovaks look for authority when confronted with uncertainty? What new forms of social organization took hold in a climate of violence and disorder? Exploring these questions brings into focus important changes to the social fabric of Slovakia unfolding in 1944-1945.

Finally, training our attention on the popular experience of these events addresses a glaring gap in contemporary scholarship on Slovakia during the war. Where nearly all previous studies have centered on elite politics—the modern heroes and villains of Czechoslovak history—I aim to provide a more inclusive, more vividly human sketch of this episode in twentieth-century history. In doing so, I aim to illuminate some of the ways in which the war transformed Slovakia, as well as the wider regions of Central and Eastern Europe.

Prelude: "Begin with the Moving"

Confusion reigned as fighting between rebel elements of the Slovak Army and the German invaders broke out on August 29-30. Rumors ran wild in towns and cities: the *Vodca* had

[5] Ibid, 844.
[6] Gross, "War as Revolution," 17.

been assassinated or taken prisoner in Germany; the Hungarian army was marching into Slovak territory.[7] Slovakia was to be incorporated into the Reich or annexed to Hungary. No words of reassurance came from Tiso until the evening of August 30, when he declared on Bratislava radio that the government, working with the German army, had taken the situation in hand. Leaning again on New Slovakia's stock themes, Tiso called for "reliability" and "hard work" to resist the "Bolshevik hordes…on behalf of the Slovak fatherland." The Ľudáks hoped to mitigate panic and desertion in the army, and Tiso, General Čatloš, and other officials issued memoranda to civil servants and soldiers claiming that only the Central Command in Bratislava could conduct military action in the name of Slovakia. The "arrival of German units on Slovak territory [did not] amount to an occupation," but rather a friendly peace-keeping mission.[8] Soldiers and civilians were warned not to fall victim to the conspiracy of "Jews and Czechs" and "wealthy Slovaks [and] Bolshevik partisans" who wanted to "enslave the nation" and "spill Slovak blood for world revolution."[9]

Golian and the MC were anxious to counter the voices from Bratislava. Army staff dashed off messages to garrisons calling partisans and soldiers to oppose the German occupation in accordance with the second, defensive variant of the uprising plan. After setting up a command post at Slovak army headquarters in Banská Bystrica, the MC had already given the secret radio signal to trigger military operations and signal their break with the central government—"Begin with the moving" ("*začnite s presťahovaním"*)—in the evening hours of August 29. Partisans and military personnel began converging on the city,

[7] *Slovák*, 31 August 1944, 1.
[8] Ibid; *Tiso a Povstanie,* 45.
[9] AMSNP, fund 9, 32/74; *Slovák,* 3 September 1944, 1.

and radio transmitters flooded the airwaves around Central Slovakia with instructions to disregard the broadcasts from the Ľudák loyalist redoubts of Prešov and Bratislava.[10]

At eleven o'clock the following morning, the MC announced a total mobilization; the operation, according to the broadcast, was a defense of Slovak territory. The army of the "Slovak homeland" was leading the "battle against the approaching German invader and its traitorous domestic helpers."[11] Golian dubbed Čatloš a traitor, rebranded Slovak units as the "Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia," and called on soldiers to "preserve Slovakia from devestation and suffering."[12] More than 45,000 Slovaks were ordered to shift their formations in defense of Banská Bystrica, the heart of a new rebel Slovakia.

The MC had taken the initiative, but figures at home and abroad were struggling over leadership of the rebellion. While some isolated Slovak army garrisons and their commands weighed dueling bids for loyalty from Ľudák state and military leaders and the MC, a chorus of voices simultaneously claimed to speak for the nation. Citing the creation of an (actually non-existent) "Central Revolutionary National Committee," a Šrobár deputy announced on Bystrica radio that the "Czechoslovak Republic [was] renewed."[13] London radio likewise insinuated that the Government-in-Exile was behind the revolt and Beneš appointed a governing delegation to administer Slovakia.[14] Other RNCs led by CPS members and partisans took over villages and towns. The largest of these, dominated by Slovak Communists and Social Democrats, formed in Banská Bystrica and declared that a

[10] Jozef Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend*, 201-202.
[11] *Dokumenty*, 365.
[12] Ibid, 357, 365; BArch, R70 Slowakei/73.
[13] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61. This intended "Central Revolutionary National Committee" resembled the London government's 1943 plan for administering Slovakia under the purview of Beneš and his cabinet.
[14] *Dokumenty*, 360; Jablonicky, *Povstanie bez legiend*, 206; Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 52; Prečan, "The Slovak National Uprising," 223.

revolution was underway.[15] Completely unaware of the SNC and its plans, leaders of "RNC Region 1" (*Revolučný národný vybor oblasť jedná*) dismissed Šrobár's power play and began organizing their own local committees to administer "liberated" Slovak territory in neighboring areas.[16] The MC, in opposition to RNC Region 1, attempted to exercise martial law in the city and its surrounds. To add to the confusion, most of the major players in the SNC were absent: Husák, Novomeský, and Lettrich were in Bratislava and would not reach the city for several hours. Šmidke was still in Moscow.

As shellfire and German air-raids ripped through the low Tatras, a political vacuum obtained. By August 31, many Slovaks had heard or surmised that a rebellion had been declared, but there could only be speculation about who was behind it, or what they intended.[17]

The Slovak National Council and the Transforming Imaginar(ies) of a Slovak Nation

Finally, after almost three days of wrangling, on the afternoon of September 1 in Banská Bystrica a new government stepped to the fore. Šrobár, who had taken up residence in the mountain town of Donovaly near Banská Bystrica, was sidelined and the RNCs were subordinated to a Slovak National Council, which had installed itself in Banská Bystrica's National Hall (*Národný dom*).[18] The SNC now began the work of statebuilding. The body

[15] Stanislav Mičev, "Banská Bystrica: Prvé štryi dni Povstania" in *Odváľujem balvan: Pocta historickému rémeslu Jozefa Jablonického*, eds. Norbert Kmeť and Marek Syrný (Banská Bystrica: Muzeum SNP, 2013), 229.
[16] Ibid, 231.
[17] The great confusion surrounding the rebellion in late August is apparent in a multitude of sources attributing it to many different actors: among them, the partisans, the Communists, Evangelicals, Jews, the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile, and the Slovak military.
[18] Šrobár, who was by now regarded by some as Beneš's factotum, eventually agreed to give up his Revolutionary National Council and recognize the authority of the SNC in exchange for membership. He came to represent (the minority) pro-London Czechoslovakist camp on the Council. See: Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati,* 14-17.

announced itself as the unified, "high organ of the Slovak resistance" with the sole authority to speak on behalf of Slovaks.[19] The "Declaration of the Slovak National Council," which was published in several newly founded newspapers and pamphlets and broadcast on the radio over the following week, rejected the Ľudák regime while outlining a program for Slovakia that took the Christmas agreement as a template: pro-Soviet, socially "progressive," committed to a renewed Czechoslovak Republic, but sensitive to the rights of a distinct, ethnic Slovak nation.[20] The concept of political parity—half "Communist," half "Civic"—was emphasized in the SNC's new incarnation.[21] At the Council's first plenum, the three most prominent resistance parties were also represented, Husák for the Communists, Ursíny for the Agrarians, and Daniel Ertl for the Social Democrats. The leadership was temporary, with "legitimate representatives" to be determined at a later date. However, despite continued confrontations with London, the SNC had defiantly established its authority on the ground in central Slovakia.[22]

Beyond the general program it laid out, the birth of this government in Banská Bystrica had pivotal implications for the short- and long-term future of a Slovak nation-state. Firstly, it produced what the American sociologist Charles Tilly has described as a "revolutionary situation." The SNC subverted the sovereignty of *both* the HSPP and the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, appointing itself the right to execute rapid,

[19] "The Declaration of the Slovak National Council" reprinted in Mičev, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944,* 124. The Uprising state accounted for roughly half the overall territory of the Slovak State.
[20] Ibid.
[21] The SNC's Board of Commissioners comprised 11 portfolios held by five members from each "bloc" plus one independent military minister for the defense portfolio. As would be their wont in the postwar period, the Communists succeeded in gaining control of the Ministry of the Interior. See: Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944,* 151.
[22] "The Declaration of the Slovak National Council"; Prečan, "The Slovak National Uprising," 225.

comprehensive changes in the Slovak political and administrative system.[23] With a large swath of territory under its control, the SNC government hoped to revise Slovakia's geopolitical standing, implying a forceful renunciation of the Slovak State and its Nazi backer. Indeed, because the very idea of an independent Slovak nation was tainted by the State's ties to the Axis, the SNC sought to construe the rebellion as proof of Slovaks' loyalty to the Republic, the Allied war effort, and "anti-fascism."

The confrontation with the "occupier" and its "domestic helpers" allowed the SNC to recapture the ideal of a discretely Slovak polity, simultaneously purging the legacy of the Slovak state, performing its own sovereignty, and countering the centralizing pressure of the London government in a future Czechoslovak state.[24] From the Slovak Communists' perspective, the rebellion may also have represented a challenge to the Beneš-Stalin-Gottwald axis in regional Communist politics. Above all, the SNC's *coup d'état* was represented in various media as a participatory "struggle" and the bridge to a new corpus of national values for Slovakia. By joining the Uprising, Slovaks were understood to have undertaken a momentous social and political transformation.[25]

This process seems to bear out Benedict Anderson's contention that nations and nationalisms are collaboratively constructed "imagined communities," brought together by means of a shared print culture.[26] Taken together with the rupture of August 29—the day the "whole nation rose together as one to drive out the German invaders"—the rebellion could

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[23] Charles Tilly, *From Moblization to Revolution* (Reading, MA: Addison Wesley, 1978), 191. Leon Trotsky called this situation "dual power."

[24] The fact that it was also written "Czecho-Slovak" in various newspapers, communiques, and pamphlets, reflects the preference among SNC members for a federated Czechoslovak Republic. See also: Dušan Kovač, "Czechs and Slovaks in Modern History," in *Bohemia in History,* ed. Mikulaš Teich (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 367-68.

[25] "The Declaration of the Slovak National Council."

[26] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), 6.

be positioned by the SNC's leaders as the "historical turning point of the Slovak nation."[27] Driven forward by the Uprising and its authors, a rapid re-imagination of a Slovak national community was now underway. Because the evolving, negotiated definition of this national community—here termed an "imaginary"—was embedded in the process of political revolution, the emergent conceptualization of Slovak nationhood and statehood during the Uprising can be described as a "revolutionary imaginary."

The First Calls to Arms

Practical exigencies informed the rhetoric and symbolism surrounding this "revolutionary imaginary." After the Germans managed to disarm two of the best-equipped Slovak army divisions in the east and several garrisons in the west, there were roughly 60,000 Slovak soldiers and 12,000 partisans on uprising territory, which now contained a population of 1.7 million on over 12,000 square miles and comprised more than two dozen Slovak districts (*okresy*).[28] Many soldiers across the country had deserted on the 29th, escaping capture or disarmament, but not all of them had fallen in with the partisans or other rebel units; their participation was seen as critical to the Uprising's chances. Several Slovak garrisons in the western part of the country deserted or refused to join the MC and the SNC government in central Slovakia, including those stationed in Bratislava, Trenčín, Nové Mesto nad Váhom, and Nitra. The Slovak historian Martin Lacko attributes this reaction to their leaders' "disinterest" and "disorientation."[29] SD intelligence reports from September 1944 point to a variety of factors, including affinity for the President and a lasting "belief in the

[27] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, 194/61.
[28] Kamenec, "Civilný sektor," 130.
[29] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944,* 84-105.

independence of a Slovak State."[30] Emanuel Frieder, a Rabbi with close ties to Slovak government circles, described more calculated attitudes in his diary from September 1944: "Some soldiers [in the west] joined the partisans, but a vast majority remained indifferent. Many citizens, fair-weather patriots, switched their allegiance within a week. They adapted rapidly to the new circumstances and, just like opportunist Slovaks, became Guardists and good friends of the Germans."[31]

Wavering support for the rebellion posed serious problems for the SNC. Civilians—many still confused and disoriented—were needed as volunteers. The SNC's central goal of liberating the country was therefore portrayed as a "matter of life and death" both politically and corporally.[32] As a CPS pamphlet had it in early September, Slovakia's "historic moment of decision" had at last arrived. The choice facing the nation was simple: either "purge the homeland for freedom...or go with the Germans on the side of the traitorous Bratislava government." As more and more territory was consumed by battles between German and Slovak forces, the SNC, the MC, and the partisans tried to convince civilians that they could no longer afford the old luxuries of apathy and "conjuncturalism." Thinly veiled threats, some laced with familiar biblical idioms, heightened the moment's urgency. People, it was warned, "will be called by the name [they] use today....if you serve the devil, the devil will surely take you!"[33]

Taunts of retribution were reinforced by a propagandized nightmare of German brutality. Rebel media organs inundated civilians—who had for years avoided the kind of atrocities seen in nearby Poland and Ukraine—with stories of slavery and torment in the

[30] BArch, R70 Slowakei/194.
[31] Emanuel Frieder, *To Deliver Their Souls: The Struggle of a Young Rabbi during the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1987), 192.
[32] *Hlas národa*, 4 September 1944, 1.
[33] AMSNP, fund 15, carton 7, 251/61.

Reich, asking "Slovaks, how will you choose? Do you wish to be taken like stolen loot to...learn the delights of slavery in German mines? Do you want your mothers and fathers to suffer beatings and hunger in German factories in order to produce weapons for the slaughter of humanity?"[34] Broadcasts recounting the "horrors of German concentration camps" warned Slovaks of a fate "more merciless than death" at the hands of the invader.[35] "Every day," reported Banská Bystrica radio in mid-September, "reports come in about the atrocities unleashed on Slovak civilians by German soldiers...everywhere the German soldier appears comes the vicious murder of Slovaks, and [he] does not show mercy to mothers, women, or children."[36] Spreading the word about the risks of a Nazi "bacillus," the SNR reminded soldiers and partisans, was the best way to stamp out apathy or any sympathy for the Slovak State and its leaders.[37] Abandoned by a traitorous government, every Slovak soldier and civilian had to rise to defend his family and his "homeland," or face calamity and slaughter at the hands of a mythical "German beast."[38] Such messages spurrred many living on "liberated" territory to join the rebels, seeing the Uprising as their best chance to avoid deportation or worse. Others, harrassed by their consciences or partisan recruiters, found their way to the stronghold around Banská Bystrica. Whatever their motivations, *SS-Führer* Josef Witiska, an *Einzatzgruppe* leader sent to crush the Uprising, confirmed that the SNC's propaganda was quite effective in winning the population over.[39]

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[34] *Útok,* 4 September 1944, 1.
[35] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, 194/61.
[36] AMSNP, fund 1, 194/64.
[37] Okresný Archív Banskej Bystrici, D1/1718.
[38] *Povstanie*, 7 September 1944, 1. The Tiso regime similarly characterized the Uprising's leaders as "beasts in human skin" who "kill innocent women and children." *Slovák,* 3 September 1944, 2.
[39] BArch, R70 Slowakei/319.

Czecho-Slovak History in a Pan-Slavic Moment

Uprising media did not play on fear and "alibism" alone. This "determined and unified struggle of the Slovak nation," as the Slovak Communist leader Vladimír Clementis described it, actually served as a historicized tableau for the renunciation of Ľudák populism and its "fascist" underpinnings.[40] In a crystalizing interpretation of both the immediate and distant Slovak past, the HSPP autonomy movement, from Munich to March 1939, became the work of a "fascist clique" that sought "to reorder Slovak life according to Nazi principles."[41] Marching in step with the Nazis, the populist party—as a malignant, alien "fragment" of society—became responsible for desecrating the peace-loving, humanistic worldview "dearest to the Slovak nation's conscience."[42] Seducing pure-hearted peasants with promises of earthly treasure and a mirage of freedom, both Tiso and Hitler, in radio "fairy tales" embellished with dramatic voices and sound effects, played the role of interloping "false prophets."[43] And just as Slovak dissidents had portrayed the Ľudák elite as Magyar agents during the Munich period, party men were now dressed as charlatans in the pay of foreign tyrants.[44] Munich was a fated, Manichean showdown wherein a "black Fascist horde" managed to "ruthlessly slice up" a "victimized Czechoslovak Republic"; the "Ľudák revolution" that followed was rated as imitative, Fascist demagoguery foisted on a blameless populace. [45]

A sanitized, de-Catholicized interpretation of Slovak nationalism (and national history) meanwhile became instrumental to the revolutionary imaginary of August 1944.

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[40] AMSNP, fund 1, 194/61.
[41] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61; *Pravda,* 6 October 1944, 1.
[42] Ibid.
[43] AMSNP, fund 1 carton 1, 195/61.
[44] *Hlas národa,* 5 September 1944, 2.
[45] *Čas,* 26 September 1944, 1; *Čas,* 27 September 1944, 1; *Pravda*, 6 October 1944, 1; AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61.

Where the HSPP had elevated Hlinka as patron saint of the modern Slovak nation, insurgent Slovakia was inscribed within the Protestant or secular traditions of the Slovak national awakening. Banská Bystrica radio extolled the patriotic virtues of "heroic" poets, lyricists, and linguists like Ľudoviť Štúr, Miroslav Hurban, and Pavol Jozef Šafárik. Samo Chalupka's 1864 epic poem, "Slay him!" (*Mor ho!*), inspired in part by the Slovak nationalist uprising in the summer of 1848-1849, emerged as the Uprising's unofficial battle hymn.[46] While leaders like Hurban and Štúr, who had fought in the 1848 rebellion, again became icons for a new nationalist rising, other awakeners like Chalupka were transmuted from literary to literal warriors for Slovak freedom. Poets and soldiers—"the best sons of the Slovak nation"—were "identical as founders of the Slovak national spirit, identical as fighters for the great Slovak people, and identical as enemies of injustice."[47] In both these frames, prostrate "Slovak doves" became "hawks and eagles" for national liberation, but this time the "invaders and oppressors" were the Germans and their Slovak handmaidens, not the Magyarizing gentry.[48] The resurrected daily *Národnie noviny*—itself a bastion of nineteenth century Slovak nationalism—made this parallel explicit by recapitulating Chalupka's work in a poem entitled "And you, slay him!" (*Aj ty, mor ho!*): "Will you stand idly by while this cannibal murders so wantonly? No, slay him! Let us all take up arms and join the battle!"[49] Janošik, the fabled seventeenth-century Slovak "Robin Hood," also lionized by the National Awakeners, joined in as an icon of the rebellion.[50] Interwoven with a nationalist sanctification of anti-German and anti-Magyar violence, the "Slovak revolution" of 1944

[46] The poem depicts a Slavic tribe's emancipation from slavery and moral triumph over an oppressive Roman Caesar.
[47] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] *Pravda*, 27 September 1944, 4.

pulled on the historical and literary threads of both the nineteenth century and post-WWI campaigns for liberal democracy and national recognition for Slovaks.[51]

The pan-Slavic spirit reflected in the Slovak nationalist canon was also mined to infuse the rebellion with ethnic piety. Where Tiso and the Ľudáks had always approached the "founding fathers" of a Slovak national identity with some unease due to their Protestantism and pan-Slavic associations with the Russian enemy in the East, Slovak revolutionaries in 1944 invoked a broad mythology of Slavic brotherhood with great enthusiasm.[52] The "Slavic consciousness" of Slovak figures like M.R. Štefánik and Milan Hodža was now highlighted.[53] Partisan brigades adopted tributary monikers ("For Slavic Freedom"), troops traded pro-Slav poetry and songs (The Slavic Voice), and the presses on uprising territory glorified recognizably Slavic (but non-Slovak) war heroes (Jan Žižka, Alexander Nevský).[54] Communist dailies like *Pravda,* as well as the homespun pamphlets of the partisan brigades, were more inclined to crown Stalin as the scion of Slavic patriotism, but "Civic" newspapers also recognized Russia as the founder of the "Slavic nation." In one new "Civic" daily*,* Stalin was the modern successor to Peter the Great.[55] Here was an (almost) apolitical, ancient, and tribal answer to German hatred and persecution: "Slovaks, mothers and children of Slava," were drawn into "a collective flowering of Slavdom" to defeat the murderous invader.[56] The "great family of Slavs" was held above particularism;

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[51] "The Declaration of the Slovak National Council"; AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, 194/61; USHMM RG 57.002M Reel 11.

[52] The Tiso regime's "betrayal" of Slavdom in joining the war against the Soviet Union in 1941 might register, after Salzburg, as the gravest blow to its credibility in the eyes of the Slovak intelligentsia.

[53] Wary of any association to a pro-Russian pan-Slavism or Czechoslovakism, the HSPP had coopted important Czechoslovak-Slovak figures like Štefánik as pure symbols of Slovak nationalism. For more detail, see: Lipták, *Changes of Changes,* 80-83.

[54] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 12, A31-92.

[55] *Čas*, 24 September 1944, 1; *Čas,* 26 September 1944, 2.

[56] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, 194/61. *Pravda*, 14 September 1944, 2. "Mothers and children of Slava" references the 1824 poem "The Daughter of Slava" by the Czechoslovak national awakener Ján Kollár. Kollár's

like a shoot or a bud in this epic "flowering," the Slovak nation was discrete yet nourished by a greater Slavic stem.[57]

Appended to the call for a Slavic renaissance was a reverence for Czechoslovakia's founders and a commitment to restoring, at least in principle, the framework of the First Republic. However, while Czechoslovakist manifestos circulated in rebel Slovakia (likely airdropped from London), most references to the state and its founders focused on their liberal-democratic and humanist credentials rather than the idea of a Czechoslovak ethnicity or a centralized state.[58] T.G. Masaryk, Hodža, and Štefánik were held up as great defenders of national virtues and of the Slavic brotherhood of Czechs, Slovaks, and Ruthenians.[59] Masaryk in particular was venerated as a "liberator," the model of resistance to German domination, and a friend of Slovakia and its people.[60] In an elegiac turn, his death in September 1937 also became a metaphor for the murder of Czechoslovak democracy, the Ľudák clique's betrayal, and the horrible Slav-on-Slav bloodletting both had supposedly engendered. All of these "tragedies" were romantically redeemed by the guns of August 1944. After grave losses—at Munich, at Žilina, in Poland, Russia, and the Protectorate—*Pravda* explained, "it appeared that the nation must perish…[but then] came news of a heroic uprising of Slovaks against the German occupier…[and] the cannon's rattle and the warrior's battle cry rejoiced…[for freedom]."[61] The Uprising, in another view, went beyond restoring the Slavic harmony lost in 1937-1938 and profaned thereafter. By resurrecting

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writings popularized the notion that Russians, Slovaks, Czechs, Poles, and other Slavs formed branches of a larger, inclusive Slavic family tree. "Slavic reciprocity," as the concept became known, was a key philosophical ingredient for the creation of the Czechoslovak state.

[57] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, 194/61.

[58] BArch, R70 Slowakei/73; *Pravda*, 14 September 1944, 1; *Čas*, 17 September 1944, 2.

[59] *Hlas národa,* 14 September 1944, 1; *Pravda*, 14 September 1944, 1.

[60] Ibid; *Útok*, 15 September 1944, 1.

[61] Ibid.

Masaryk's very spirit, the SNU reanimated a multinational but firmly Slavic Czechoslovak Republic, the ideal expression of statehood and nationhood for Czechs and Slovaks.[62]

Unity in the Highest

For all the Slovak rebels' bombast and bellicosity, the Germans did not regard them as formidable foes. The Nazi military command saw both the Slovak soldier and the general population as temperamental and undisciplined. [63] The Slovak regular was too old or inadequately trained. Other troops were considered unreliable because of allegiance to Tiso and nostalgia for the ideals of New Slovakia.[64] Commanders expected that the blueprint for crushing the rebellion, unflatteringly codenamed "Operation Potato Harvest," would take a matter of a few days. A series of early victories, along with the warm reception the Germans enjoyed in many Slovak towns, reinforced these perceptions. The SS divisions that reached the outskirts of Žilina in September, for example, were reportedly seen as "liberators," whose arrival might mean an end to the violence unleashed by partisans.[65] Moreover, almost two weeks after the Uprising had been declared, the Slovak forces had done little more than fight defensive actions toward the "iron triangle," retreating on every flank.[66] The government in Banská Bystrica was seen as isolated, weak, divided, and undersupplied.[67] Belying the SNC's pretense of authority on the ground in Slovakia, the population at home and the Czechoslovak government abroad perceived its rule as untenable and interstitial.[68]

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[62] *Čas*, 17 September 1944, 2.

[63] *Nemci a Slovensko*, 244-45, 248-49.

[64] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 115.

[65] BArch, R70 Slowakei/87. Rebel leaders worried over Slovaks' pliant behavior toward German soldiers, responding with propaganda declaring that the Germans would show no quarter to those who surrendered, and threatened quick death to anyone who failed to resist.

[66] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie*, 125.

[67] *Nemci a Slovensko*, 248-49.

[68] BArch, R70 Slowakei/87; Prečan, "The Slovak National Uprising," 223-26. Over the course of September and October, London and its representatives in the Czechoslovak Army demanded that the SNC consult them

The SNC's plenum, which by September 5 comprised 41 members, reacted to this precarious state of affairs with an air of inevitably, announcing Slovakia's membership in the coalition that was poised to liberate the country. This strategy had the effect of signaling to the London centralists—who were still making every effort to subordinate the national council to the Czechoslovak government-in-exile—that the body represented the "resistance" in Slovakia and could therefore legitimately claim leadership when the dust had settled.[69] Particularly after a joint Czechoslovak-Soviet offensive commenced in Poland on September 8 across the border from the Slovak city of Svidník, Slovakia's Uprising could more convincingly be characterized as a part of the greater European war effort, as well.[70] August 1944 became a wave in the larger swell of European antifascism, a "historical moment" of unity with co-combatants in the USSR, Rome, Paris, Warsaw, Turkey, and Romania, together pushing fascism "into the abyss."[71] The MC and the parties in the SNC were all eager to tout the solidarity of Czech, German, Russian, and French regulars and partisans in the rebel ranks, and the battles in central Slovakia became an "international affair" in which the rest of the world was both watching and participating.[72] At the crux of the "just" and "communal cause" was national honor and European belonging for Slovaks.[73]

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on all military decisions; on September 20, Beneš's deputies requested that the SNC assume the status of a "National Committee." This request was rejected.

[69] Pavol Šimunič, "Povstalecká slovenská národná rada," in *Pohľady na Slovenskú politiku: Geopolitika, Slovenské národné rady, Čechoslovakizmus*, eds. Miroslav Pekník et al (Bratislava: Veda SAV, 2000), 410-14.

[70] Over 16,000 soldiers in the Czechoslovak Army under General Ludvík Svoboda participated in the battle, which lasted until October 28. Unanticipated German resistance in the pass Dukla Pass complicated Soviet aid to the Slovak rebels and further narrowed the uprising's chances.

[71] BArch, R70 Slowakei/74.

[72] AMSNP, fund 4, carton 20, 159/72; *Čas*, 26 September 1944, 1.

[73] *Čas*, 20 September 1944, 3; *Pravda,* 16 September 1944, 1.

"We want to achieve [Slovakia's] rightful place among nations," proclaimed Banská Bystrica radio, "marching in unison toward peace."[74]

The goal of transnational unity during the Uprising was most vocally advocated by the Slovak Communists. The proletarian solidarity of Marxist-Leninist doctrine and a Russian-inspired pan-Slavic revival dovetailed perfectly with the call for a lockstep international class movement. However, CPS press organs saw the Red Army, the party, and above all Stalin, as *primus inter pares*. Stalin, at the head of over a dozen Soviet Republics, along with the archetypal (Soviet) Communist partisan, personified collective purpose against the "common enemy."[75] The special relationship envisioned for Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union, sealed in the 1943 treaty, was also seen to be bearing early fruit as the Red Army drove forward to liberate Slovak territory. Reciprocally, as the Slovak Communists grew bolder in asserting their leading position, the Uprising—as Slovakia's "second front"—became proof positive of the lasting "deep friendship" and "mutual assistance" between the Slovak nation and the Soviet Union.[76] Though less fulsome in their praise of Soviet-Slovak partnership, non-Communist representatives of the SNC could not ignore that Stalin and the USSR were leading the "national liberation" crusade and that Uprising Slovakia would soon play host to the Red Army.[77] From all vantage points in the summer of 1944, the view from Banská Bystrica was of a Soviet-ordered future.

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[74] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, 194/61.

[75] *Útok*, 7 September 1944, 1. *Pravda,* 28 September 1944, 4.

[76] *Pravda*, 24 September 1944, 1, 3; *Útok*, 30 September 1944, 2.

[77] Syrný, *Slovenskí komunisti*, 152. Unlike their counterparts, after heaping praise on their "great Slavic brother," non-Communists made a point of expressing gratitude to their "powerful friends and allies" in Great Britain and North America. *Čas*, 17 September 1944, 1.

From Unity to Party and "Revolutionary" Particularisms

Faced with a day-to-day threat of military collapse, good relations between all elements of the resistance movement were paramount. Mirroring developments in the larger war effort, the old maxim "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" had helped make cautious but willing bedfellows of the Communists and the "Civic Bloc."[78] The two factions had also found a basis for collaboration in their commitment to national rights for Slovaks. Nevertheless, an atmosphere of mutual mistrust prevailed behind closed doors. For the Communists, the Agrarians were still "exploitative landlords," while Ursíny and Lettrich were wary of Husák and Šmidke's "radicalism" and subservience to Moscow.[79]

Two major disputes complicated relations between the factions: firstly, the partisans' refusal to recognize the MC's authority, resistance to coordinated action with Slovak army forces, and their habits of murder and robbery amongst the civilian population put pressure on the Communists. Husák and Šmidke, though they in fact possessed little control over the brigades, were expected to answer for their lawlessness. Secondly, CPS deputies to the SNC accused the MC and the army leadership of cowardice and incompetence. In a climate of mutual recrimination, exacerbated by defeats on the battlefield, it was decided to reorganize the leadership of the Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia and place Soviet officers at the head of Army units, partially integrating the partisans and the regulars.[80] To counterbalance their ideological influence amongst Slovak troops (something which had raised concerns in the

[78] Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati*, 31.

[79] *Dokumenty,* 971; Marek Sýrny, "Politické aspekty Slovenského národného povstania," in *Udalosti 23. augusta 1944 v Rumunsku a Slovenské národné povstanie z 29 augusta 1944 (ich vplyv na oslobodenie Rumunska a Slovenska na ukončenie Druhej Svetovej Vojny). Zborník príspevkov z 9. zasadnutia Komisie historikov Slovenska a Rumunska (Alba Iulia, 19.-23. september 2011),* eds. Nicolae Edroiu, Eva Mârza, Marek Syrný (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum SNP, 2012), 90.

[80] These criticisms were applied to Golian himself and he was indeed unqualified. At only 38 years old, the SNC had promoted him from Colonel to the rank of Brigadier General to preempt London's preference for a more loyally "Czechoslovak" commander. On October 6, he was replaced by General Rudolf Viest, flown from London to Banská Bystrica to assume command. Nosko, *Takto bojovala povstalecká armada,* 144.

Civic Bloc since the expansion of the partisan movement in the early spring), the SNC agreed to assign teams of political commissars from each party faction to army divisions.[81]

These disputes suggest that the SNC's commitment to parity and the ideal of unity obscured sharpening internal divides. Only three weeks after the body's inauguration, constituents were distilling into two more narrowly defined organizations. A much-publicized merger of the CPS with the Social Democratic Party (SDP) on September 17, billed as another gesture of unity in the fight against the occupier, sparked panic amongst the members of the Civic Bloc.[82] This move, which foreshadowed the Communists' postwar "salami tactics," alarmed the conglomeration of Slovak Agrarians, Nationalists, and National Socialists that had been hitherto known as the "Democratic Club." The Club quickly drafted a charter for a Slovak Democratic Party (DP) and published *Čas* as their party daily. Two days after the official CPS-SDP merger, the DP declared itself to represent the non-Communist "progressive forces" in Uprising Slovakia.[83] Previously, *all* "progressive forces" had spoken and acted as one. Reviving an historical pan-Slavism and conjuring mythical hatred for an inhuman "German occupier," they had together endorsed an inclusive internal and international unity, the geopolitical primacy of the Soviet Union, and imagined a regenerated Slovak nation in a renewed Republic, fighting for its moral soul and political existence. Now, amidst the ongoing rebellion, two competing conceptions of a future Slovak society, both tied to the pivotal moment of August 29, began to emerge.

According to the DP, the "dawn of freedom" was profound, indeed. At the center of the "heroic moment of resistance" was the Slovak Christian, and the values he rose to

[81] Šimunič, "Povstalecká slovenská národná rada," 403-404, 409.
[82] *Pravda*, 17 September 1944, 1; *Hlas Národa*, 22 September 1944, 1; Syrný, *Slovenský demokrati*, 18. According to the article published in *Pravda,* the unification (which in fact really absorbed the SDP into the CPS organization) also represented a reunion after their bifurcation in 1919.
[83] *Čas,* 19 September 1944, 1.

defend were not just national or political, but, in a liberal-democratic frame of interpretation, fundamentally *human*.[84] Here, the DP's stated desire to promote a humanistic "culture" as the basic fabric of Slovak society performed important functions. Most importantly, it claimed to redress Slovak Christians' interwar grievances over Prague's secularism and lopsided economic development while distancing the party's moderate Christian nationalism from the HSPP's radical form. The Church became the arbiter of domestic peace and cooperation, as well as guardian of human rights and civil liberties. Christian tolerance, not the "political confessionalism which [had] wreaked such havoc on [the] nation," would form the "cultural politics" of a renewed Slovakia.[85] The binding force of "Love" (for nation, for God, for one's fellow man) could mend the divisions sown by the poisonous ideologies of imperialism and extreme nationalism.[86]

By placing the individual (Christian) citizen at the center of a new Slovak "culture," the DP carefully defended capitalism and property rights in a climate of increasing support for the state-sponsored socialism advocated (in their respective formulations) by both the HSPP and the CPS.[87] While their platform called for a welfare state, agrarian reform, stronger regulation of markets, and some central economic planning, the DP rejected the "utopian extremes" of Christian Solidarism, Nazism, and Marxism, promising in their stead a "golden middle way" that protected private enterprise and investment.[88] The sagacious President Masaryk's marriage of "cultural nationalism" with a "deeply scientific and warmly

[84] *Čas*, 17 September 1944, 1; AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61.
[85] *Čas*, 17 September 1944, 1; A copy of "Programové zásady Demokratickej strany prijaté v Povstaní," found in the SNA, fund Demokratická strana (DS), carton 5, was provided to the author by Marek Syrný.
[86] *Čas*, 21 September 1944, 1.
[87] SNA, fund DS, carton 5.
[88] *Čas*, 31 September 1944, 1; "Programové zásady."

humanistic" brand of socialism was seen as the recipe for repairing the Czechoslovak Republic."[89]

The DP envisioned the uprising as the beginning of a "better tomorrow" by drawing on a symbolic lexicon of "culture," "humanism" and "individualism," but it was noticeably less comfortable with the idea of "revolution."[90] Somewhat paradoxically, Democrats argued that August 29 inaugurated a "national revolution" to unseat Tiso and the Germans, but their clear interest in mediating the term's deployment—effected through radio, print, and the MC command—reveals a fear that their narrative of the uprising was vulnerable to misinterpretation or controversy. The "democratic progress" inherent to the "fight for freedom" needed to be shielded from "political speculation" and the snake oil of proletarian dictatorship and "state capitalism."[91] The Uprising was not to be construed as a moment of great social or economic upheaval, but instead an opportunity to deepen Slovak self-determination and democratic praxis. "Revolutions are not aims in themselves," explained one DP commentator, "but only temporary, necessary transitions in the life of the nation…[today's revolution] is a national one…[recognizing] that the nation belongs to its own sons, to its own blood."[92] More often, in place of "revolution," the Democrats intoned a process of national "renewal" realized within the "essence" of the Czechoslovak Republic.[93]

The enlarged CPS, by contrast, portrayed the Uprising as a direct extension of the party's political mandate. *Pravda* compared it to the Great October Revolution of 1917 and the Paris Commune of 1871.[94] Even with the moderate, nationally minded Husák at the

[89] *Čas*, 28 September 1944, 1.
[90] *Čas*, 26 September 1944, 3; AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61.
[91] Ibid; AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61.
[92] Ibid.
[93] *Národnie noviny*, 26 September 1944, 2; AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61.
[94] *Pravda*, 29 September 1944, 1.

helm, behind the "national-revolutionary" banner of the movement, currents of "Soviet Slovakia" colored the party's propaganda.[95] Class war, Communists' leading role in society, the unequaled harmony of the Soviet system—all anchoring concepts of the pre-war CPS program (with the notable exclusion of "Soviet Slovakia")—were referenced to rally the party faithful.[96] If, in the DP's view, the agents of history were the individual and the Slovak Christian, the CPS advanced in line with the working class.[97] The worker and peasant, like the Slovak nation itself, had spent the interwar period passively awaiting emancipation. Now, marching toward national equality and self-determination, they could—with "weapon in hand"—begin the project of socio-economic leveling in Czecho-Slovakia.[98] For the Slovak Communists, the foundational act of "liberation" interposed national and proletarian revolution.

Like Communist activists elsewhere in occupied Europe, the measures the party proposed for postwar Slovakia represented a reaction to Munich and the experience of Nazi domination. The demand for radical purges of Germans and their "helpers" in Slovak industry and government was part of an overarching materialist discourse. Domestic wealth stolen by the Fascist imperial class belonged in the hands of the Slovak people, or more precisely, the "Slovak working people."[99] And because Nazism was only one form of global imperialism, the de-Nazification of Slovakia and the nationalization of wealth in postwar Czecho-Slovakia were taken as the beginnings of a more equitable national and social

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[95] AMSNP, fund 15, carton 7, 114/72; *Pravda,* 27 September 1944, 1; Syrný, *Slovenský komunisti*, 150-51, 162-63. Though they did not always say it openly, Husák and Novomeský favored a federalized Czecho-Slovakia. This comparatively stalwart, nationalist position on the 'Slovak question' was still opposed by many older, more senior Comrades, as well as some Czechoslovakists in the DP.

[96] Ibid.

[97] *Pravda*, 22 September 1944, 1. *Pravda's* interpretation, there was little difference in the socio-economic position of the Slovak worker and peasant; together they constituted a Slovak working class.

[98] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61.

[99] *Pravda*, 22 September 1944, 1; *Pravda,* 27 September 1944, 1, 3.

order.[100] Capital, in a fusion of nationalist and Marxist analysis, had also bred the Czech "chauvinism" partly responsible for rending the Republic.[101] The Czech ruling class, like the Magyars before them, had exploited the Slovak lands for raw materials and cheap labor while stymying Slovakia's internal growth. The hardship, uncertainty, and "alienation" afflicting the Slovak worker and peasant resulted from the "chaotic laws of the capitalist economic system" instituted by the Bohemian industrialist and the Hungarian landed noble.[102] A federalized, de-privatized, and collectivized Czecho-Slovak "people's democracy" promised, however vaguely, to address these ills, upending the pre-war, bourgeois status quo for a "brighter, more harmonious future."[103]

The Revolution in Practice: Life under the SNC and the National Committees

By early October, a fissure had opened between Communists' and Democrats' interpretations of the Uprising and its "revolutionary" implications. The systems created to govern Uprising territory, however, better resembled the kind of society advocated by Communists. The conditions of day-to-day life were dictated by the state. Stringent rationing and supply regulations, on everything from beer to bootlaces, were imposed. SNC departments sponsored and oversaw the production and sale of all major commodities, including sugar, grain, livestock, firewood, fuel, and alcohol.[104] The MC and the army commandeered factories and mills; trade unions and committees were formed to manage and maintain production, transit, and public works.[105] The distribution of currency, the payment

[100] Ibid. *Útok*, 3 October 1944, 1.
[101] *Pravda,* 28 September 1944, 1.
[102] *Pravda,* 27 September 1944, 1; *Pravda*, 22 September 1944, 1.
[103] AMSNP, fund 15, carton 7, 114/72.
[104] Kamenec, "Civilný sektor," 131-38.
[105] Arpáš, "Každodennosť," 132-33; Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944,* 158-60.

of salaries and pension funds for soldiers and civil sevants, life insurance, and even stipends for new mothers—all fiscal matters fell under the SNC's control.

A *levée en masse* required all men aged sixteen to sixty to report for military service. Martial law engaged all other able-bodied adults to build fortifications, transport supplies and munitions, feed and care for combatants, and staff "free Slovakia's" nascent administration. In some cases, SNC authorities utilized the existing administrative apparatus of the Slovak State. The regime's banking and currency system remained largely intact, for example.[106] Elsewhere, new entities were set up, including the Office of Labor and the Commissariat of Education and National Culture, which moved to nationalize (and laicize) Slovak schools within the first weeks of the Uprising.[107] This centralization of administrative and economic activity was in part a product of necessity; only a strictly controlled, command economy could support a military campaign while provisioning the civilian population. To gain the public's trust, the SNC needed to appear capable of addressing its basic needs and preserving certain societal routines.

Local and regional National Committees (NCs), many already established by the underground CPS in the summer months, were organized to discharge the work of local governance.[108] Purchase orders, permits, and inventories from NC records show that, after installing themselves in local city halls (and sometimes pubs), these bodies were primarily tasked with provisioning and policing towns and villages. However, purges of local

[106] Attempts were made to print and distribute a new currency, but territorial losses meant that money in Uprising Slovakia actually bore portraits of Tiso and other Slovak State personalities.
[107] Arpáš, "Každodennosť," 131; James R. Felak, *After Hitler, before Stalin : Catholics, Communists, and Democrats in Slovakia, 1945-1948* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 10.
[108] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61; *Čas*, 30 September 1944, 3; *Pravda*, 30 September 1944, 2; Jablonický, *Povstanie bez legiend*, 70. The "revolutionary" quality of these bodies was accentuated in CPS publications. The Democrats more often referred to them as "national committees." Many NCs began as CPS cells and expanded to serve an administrative function. Like the SNC, the NCs were founded on the principle of democracy and political parity, though it is unlikely that these conditions were consistently fulfilled.

government were also an important priority.[109] Membership in a local NC was allowed only to those with an "uncompromised" political background, and the committees were ordered to seize the state properties and assets of all HG and HSPP officials, as well as of ethnic Germans and Hungarians.[110] Impromptu trials, adjudicated by partisans, punished Ľudák *prominenti* or interrogated civilians to determine their credentials as "good" or "bad" Czechoslovaks.[111] Village and city officials were required to swear oaths of allegiance to the new Republic, received new identity cards, and were "given the opportunity to prove themselves...."[112]

Paroxysms of hatred against ethnic Germans and other "collaborators" led to torture and murder. The SNC's lack of control in the often Soviet-dominated local NCs had particularly lethal consequences in Slovakia's *Volksdeutsche* enclaves. Public executions decreed by NC kangaroo courts or undertaken spontaneously by partisans in Spišská Nová Ves, Handlová, Sklené, and Prievidza claimed the lives of several hundred non-combatants.[113] In some cases, ethnic German men were selected for summary executions by gunshot in mass graves; in others, they were tortured and mutilated. German forces reported unearthing bodies with hands and fingers broken, "foot-soles burned… eyes put out, or skin removed."[114] Particularly for the ethnic Germans and perceived traitors who crossed paths

[109] AMSNP, fund 6, carton 12, A65/90.
[110] *Čas*, 30 September 1944, 3; *Pravda*, 30 September 1944, 2.
[111] AMSNP, fund 6, carton 12, A65/90. Such courts were also employed to judge partisans and others accused of crimes (theft, murder, desertion, cowardice) against the state. See: Kamenec, "Civilný sektor," 139.
[112] BArch, R70 Slowakei/87; BArch, R70 Slowakei/319.
[113] *Volksdeutsche* leader Franz Karamasin claimed that 1,200 Slovak ethnic Germans were killed during the Uprising. *Nemci a Slovensko,* 266. For example, Slovak historian Michal Schvarc explains how Soviet leaders were the driving force behind mass killings in Sklené in August 1944. See: "Masová exekúcia v Sklenom v širšom dejinnom kontexte" in *Pamäť národa*, no. 3 (2007): 4-14.
[114] BArch, R70 Slowakei/87.

with partisan brigades, the "Slovak national attitude" of the new "government" often served as the backdrop to ethnic hatred, rape, humiliation, and abuse.[115]

What motivated such unprecedented violence? Some Slovaks were anxious to settle scores with HG, HSPP, and *Deutsche Partei* strongmen who had benefitted financially from their positions or abused their co-nationals. Others may have seen the opportunity for personal enrichment, or hoped to paper over past acts of "collaboration" with zeal for the new order. But while it is clear that Soviet partisans and NKVD operatives frequently played starring roles in these atrocities,[116] NC leaders—many Slovak partisans and soldiers among them—were not immune to the cheapening of human life and brutalization that defined the conduct of war across the continent.

Both the SNC and NCs cultural and educational initiatives illustrate the ways in which life on Uprising territory also became charged with the ethnic, national, and ideological enthusiasms outlined in the previous sections. News of Red Army advances fed increased interest in the Russian language; after purging HG-administered schools, the NCs sponsored free Russian courses in towns and cities.[117] The SNC's Commissariat of Education and National Culture likewise organized events promoting Russian poetry and literature. These works were added to an "Enlightenment Library" for distribution to soldiers and civilians; the "library" included copies of the hundred-page brochure "Our Soviet Ally," broken into chapters like "What the Communists Want" and "Lenin and Stalin."[118]

Beginning in mid-September, a "Front Theater," led by Slovak Communists in Banská Bystrica, gave nightly, two-hour revues featuring the poetry and plays of Chekov

[115] BArch, R70 Slowakei/320; BArch, R70 Slowakei/87; BArch, R70 Slowakei/319.
[116] Scvharc, "Masová exekúcia," 9, 14.
[117] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 1, A194/61.
[118] *Hlas ľudu,* 22 September 1944, 1. These types of topics were the usual fare in several periodicals and pamphlets in Uprising Slovakia.

and Pushkin, amongst other Russian greats. The Front Theater went on to tour Uprising Slovakia, performing for thousands in towns and army encampments, and its repertoire tended to describe the world in Slovak nationalist, pan-Slavic, and Marxist terms. Dramatizations of poems from the Czech surrealist Jiří Wolker, a founding member of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, also appeared. Punctuated by "revolutionary melodies," Wolker's poetry was seen by one commentator as introducing the Slovaks to a "thoroughly proletarian mode of art…in the new cathedrals of socialist culture."[119] The group tackled works that promoted Slovak nationalism, including a Slovak take on Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Švejk*, Ján Botto's folktale-inspired *The Death of Janošik*, and the giants of Slovak romantic poetry and verse (Andrej Sládkovič, Janko Kráľ, and Samo Chalupka). Traditional Slovak folksongs and dance also took center stage.

The Uprising's potent cross-pollination of nationalism, pan-Slavism, internationalism, Russophilia, and Soviet Marxism was more than ideological imperialism or minority activism. Around bivouacked campfires in the mountains and forests, Slovak partisans joined Soviet, Polish, and Czech partisans in the *Internationale*, as well as the Czech and Slovak anthems of *Kde domov můj* and *Hej, Slováci*. Crowds gathered in central Slovakia's pubs and cafés to debate radical politics; Marxist texts and Soviet-produced newspapers and pamphlets were traded and discussed in army encampments. In cities like Banská Bystrica and Zvolen, nightly screenings of Soviet-produced propaganda films like *Stalingrad* and *She Defends the Motherland* aligned Slovaks and Soviet citizens in resilience against suffering under the Nazi jackboot.[120] Late in October, a CSS informant described the cultural scene in the rebel capital: "Films, newspapers, and books [there] all paint a powerful

[119] AMSNP, fund 1, carton 12, A31-92.
[120] Arpáš, "Každodennosť," 137.

and poignant picture of life in the Soviet Union. [The people in Banská Bystrica] see images of Soviet Russia as never before, and they are exposed to the real struggles of the Russian people."[121] Fueled above all by the danger and excitement of rebellion, the binding goal of expelling the invader, these gatherings took on a transcendent quality. In moments of collective effervescence, the celebrated cause of resistance to occupation became embedded with a diverse set of cultural and political schemas, each drawing their power from the "revolutionary" moment of August 29.

The End of the Uprising and Its Aftermath: "God Helps Those Who Help Themselves"

The territory controlled by the SNC shrank by more than half in the first week of October, leaving roughly 300,000 civilians huddled in the hills and valleys of eastern and central Slovakia.[122] The area was still defended by about 60,000 soldiers and guerillas, and the MC had received some arms and reinforcements by air, including the Second Parachute Brigade from General Svoboda's Czechoslovak Army in the Soviet Union. [123] However, the Red Army—the key variable in the MC's plan—remained bogged down in the Carpathians against stiff *Wehrmacht* resistance. The Slovak insurgents lacked the heavy weapons needed to counter tanks and the aircraft suited to contest the *Luftwaffe's* air superiority. A renewed German offensive on October 17, bolstered by fresh mechanized divisions and nearly 35,000 well-equipped and well-trained men, pushed the defenders deeper and deeper into the "Iron Triangle." Deteriorating organization, irresolute leadership, and a tenacious opponent sapped rebel morale. On October 27, after surrendering Zvolen and Brezno and facing attacks from three directions, the MC and SNC abandoned Banská Bystrica. The army and

[121] BArch, R70 Slowakei/319.
[122] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944*, 159.
[123] Takáč et al, *We were not alone,* 53-60.

partisan units dissolved, some fleeing into the mountains and others melting back into civilian life. The following day, the German military mission giddily reported that the city had fallen, and that the "Czecho-Slovak 'government' [had] fled in cowardice."[124]

While civilians in the Iron Triangle Slovak braced themselves for occupation, officials reacted to news of the rebel collapse with customary callousness and delusion. The party press reported "jubilation" and "enthusiasm" amongst the Slovak populace, grateful to be free from "Czecho-Bolshevism."[125] On October 30, as part of a ceremony to decorate German troops for crushing the rebel military, *Vodca* Jozef Tiso likewise expressed "joy" over the city's "liberation" in Banská Bystrica's Hlinka Square.[126] Tiso avoided any direct mention of the "putsch," its Slovak leaders, or the wide support it had received from the population; instead, the revolt was credited to "the greatest enemy of the Slovak nation – Beneš," "godless" communism, and treacherous Czech infiltrators.[127]

On full display was what Tiso's biographer, James M. Ward, has termed the priest-president's "addiction to deniability."[128] The Ľudák government itself had invited the occupation, but others were blamed for its bloody epilogue. "Around Slovakia, [you see] mass graves, burned-out houses, ruined bridges, the Slovak way of life destroyed, people driven from their homes," Tiso fulminated. "*This* is Bolshevism!"[129] German propaganda relished with macabre irony the coincidence of the Uprising's failure and the Czechoslovak Republic's anniversary of independence (October 28, 1918), but Tiso's focus was on the

[124] *Nemci a Slovensko*, 361.
[125] *Slovák*, 28 October 1944, 1.
[126] *Slovák,* 1 November 1944, 1.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator*, 162.
[129] Emphasis added.

future.[130] "The Slovak state has not been liquidated, nor has the Slovak nation been buried," he told a crowd of Hlinka Guards, German soldiers, and civilians.[131] Even in its death throes, the HSPP government insisted that faith, "modesty," and "diligence," would preserve Slovak "independence" as a blessed "oasis of peace" in Europe. For this promising tomorrow, Tiso concluded, the Slovak nation could thank Hitler and the German army.[132]

In reality, the end of the Uprising served above all the Nazi High Command's wishes; an artery was cleared to the front and Slovak industry was rededicated to war production. Slovak territory would for another five months serve the needs of the German army and much of the country's remaining wealth was funneled to the Reich.[133] The Slovak army was gutted and its troops disarmed. German intelligence reported 4,000 rebels killed and 15,000 taken prisoner. Though a few leaders were captured, most soldiers, partisans, and civilians traded their weapons and uniforms for mufti by the beginning of November. Many workers went back to the factories, fathers to their families, returning to their quotidian routines as quickly as they had left them.[134] German dispatches noted that, with "the nervousness passed," the economy and administration were again running smoothly.[135] The fall of Banská Bystrica had scattered the "revolutionary imaginary" of Uprising Slovakia to the winds.

For the roughly 40,000 Jews hiding, living under false identities, or holding special government exemptions from deportation, the collapse of the rebel state ushered in another deadly phase of the "Final Solution." For those Jews imprisoned in Slovak work camps, the

[130] BArch, R70 Slowakei/319.
[131] Milan S. Durica, *Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov v časovej následnosti faktov dvoch tisícročí* (Bratlislava: Vydavateľstvo Lúč, 2003), 517.
[132] BArch, R70 Slowakei/319.
[133] Dušan Halaj, ed., *Fašistické represálie na Slovensku* (Bratislava: Obzor, 1990), 21. Hallon et al, 53-61.
[134] BArch, R70 Slowakei/89.
[135] BArch, R70 Slowakei/87.

rebellion had offered a chance at freedom. Now, after joining the military or simply seeking protection in the area around Banská Bystrica after the occupation, they found themselves defenseless against *Einsatzgruppen* and other "Jew hunting" battalions.[136] Most of those captured either received "special treatment" or were sent to a transit camp in Sereď. Soon the transports to Auschwitz—having come, from the Reich's perspective, to an undesirable halt in late 1942—were renewed. Thousands more were deported to forced labor in Germany. Political prisoners, including the MC leaders Ján Golian and Rudolf Viest, met their deaths in Mauthausen or other German camps.[137]

In the areas in and around the Iron Triangle, a war of terror began to play out between partisan bands and German patrols. Starving and struggling for survival after their flight to the mountains and forests in November, the partisans raided villages and stole livestock and in some places they found succor amongst the population.[138] Elsewhere, their pillage and banditry made them feared and hated. Apparently partisan life appealed to some as a chance to run amok: the SCPC condemned those criminal elements "soiling the partisans' good name," while Slovak peasants often begged German units for protection against their looting and mayhem.[139] The Einsatzgruppen meanwhile led their own reprisal operations, targeting those areas thought to be supporting the bands. In turn, those working with occupation authorities were attacked by the guerillas. Public figures felt themselves particularly vulnerable, fearing "both reprisals from partisans and punishment by the

[136] AMSNP, fund 7, 98/88.
[137] See, for example: AMSNP, fund 7, 98/88; Halaj, ed., *Fašistické represálie,* 96.
[138] AMSNP, fund 4, 616/58; USHMM 57.001M.0406.00000121.
[139] USHMM 57.001M.0406.00000113; USHMM 57.001M.0406.00000116. According to one account, "actual partisans" represented only 30 percent of the movement. The rest merely "plundered, killed, assaulted women and children and got drunk." See: Durica, *Dejiny Slovenska,* 518.

Germans."[140] In Trenčín, for example, *SD* officials wrote of the "inordinate fear" amongst police and gendarmes, who dreaded being recognized and pursued by resistance cells in their hometowns.[141]

While the partisans could launch the occasional attack against German formations, the Einsatzguppe H, the Sicherheitspolizei, and the SD, exercised deadly authority over formerly rebel-held areas.[142] Otomar Kubala, a one-time schoolteacher and former editor of *Gardista*, became their favored Slovak collaborator. Kubala formed and commanded the Emergency Battalions of the HG (*Pohotovostné oddiely Hlinkovej Gardy* [EBHG]), which were deployed alongside German units beginning in November 1944 to hunt Jews, kill partisans, and maintain "order." With Kubala at the helm, at least several hundred Slovak troops began to play some part in acts of mass murder and "ethnic cleansing" in the fall and winter of 1945.[143]

The case of Ladislav Nižňanský, a career officer in the Slovak army turned rebel leader in the Uprising, illustrates the fluid boundries between "collaboration" and "resistance" in the Uprising's aftermath. After joining the Žilina garrison in the Uprising, Nižňanský was captured by German forces in November 1944 and then appointed to lead a reprisal squad in Abwehrgruppe 218 (known as *Edelweiss*), comprising about 130 Slovak members.[144] According to *218*'s commander, the Viennese *SS-Sturmbahnführer* Count

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[140] BArch, R70 Slowakei/319.

[141] Ibid.

[142] AMSNP, fund 9, S25/78.

[143] Along with Slovaks, Nazi killing squads employed Ukrainians, Cossacks, Azerbaijanis, and other Soviet nationals in many of these operations. The infamously brutal Dirlewanger Brigade, a German penal battalion composed of political prisoners, Nazi “asocials,” and elements of the *Wehrmacht* and the *SS*, also took part in these reprisals. Some of its members also defected to partisan units following the defeat of the Uprising. AMSNP, fund 9, carton 10, S77/91. Ivan Kamenec estimates that 13,500 Jews were deported from Slovakia by March 1945. Hundreds of others were shot and buried in mass graves. Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie*, 337.

[144] AMSNP, fund 7, 98/88. EBHG members were usually the most radical members of the HG, selected for their reliability and fascist fervor.

Erwin von Thun-Hohenstein, men serving in these battalions received extra food rations, alcohol, and cigarettes, as well as 500 crowns monthly.[145] This was, in the meager winter of 1944-1945, certainly a generous wage. However, at least in the view of one Slovak historian, men like Nižňanský were not primarily motivated by remuneration, but violence and intimidation. Subject to torture and psychological manipulation, and threatened with the murders of their families and loved ones, captured former partisans were sometimes converted into murderous agents of the occupation.[146]

Local knowledge, partisan clothing, and experience with partisan tactics gave Nižňanský and *Edelweiss* an efficacy unmatched by German units; they were able to infiltrate partisan groups and more easily penetrate partisan-controlled areas. In one encounter, *Edelweiss* lured an enemy partisan group into an ambush with cries of *"Mor Ho!"*[147] In January of 1945, Nižňanský's men, joined by heavily armed troops and tanks from the SS and the Slovak-German Heimatschutz*,* encircled the mountain villages of Kľak and Ostrý Grúň in Central Slovakia. The towns were thought to be harboring guerillas from the "Vorošilov" and "Jan Nalepka" brigades. Though their sweep on January 21 yielded only three partisans, Slovak members of *Edelweiss*—primed with schnapps—joined in the mass execution of 148 fellow Slovaks, including 48 children, all civilians. More than 60 homes and other buildings were burned down.[148]

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[145] AMSNP, fund 9, carton 4, 255/64.

[146] Marek Syrný, "Od odboja ku kolaborácii: Načrt problematiky spolupráce príslušnikov odboja so slovenskými a nemeckými orgánmi v rokoch 1939-1945 na Slovensku," in *Kolaborácia a odboj na Slovensku a v krajinach nemeckej sféry vplyvu 1939-1945*, ed. Marek Syrný (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum slovenského národného povstania, 2009), 208-209. Nižňanský certainly wasn't the only former partisan to join in the German-led reprisal actions. Syrný also documents the case of Ján Stejskal, a Slovak officer from Prešov who had worked with the Čapajev Brigade during the Uprising. After capture in November 1944, Stejskal agreed to lead and train EBHG troops in and around Bratislava. Ibid, 229.

[147] AMSNP, fund 7, 98/88.

[148] Ibid.

Elsewhere, the EBHG and German reprisal battalions dished out collective punishment for citizens' participation in the Uprising itself. The hamlet of Kremnička on the outskirts of Banská Bystrica had become a defensive outpost for the rebels in September and October of 1944, surrounded by bunkers and breastworks that had been built under orders from the local RNC. From early November to January, 747 Slovak soldiers, partisans, Communists, Jews, and civilians (including 269 women and children) were shot into anti-tank ditches and other makeshift mass graves (railroad embankments were frequently used) in the vicinity.[149] Kľak, Ostrý Grúň, and Kremnička were not isolated incidents: the Slovak historian Dušan Halaj estimates that 5,000 people were swallowed up by such killing actions in central and eastern Slovakia after the Uprising.[150] In total, nearly 100 villages were razed and more than 200 mass graves were uncovered.[151]

As the occupation dragged on, political life in Slovakia became a matter of performance. The *SD* estimated in late November that "90 percent of population [was] hostile to the Germans," but few were willing to declare it publicly.[152] Yet, where a "wait-and-see" mentality had prevailed in the summer months, more delicate acts of dissimulation were now employed. As they awaited the Red Army's imminent arrival, civilians and officials balanced the need to survive life under the occupier against the desire to avoid his successor's disfavor. For some, this meant cutting ties with regime comrades or sheltering partisans and fugitive Jews. Others gambled on German protection, turning in Jews and informing against the bands.[153] Excepting the clashes between pockets of EBHG and

[149] Halaj, *Fašistické represálie*, 113.
[150] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944*, 179.
[151] This total includes the southern areas annexed by Hungary during the war. See: Halaj et al., *Fašistické represálie*, 3-4.
[152] BArch, R70 Slowakei/89.
[153] Lacko, *Slovenské národné povstanie 1944*, 167.

resistance fighters, however, most Slovaks spent the final months of the war in a sort of socio-political hibernation. Interest in HSPP initiatives disappeared as the population retreated into "lethargy"; opposition to German rule was confined to sporadic partisan attacks on convoys.[154] "The broad mass of the Slovak population shows indifference to all events...there is no concern for communal matters," wrote one SS officer. "All worries of the average Slovak relate to the present...and his plans for the future revolve only around his own interests."[155]

For their part, Ľudák leaders spent the Slovak State's final days trying to stamp out the forces of "reaction." On January 3, 1945, the Slovak State's supreme court condemned six of Uprising Slovakia's leaders to death in absentia.[156] A purge of the Slovak parliament, justified under the pall of anti-state conspiracy sparked by the August rebellion, interned every third Slovak senator on charges of treason. Slovakia's newly appointed Prime Minister (and Tiso's cousin) Štefan Tiso claimed that these measures served the "interest of the nation."[157]

Still, for some party members, the government was not doing enough to protect "independence" and punish enemies. In the spa town of Piešťany, radical Ľudák deputies gathered on January 14 to draft a memorandum calling for stronger ties with Germany (!) and a more merciless approach to the "putchists," Czechs, and Jews. Štefan Polákovič, the HSPP's chief intellectual, declared the conference's motto "For the life of the nation, for the survival of the state." Other slogans urged Slovaks "into battle alongside Nazi Germany."[158] At Hitler's behest, Tiso the next week ordered a general mobilization of the remaining

[154] *Nemci a Slovensko*, 435-37.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Július Bartl, *Slovak Chronology and Lexicon* (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2002), 146.
[157] Martin Lacko, *Slovenská republika,* 180-81.
[158] Ibid, 181.

Slovak armed forces (named the *Domobrana* or "home guard"). Slovak civilians, many of whom had only months before enlisted in building defenses on rebel-held territory, found themselves press-ganged into work battalions digging trenches to thwart the Red Army's advance into Slovakia.[159]

As the front arrived in midwinter, the mood in eastern Slovakia reflected neither the belligerence nor the zest for retribution voiced in "The Young Ľudák Memorandum." Since August, ruin, misery, and mass evacuations had descended over the region. German troops stole or killed livestock and destroyed Slovak infrastructure as they retreated; cold weather, poor sanitation, and inadequate nutrition sparked a deadly typhus epidemic.[160] Allied bombs leveled Slovak towns and villages, leaving thousands homeless and killing hundreds.[161] "I wanted to cry when I saw the naked and barefoot children, the old, grey pensioners […] sleeping in heaps of straw, the broken women begging for bits of bread," wrote one observer. "This is Stropkov today, much like [the entire region]…."[162]

A Soviet-led coalition consisting largely of Romanian troops, joined with the First Czechoslovak Army under General Ludvík Svoboda, made slow but steady progress through the country as spring approached.[163] Moving in a series of thrusts from three directions, the advancing armies grew in size as partisans and Slovak troops fell in with them.[164] Despite facing stiff resistance from Nazi armored divisions, Prešov was liberated in January, Banská

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[159] Ján Korček, *Slovenská republika 1943-1945: K pôsobeniu mocensko-represívneho aparátu a režimu* (Bratislava: Ministerstvo obrany SR, 1999), 182.
[160] Hallon et al., *Vojnové škody*, 62, 115. In 1945, over 4,000 people in eastern Slovakia died of typhus.
[161] Lacko, *Slovenská republika,* 194. One such raid killed as many as 350 civilians in Nitra on March 26, 1945.
[162] *Hlas ľudu*, 11 December 1945, 1.
[163] An estimated 850,000 soldiers of the First and Fourth Romanian Armies participated in the liberation of Slovakia. Ukranian and Czechoslovak contingents contributed another 32,000. See the article "Osvobozování Slovenska vyvrcholilo 4. dubna v Bratislavě" published by *Česká televize,* 4 April 2014. Available online: http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ct24/svet/1516254-osvobozovani-slovenska-vyvrcholilo-4-dubna-v-bratislave. Accessed January 25, 2017.
[164] Vladimír Segeš, *Slovensko: vojenská kronika* (Bratislava: Perfekt, 2007), 135.

Bystrica on March 25. By early April, Bratislava had fallen and most high-ranking Ľudáks had surrendered or fled. Tiso delivered a final broadcast to the public. “The Slovak State [still exists],” he claimed, "because its president, government, and organs of state administration...[still] live and carry out their [official] functions."[165] His regime had gone abroad, he continued, “with the pallium of the Slovak nation—the idea of Slovak statehood—in order to protect it….”[166] Though the Slovak president—and now alleged war criminal—was captured in June of 1945, Tiso's dream of Slovak statehood would remain perhaps the most enduring legacy of his six-year reign.

Conclusion

The MC's declaration of a rebellion against the Slovak State and invading German forces on August 29, 1944, allowed the Slovak National Council to proclaim a renewed Czechoslovak (or Czecho-Slovak) Republic in Slovakia on September 1. Taken together, these revolutionary acts—subverting the authority of both the Ľudák regime and Beneš's exiles—sought to install domestic leaders as the country's only legitimate government and win the country acceptance amongst the war's likely victors. Though it was composed of only a small group of political and military elites, the SNC managed to amass an army of more than 100,000 soldiers and partisans; it also installed a state apparatus governing more than 1.7 million inhabitants on 12,000 square miles of territory in central Slovakia. Hundreds of thousands of Slovak civilians supported the military campaign for nearly two months, laboring in factories, producing weapons and supplies, caring for soldiers and partisans, and staffing the administration of a full-fledged civil bureaucracy.

[165] SNA, NS, 6/46, 53. Quoted in Ward, “No Saint,” 488.
[166] Ibid, 489.

More significantly, the formation of a rebel state stimulated a process of symbolic generation and socio-political re-imagination. Amidst the chaos and emotion of rebellion, the administrative and spatial framework of the SNC's state provided the opportunity for citizens to advance novel articulations of cultural, political, and ideological schemas in Slovak society. Marrying the celebrated act of resistance against the invader—symbolized by the "revolutionary moment" of August 29—to a variety of social and political ideals, the state and its political leadership fostered a multivalent "revolutionary imaginary" of the Slovak nation. In the interplay of SNC media and the energy of collective action, life and deed in Uprising Slovakia became infused with new conceptions of what really exists (the people united in resistance to foreign invasion); what is right and good (internationalism, pan-Slavic solidarity, Soviet partnership, democracy); and what is possible (national rights for Slovaks in Czechoslovakia and a "better tomorrow"). Inspired by some configuration of these ideals and sometimes aided by the civilian population, underground NCs, CPS cells, and partisan brigades kept up their opposition to the Germans and Ľudák loyalists after the fall of Banská Bystrica in late October until the end of the war.

When it came to identifying the specific features of a "better tomorrow" for Slovakia, Democratic and Communist factions in the SNC articulated differing visions. The Democrats projected a regenerated Slovak *demos* guided by liberal humanism, Christianity, and the democratic socialism associated with Tomáš G. Masaryk.[167] Communists advocated "revolutionary" transformations: the nationalization of wealth, agricultural collectivization, Czecho-Slovak federation, and thorough purges of Germans and Magyars. Nevertheless,

[167] The Democrats' program shared much with Masaryk's design for the first Czechoslovak Republic, minus the emphasis on a unitary Czechoslovak ethnic identity.

both groups identified August 29 as the foundational “event” from which these divergent visions must proceed.

If Uprising Slovakia under the SNC and the MC can be taken as a prototype of any new "imagined community," the conditions of occupation and mass violence helped to mold it more according to the Communists’ vision. The Uprising state, not unlike the Slovak State before it, prefigured developments in the postwar Republic and beyond. Mass mobilization, the supremacy of the state, "salami tactics," and the politicization of everyday life blurred distinctions between a popular rebellion and socio-political engineering of the kind seen across the Eastern Bloc. In the persecution and murder of ethnic Germans, Magyars, and “collaborators,” for example, the Uprising also foreshadowed the expulsions and “ethnic cleansing” launched in the months and years following the war. This suggests that the Uprising, continuing a process begun by the Ľudáks, furthered the ethnic "Slovakization" of the country.

These events had a profound impact on Slovaks' modes of political engagement, as well. As they weathered a series of traumas from the summer of 1944 to the spring of 1945, the majority of civilians were forced to adopt strategies best suited to securing individual survival. This could mean abandoning former ethnic, political, and spiritual affiliations or rapidly embracing new ones. Not for the last time, the upheaval ushered in by occupation and rebellion drove Slovaks to seek safety amidst a maelstrom of ideological and political contradictions, instability, and human suffering. Such experiences perhaps nourished a calculated willingness to adapt to rapidly changing political currents in the interest of survival.

We must reject the tendency—central to almost every interpretation of the Slovak National Uprising—to apply unambiguous meaning or singular motivation to what transpired during late 1944 in central and eastern Slovakia. Instead, the Uprising is best understood as a historical event implying a deep cultural, social, and political rupture, punctuated and mediated by *various* interested actors in *various* ways. Was the SNU a symbol of a Slovak nation's rejection of Ľudák populism and fascism in favor of Czechoslovak democracy? A Czecho-Bolshevik gambit to destroy a legitimate national government? A popular movement for Soviet-style Communist revolution? In the months following the rupture of August 29, it could signify many things to many different actors. But the power to define and consolidate the "true" meaning of the rebellion—*the* Slovak National Uprising—would fall to the leaders of the postwar state.

Chapter V.
The Afterlives of the Slovak National Uprising in Postwar Czechoslovakia, 1945-1989

> *....[Europe] is far from achieving a comprehensive analysis of the years immediately following the Second World War. The memory of the period is incomplete and provincial, if it is not entirely lost in repression or nostalgia.*
>
> —Hans Magnus Enzensberger

The end of the Second World War seemed to promise a new beginning for Europe. For Slovakia, however, 1945—a juncture scholars have sometimes characterized as the continent's "year zero"—was in many ways only an illusive reset.[1] The leaders of the restored Czechoslovak Republic were once again tasked with bridging the internal contradictions that had long defined the state. To the polarities of Slovak nationalism and Czechoslovak centralism, of faith and secularism, were added a confrontation between proletarian revolution and "bourgeois reaction." And as the relief and optimism of peace and liberation faded, lingering debates over a shared Czechoslovak national culture, economic and social policy, and the question of national rights for Slovakia were again at the center of public life.

Despite its clear and persistent relevance to the above debates, there has been scant effort among scholars to decipher the ways in which the history of the Uprising revealed

[1] Ian Buruma, *Year Zero: A History of 1945.* New York: Penguin, 2013; John Lukacs, *1945: Year Zero.* New York: Doubleday, 1978.

itself in the struggle for a Czechoslovak present.[2] Locating the Slovak National Uprising as a subject of particular importance in Czechoslovak society after 1945, this chapter explores how various actors invoked the wartime resistance and its perceived legacy during three key periods of postwar transformation. Through the reestablishment of a Czechoslovak state and the subsequent struggle between Communists and Democrats in Slovakia (1945-1948), the consolidation of the Soviet-backed Czechoslovak Communist regime following the coup of February 1948 (1948-1963), and the liberalization and subsequent "normalization" of Czechoslovak society around the Prague Spring (1963-1972), evidence demonstrates that the SNU emerged as a potent form of discourse mobilized by individuals and organizations to construct and confirm relationships of power in Slovakia and the wider Republic. This discussion indicates, moreover, that following the Second World War the SNU became enmeshed in iterative articulations of cultural and political structures in Slovakia, suggesting comparisons with the legacies of "anti-Fascist" uprisings in other countries in the Soviet sphere of influence.

Czecho-? Reborn in Košice and Banská Bystrica, 1945

As the Slovak State ignominiously expired in April 1945, the political structures of a renewed Czechoslovak Republic in Slovakia were already coalescing. On April 4, 1945, the same day that the Ľudák capital was occupied by the Red Army, the Slovak National

[2] Notable exceptions include: Bradley Abrams, "The Politics of Retribution: The Trial of Jozef Tiso in the Czechoslovak Environment," in *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath*, eds. István Deák, Jan T. Gross, Tony Judt (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Miroslav Michela and Michal Kšiňan, "The Slovak National Uprising," in *Communists and Uprisings: Ritualisation of Remembrance of the Anti-Nazi Uprisings in Central Europe, 1945-1960*, eds. Michal Kšiňan et al. (Kraków, Towarzystwo Słowaków w Polsce, 2012); Elena Mannová, "Slovenské narodné povstanie a politická pamät" in *Z dejin demokratických a totalitných režimov*, ed. Edita Ivančiková (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2008); Adam Hudek, *Najpolitickejšia veda: Slovenská historiographia v rokoch 1945-1968* (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2010).

Council welcomed a Czech delegation, led by President Beneš and CPC chairman Klement Gottwald, to the eastern Slovak city of Košice.[3] The document they ratified the following day outlined the plans for a new Czechoslovak democracy that was soon dubbed the Košice program. But the system of party representation, the "National Front of Czechs and Slovaks," had been in the works for months. During the Uprising, a delegation of the Slovak National Council had traveled to London to tease out the contours of Slovakia's position in the new Republic; talks between Czech party leaders, Stalin, and SNC representatives continued in Moscow in February and March.

An Uprising SNC delegation (composed of Husák and Novomeský for the Communists; Ferjenčik, Šrobár, and Ursíny for the Democrats) approached the talks with clear objectives in mind. According to a memorandum issued at the Moscow summit, the Council expected "a binding promise....[that the] future constitutional relationship of the Slovak to the Czech nation is carried out on the basis of equality and agreement of both nations... [and that] the Slovak National Council wields complete legislative and executive power in Slovakia."[4]

For the SNC members, the mandate for some form of Slovak autonomy was the payoff for their own inter-party alliance and the partnership with Beneš and the other London exiles begun in 1943. After helping to launch the rebellion in 1944, they sought tangible gains from what had turned out to be a largely symbolic action.[5] As the "organ of

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[3] H. Gordon Skilling, "The Czechoslovak Struggle for Liberation in World War II," in *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 39, no. 92 (Dec., 1960), 195.

[4] *Cesta ke květnu: Vznik lidové demokrácie v Československu do února 1948*, vol I., eds. Miloš Klimeš, Petr Lesjuk, Irena Malá, Vilém Prečan (Praha: Nakladatelství československé akademie věd, 1965), 367.

[5] The Slovak historian Ľubomír Lipták was among the first to posit that the Uprising's effect on the larger war effort was minimal. Like other Slovak scholars in the post-1989 era, he argued that its most important outcomes were: Slovakia's transformation from an Axis to an Allied state, the death of Slovak populism, and a

the Slovak revolution" forged in Banská Bystrica during the heady days of September 1944, the SNC projected its postwar push for recognition through an aura of Uprising glory.[6] Slovak representatives in Moscow argued that the promise of self-government for Slovakia reflected "the principles agreed upon by all components of domestic resistance....[the same] principles that brought together the healthy forces of the Slovak nation in our celebrated uprising." Uprising Slovakia's charter, the September 1, 1944 "Declaration of the Slovak Nation," framed the SNC's positions in these negotiations. The Slovak delegates also professed a Czecho-Slovak patriotism that, in light of the Ľudák-led secession from the Second Republic, would have otherwise carried little force.[7] The leading Slovak Communist on the SNC, Gustáv Husák, cannily referenced the Uprising in pressuring other National Front representatives to accept an "equal with equal" (*rovný s rovným*) arrangement between the two nations:

> We will not in any way intervene in Czech affairs, but here we have to argue on behalf of internal, Slovak matters.... Kindly take note: there are 60,000 people in the army and in partisan divisions who put everything on the line, not only for Slovakia, but also Czechoslovakia.... What do you think the people were fighting for? To go back to 1938?[8]

There is other evidence that the mantle of wartime resistance gave the SNC a place at the bargaining table and supported a reassessment of Slovakia's status in the Republic. The new government program, published on April 5, 1945, made explicit in its first paragraph that only those who "had led the national struggle for liberation" would play a part in

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new level of popularity for the Slovak Communist Party. See: Ľubomír Lipták, "Slovenské národné povstanie" in *Slovensko v dvadsiatom storoči* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2011), 242-60.

[6] Skilling, "The Czechoslovak Struggle," 195.

[7] *Cesta ke květnu*, 368.

[8] Ibid, 435.

postwar politics.[9] Indeed, this is exactly the case the Council's delegation had made in its September 1944 audience with Beneš in London. According to records of those meetings, after reviewing the SNC's proposals for joining the government, a Czechoslovak state council led by Beneš and the Czech jurist Prokop Drtina agreed that "the battle in Slovakia...shall not be in vain and that from the sacrifice of [Slovak combatants] shall come a...genuine homeland for all Czechs, Slovaks, and Subcarpathian Ukrainians...."[10]

Six months later, Beneš recited the same line of reasoning as he arrived in Košice. Receiving a warm and ceremonious welcome, the President paid tribute to the Slovak underground and the partisan movement as he detailed the Košice document, which included a "special charter" recognizing Slovakia as a "nationally independent nation," and lauded the importance of Prague's wartime partnership with the SNC.[11] This special charter arrogated power over Slovakia's internal affairs to the SNC and its five-member Board of Commissioners.[12] In keeping with its reputation as the embodiment of the Slovak resistance, the men appointed to that body in April 1945 were, down to the last member, those who had fought in the rebellion or served in the Uprising government.[13] The same was true for almost every other high-ranking member of Slovakia's new political class.

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[9] United States National Archives and Records Administration (USNA), 860F.01, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, February 14, 1945 – September 23, 1949.

[10] *Cesta ke květnu*, 279.

[11] USNA, 860F.01, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, February 14, 1945 – September 23, 1949.

[12] *Cesta ke květnu*, 279. Beneš and Gottwald stopped short of granting Slovakia constitutional guarantees of parity. The SNC was recognized as the representative of state power in Slovakia, but the Košice program did not outline its particular responsibilities and competencies in detail. Federalization was neither accepted nor outright rejected. Gottwald tried to placate the SNC with the publication of a so-called "Magna Charta of the Slovak Nation," noting that "Slovaks should be lords of their homeland just as Czechs should be lords in their own." *Slovenské národné orgány, 1943-1968,* eds. Elo Rakoš and Štefan Rudohradský (Bratislava: Slovenská archívna správa, 1973), 548. See also: Michal Barnovský, "The Slovak Question, 1945-1948" in *Slovakia in History*, eds. M. Teich, D. Kovač, and M. Brown (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 234.

[13] *Slovenské národné orgány,* 496-97.

While the Uprising was essential to arguments for Slovakia's honorable and equitable return to Czechoslovakia, it was certainly not the only far-reaching feature of the sixteen-point Košice Program. The Canadian historian H. Gordon Skilling argued that the program marked the beginning of a "revolution from above."[14] Even as Slovaks were promised a new stake in a Republican democracy, power was concentrated in the hands of a few party leaders and President Beneš, who ruled by decree through much of 1945. The banning of several pre-war political parties seen as tainted by fascism, plans for the nationalization of industry, land reform, population transfers and resettlement, trials of German and Hungarian collaborators, a reorientation of foreign policy to the East—all these policies were instituted "without an express mandate from the people."[15] The shift toward what Beneš called "socializing democracy" may have been in line with the European *Zeitgeist*, but it did not occur democratically, at least not prior to elections set for an as-yet undetermined date.[16]

When we consider the previous year's events in Slovakia, Beneš's vision of a top-down, *postwar* process of transformation in Czechoslovakia recedes from view. Indeed, as I suggested in the previous chapter, the Slovak Uprising had helped set the stage for some of these changes months before the London and Moscow talks, the Czechoslovak delegation's arrival in eastern Slovakia in April, or even the end of the war in May 1945. It was the rebellion begun in August 1944 that permitted the very formulation of a new Slovak government. The Uprising SNC's September declaration read like a preamble to the Košice

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[14] H. Gordon Skilling, "The Break-Up of the Czechoslovak Coalition, 1947‑8," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science,* vol. 26, no. 03 (Nov. 1960), 397. The remaining Czech parties included: The Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party, the Czechoslovak Communist Party, and the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party. The two distinctly Slovak parties were the Democratic Party and the Slovak Communist Party.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Eduard Beneš, *Democracy Today and Tomorrow* (Prague, 1946), 268-71.

document, declaring loyalty to a joint Republic, making progressive reforms the goal of domestic policy, calling for the punishment of "traitors," and proclaiming reverence for Slavdom, Stalin, and the Red Army.[17] And, as observed in Chapter IV, the dictates of the September declaration were born out in Uprising Slovakia during its brief tenure.

As an episode of the larger war, the SNU had reshaped Czechoslovak politics in other ways as well. Months of fighting between rebel forces and the Germans (and their Slovak helpers) resulted in a politicization of public life and introduced Slovaks to the parties that would dominate the political stage for the foreseeable future. The Democratic Party itself was a product of the rebellion, pieced together from elements of the Agrarian, Slovak National, and Slovak People's parties, and had solidified its platform during Uprising Slovakia's brief tenure.[18] The Slovak Communist Party, which had splintered from the CPC after the Czech lands fell under direct Nazi control in the early spring of 1939, also used the Uprising to broadcast its program and expand its organizational reach.

The system of district National Councils (NCs) installed by the SNC in September 1944, which had roots in the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Soviet system of Lenin's Bolsheviks, seemed to benefit the CPS in this regard.[19] The NCs survived underground after the fall of Banská Bystrica and were expanded across the Republic as the war drew to a close.[20] In August of 1945, a CPS report estimated that Communists held sway in 43 of 66 total district NCs. Their advantage in local representation, the report concluded, well

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[17] "The Declaration of the Slovak National Council," reprinted in Mičev, *Slovenské národné povstanie,* 124.
[18] Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati,* 171-72.
[19] Stanislav Sikora, "Národné výbory a vývoj na Slovensku 1947-48," in *Február 1948 a Slovensko: Zborník z vedeckej konferencie*, ed. Ondrej Podolec (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2008), 422.
[20] According to one estimate, nearly 5,000 local and district NCs were formed between August 1944 and August 1945. As discussed in the previous chapters, many were founded by partisan units and their leaders. See: J.F.N. Bradley, *Politics in Czechoslovakia, 1945-1971* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 7.

exceeded the actual basis of support for the CPS amongst district populations.[21] The reasons for this discrepancy are opaque, but one possible explanation lies in the party's higher degree of localized organization during the Uprising.[22] It is also possible, as a State Department source suggested, that Slovak Communists were installed with help from occupying Soviet forces.[23]

These developments drove changes in local and regional administration, economic and social policy, and demography in manifold ways and will require more detailed future analysis. What emerge more immediately, however, are some of the ways in which the direction and structures of postwar government in Slovakia proceeded from the construction of the Uprising's "true story." Beginning with the Košice program, ideas and beliefs predicated on various interpretations of these historical events would continually be deployed to validate and challenge forms of political power in the new Republic.

The SNU as a Symbol of Political and National Unity in 1945

The SNC and its constituent parties rapidly made the SNU a touchstone of their platforms and organizational identities.[24] Slovak politicians enthusiastically embraced Uprising mythology in part because it supported a publicly acceptable form of Slovak nationalism (*vis-à-vis* the tainted populist variety) and validated a push for greater Slovak sovereignty, both of which had grown increasingly popular since the 1920s.[25] As DP leaders

[21] Michal Barnovský, *Na ceste k monopoli moci* (Bratislava: Archa, 1994), 60, fn. 23.
[22] Sikora, "Národné výbory," 422-23.
[23] A report compiled by the US Department of State alleged that Communist activists in the eastern district of Michalovce worked aggressively, with the help of Red Army authorities, to intimidate and exclude non-Communists from local NCs after liberation. USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, March 28, 1945 – December 22, 1947.
[24] The term "Slovak National Uprising" appears as early as October 1944 in CPS communications, but does not seem to have been widely used during the rebellion itself. Other monikers were prevalent, including the "Slovak rising," "the uprising," and in statements from Beneš, "the Slovak revolt."
[25] Felak, *After Hitler*, 5.

stated throughout 1945, for example, the SNC's chief goal should be to "protect the gains of the SNU" by advancing Slovak national rights in the National Front.[26] Despite abandoning calls for a Czecho-Slovak federation under pressure from the CPC, the CPS, too, drew a direct line from the party's role in the SNU to Slovakia's new status in the Republic.[27] CPS deputy secretary Karol Šmidke was not alone in claiming that the SNU embodied the bond between the new Slovak national organs and Slovakia's "national will." The SNC's formation and the achievement of "equal with equal," he asserted in June of 1945, were possible because the "entire Slovak population" had joined the CPS and the DP in a "national and nationwide" pursuit of Slovak liberation.[28]

In the summer of 1945, the SNU and its putative legacy became for the first time in the postwar period a vehicle for advancing particular political and social ideals for a future society. This was, at least in the DP's view, a function of the event's transformative power: the Slovak Democrats sometimes referred to the "Slovak revolution" as a "political, economic...social and cultural shift" and a "rupture with the evolving course of life" in Czechoslovakia, while repudiating the "excesses and tumult" associated with more radical revolutions.[29] In the months before the end of the war, the CPS had treated the Uprising as the first act in a Marxist revolutionary drama. In the latter months of 1945, however, an increasing emphasis on reform and renewal—of justice, democracy, economic revitalization, and above all, national unity—had come to dominate both parties' rhetoric about the future. The message of unity was echoed in the statements of political figures across the continent

[26] Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati,* 261, 267.
[27] After the Slovak Communists acquiesced to CPC hostility toward the federalism at a May summit, there was insufficient support for the initiative on the SNC. The so-called First Prague Agreement of June 2, 1945, concluded between the National Front government and the Council verified the Council's executive power over Slovak affairs, but precluded any possibility of federation. Barnovský, *Na ceste,* 45.
[28] *Partizán,* 23 June 1945, 1.
[29] *Čas*, 26 August 1945, 2.

in 1945; as efforts turned from freeing Europe to rebuilding it, leaders sought opportunities to engender consensus and cooperation. Notably, for Czech and Slovak Communists, like their counterparts elsewhere in the region, radical revolution appeared for the moment out of reach. Though it is unclear whether they did so in accordance with Stalin's orders or their own conviction, the Communists tended to discuss the SNU as the basis for continued multiparty and international cooperation, as well as a symbol of collective renewal.

The Uprising's first anniversary celebration on August 29, 1945, offered an occasion to transmit and sanctify these ideals before a national audience. In vanquishing the threats of internal division and authoritarianism, the DP daily *Čas* remarked in the run-up to the August festivities, "[the SNU] will always be an occasion to return to those acts by which….we protected and laid a firm basis for the integrity and indivisibility of the Czechoslovak Republic." [30] Several days of fanfare in Banská Bystrica that month, reportedly attended by 50,000 citizens, featured elaborate tributes to the Allies and energetic oratory from President Beneš, Šmidke, the head of the National Front Zdeněk Fierlinger, and the Slovak partisan hero Viliam Žingor. The town's main square, upon which the crowds gathered, was rededicated to the Uprising.[31] The effect of the speeches, according to the Slovak military weekly *Bojovník,* was not only to demonstrate to the world the "eternal ideals of August 1944," but also "to dedicate [the nation] to the work of reconstruction."[32] Laurence Steinhardt, the US Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, who was in attendance,

[30] *Čas,* 29 August 1945, 1.
[31] Banská Bystrica's main square thus made its third transformation in less than thirty years, having taken Masaryk's name after 1918 and Hlinka's in 1939.
[32] *Bojovník*, 31 August 1945, 1.

remarked on the "extremely congenial atmosphere" of the occasion. All those present, he observed, earnestly pledged "the fullest cooperation" in the work ahead.[33]

There were good reasons to feel, as another observer had it, "optimistic and elated" over the future prospects for a Slovak nation.[34] With fascism defeated, a country reclaimed, and promises of good will among the Republic's leaders, parties in both the Czech lands and Slovakia were coming together despite ideological differences. In July, the DP and the CPS followed an example set by the CPC, the Czech National Socialists (not be confused with the Nazi Party), and the Czech Social Democrats by issuing a declaration promising unity in all policy matters.[35] Husák, representing the CPS, declared in an address to the Democratic Party congress that month, "cooperation between our parties is the cornerstone upon which we must build."[36] The framework of the National Front and the decisions of the government were accepted by both parties, despite occasional differences of opinion, and the spirit of bipartisanship established in September of 1944 seemed to be holding up.[37]

Consensus, however, cleaved to some degree along national lines. Bonded by their wartime partnership, the DP and CPS were in agreement on binding legal declarations on Slovak national rights. The Czech parties meanwhile remained suspicious of their "separatist" motives. Continually frustrated with Beneš's and the National Front's slow action on aid to repair Slovakia's decimated infrastructure, as well as still-wanting constitutional provisions for fuller autonomy, both Slovak parties combined efforts to

[33] USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, March 14, 1945 – December 31, 1946.
[34] *Čas*, 28 August 1945, 1.
[35] Suzanne Polak, "In the Spirit," 80-81.
[36] Ibid, 92.
[37] Skilling, "The Break-up," 398-99.

challenge Prague policy in the press, the Provisional Assembly, and public meetings.[38] When Czech commentators suggested that the SNC was trying to undermine the President's authority in December, DP chairman Ján Ursíny took to the airwaves, citing the SNU as evidence that Slovakia was integral to the Czechoslovak state, yet nationally distinct. "The Slovak rising is the best testament that Slovak national feeling shall never be a hindrance to Czechoslovak patriotism....the government program is based on these principles," he insisted. According to Ambassador Steinhardt, CPS leaders responded to Prague's blandishments with similiar indignance, arguing that the SNU and the national bodies it had created were not only "the pride of every Slovak, but the main pillars of the new Republic."[39] When accused of separatism or anti-Republican sentiment, Slovakia's political representatives saw the SNU as their first line of defense.

"We have survived the fateful year," noted *Čas* with optimism at the close of 1945.[40] However, the anti-Ľudák coalition formed with the 1943 Christmas Agreement had done more than survive. The Slovak National Council had, with the help of partisans, the Slovak military, and the Allies, rescued its reputation, gained a bargaining position in the postwar settlement, and influenced the blueprint for a new political system. And while their 1944 act of "redemption by blood" had not yielded a clear military or strategic victory, it came to embody a new Slovak nationalism and a compelling argument against returning to a unitary Czechoslovak state.[41] In this way, as a subject of political discourse, the SNU gave expression to Slovak national consciousness and intolerance for Czechoslovakist

[38] USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, March 14, 1945 – December 31, 1946. The constitution, still in draft form, was to be promulgated in April 1946.
[39] Ibid.
[40] *Čas*, 1 January 1946, 1.
[41] Miroslav Michela, "Slovak Uprising 1944 – Celebrated as Well as Condemned," *The Visegrad Revue*, 1 September 2014. Available online: http://visegradrevue.eu/slovak-uprising-1944-celebrated-as-well-as-condemned/. Accessed October 21, 2016.

assimilation, both of which had greatly matured during six years of Slovak "independence."[42] Uprising celebrations and anniversaries meanwhile became a new form of public ritual, offering an opportunity to position—and re-position—the Uprising in support of particular political and societal aims. In 1945, these aims included national-political cooperation and reconstruction. Yet, as the euphoria of victory and peace began to fade, the SNU's durability as a symbol of unification would be put to the test.

From Unity to Division: The Shifting SNU Discourse in the Fraying National Front, 1946-1948

In January 1946, after an almost eight-year absence, electoral politics returned to Czechoslovakia. A vote for parliament was slated for May. Slovaks had not participated in a free election since May of 1938 and the two major Slovak parties competing had never before appeared on the ballot. Partly because they were not well known, neither the CPS nor the DP were greatly popular, but a residual affinity for the now-banned political Catholicism also weakened their appeal. As election day approached, the two parties had to find ways to court uncommitted or unaffiliated voters, many of whom were devout, rural Catholics who had traditionally supported Hlinka's Slovak People's Party. At the same time, the Communists and Democrats worked to tailor their programs to the norms of "socializing democracy" in the Republic by eliminating any association with populism and the Slovak State.

In the early stages, both parties' platforms advocated Slovak national rights and rehearsed the other positions laid out in their Uprising declarations. For the Democrats, this meant claiming T.G. Masaryk as a Democratic icon of unity within the Republic's ethnic

[42] Abrams, "The Politics of Retribution," 256.

and political diversity (sometimes termed "Masarykism"), and promoting a culture of Christian individualism and religious freedom that borrowed much from the American Democratic Party's playbook.[43] Special attention was paid to land reform, rural poverty, and income inequality.[44] The DP was, according to Ursíny, attuned to the need for a progressive uplift for Slovakia: "The meaning of our revolution," he told a crowd in Modra, "is social as well as political." Sliding even further to the left of their September 1944 program, the party now more strongly endorsed social leveling. Former Agrarians in the party adroitly used their experience and prewar influence to assuage wealthy peasants' concerns over land reform while selling "responsible" collectivization and nationalization as "necessary and justified."[45]

Calls for further tightening pan-Slavic ties secured in the summer of 1944 appeared in the party press and at rallies. DP deputy Milán Polák, speaking in Trenčín, highlighted Slovaks' "duty to remain faithful to the idea of Slavism, for which our best sons suffered and died."[46] Polák's comments were in step with the almost daily panegyrics to Stalin and the Soviets in the wider Czechoslovak press, as well as a nineteenth-century romanticism in Slovak literature that had undergone something of a revival since the Uprising. But pan-Slavism also helped make the DP more attractive to Czechs and helped distinguish their nationalism from Slovak populism. Just as important, pan-Slavism supplied much-needed common ground: the DP in 1945 was riven by division, representing an amalgam of Czechoslovakists and Slovak nationalist-autonomists, Catholics and Evangelicals. Among

[43] For more on the DP leadership's interest in emulating the US Democratic Party, see: Syrný, *Slovenský demokrati,* 18.
[44] See, for example: *Čas*, 12 March 1946, 2.
[45] *Slovenské občianske politické strany v dokumentoch, 1944-1948,* Štefan Šutaj ed. (Košice, 2002), doc. no. 22. Available online: http://www.svusav.sk/data/uploads/publikacie/sops.pdf. Accessed October 5, 2016.
[46] *Čas*, 28 June 1945, 3.

the DP's ranks were former members of the disbanded HSPP and of the pre-war Agrarian and Slovak National Parties.[47]

The CPS embraced pan-Slavism as part of a wider effort to recruit Slovak Catholics. Aware of its relatively poor standing amongst that group, the party hoped to transmit its appeal through idioms more traditional than Marxist theory. Bratislava's All-Slav Day, a bipartisan event celebrating Slavic tradition at the historically significant Devín castle, saw Communist deputies couching the Slavic Cyril-Methodian epic in the language of Slovak Catholic folkways.[48] Moreover, the Slovak Communist press, as the historian James R. Felak points out, crafted from 1945 to 1946 several lines of argument designed to woo Catholic voters; one contention was that "neither the CPS, nor the Soviet Union, nor Communism in general, are enemies of Christianity, but rather defenders of its freedom."[49] But for the CPS, pan-Slavism as a pitch to an undecided Slovak electorate was more effective when painted with the brush of Uprising lore. Jan Straka, a priest sympathetic to the Communist cause, penned an article in *Partizán* on All-Slav Day (which had become a Slovak national holiday) that explained the campaign's logic: Slovaks had risen against the Germans and the Slovak State in August 1944 to protect Slavic ideals; Slavic ideals were epitomized by the Russian people; to continue safeguarding Slavic ideals, all future political, cultural, and economic life should be organized according to Russian (Soviet) norms.[50] These norms were supposedly epitomized by the CPS' program.

This line of argument in party propaganda is indicative of Communism's lack of appeal in Slovakia. In the final months of the war, *Pravda* had still touted the massive

[47] Barnovský, *Na ceste,* 72; Polak, "In the Spirit," 84.
[48] Felak, *After Hitler*, 26.
[49] Ibid.
[50] *Partizán,* 7 July 1946, 1.

"awakening" of a once passive Slovak working class during the Uprising.[51] But this rather wishful—or perhaps manipulative—assessment overlooked the country's lack of a strong industrialized base and an urban proletariat. Their association with atheism among Slovak Catholics deprived Communists of a receptive audience, while the DP's advantage on land reform and religious freedom also frustrated their hope of winning over devout Slovak peasants.

Further complicating matters, the CPC was pressuring the CPS to drop its support of Slovak nationalism. Czech party leaders had long distrusted the "separatist" tendencies of the CPS Central Committee and, in August 1945, they tightened the reins on the "Uprising Generation" in the Slovak branch of the party.[52] A new CPS presidium was elected at the party conference in August, preserving only a few figures from the 1944 leadership cadre. Though the CPS still existed as a nominally distinct body, the remaining younger, more pragmatic and nationally-minded members like Husák and Šmidke were now subordinated to Viliam Široký, a hardline ally of Moscow and Gottwald. [53] The wartime bond between the CPS and its non-Communist allies in the DP was shattered.

Firmly under the control of the CPC, the Slovak Communists pursued a new tack in late 1945: the SNU remained a focal point of their public image, but it was increasingly shaded more as a gesture of pan-Slavic (and pro-Soviet) anti-fascism and Czechoslovak brotherhood than as a national movement for Slovak rights.[54] Moreover, as an internal

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[51] *Pravda,* 1 March 1945, 1.

[52] Jan Pešek, *Komunistická strana Slovenska: Dejiny politckého subjektu* (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo HÚ SAV, 2012), 29-30. Pešek notes that only under intense pressure from Moscow and CPC deputies, including Gottwald, did the Uprising Communists accept Široký as the new CPS Chairman. Šmidke still had strong support among former partisans and Slovak party delegates and his removal drew protest. In the interest of avoiding an inter-party power struggle, however, they apparently acquiesced to the leadership changes.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Abrams, "The Politics of Retribution," 257.

memorandum from the DP's general secretary complained, the Communists began occasionally "defaming" their opponents by hinting that the Communists alone were responsible for the SNU.[55] Indeed, this fresh iteration of the Uprising discourse—a notable departure from its earlier "unifying" power—was only the opening salvo in an incoming barrage. Husák later wrote that, by the end of 1945, party leaders decided to attack their opponents using an "Uprising line."[56] The strategy was to compromise the DP's image on the national stage and sow discord within its leadership by portraying it as "reactionary" and anti-state. They slowly began accusing the DP of harboring former HSPP members and collaborationist clergy who wanted to restore the fascist Slovak State.[57] In one early example of this strain of CPS propaganda, a cartoon featured in *Pravda* showed a figure clad in an HG uniform carrying a DP flag.[58]

For the Democrats, meanwhile, the quest to win the Catholic vote was proving challenging. Despite the party press' effort to play up its Christian worldview, Protestants' preponderant representation in top positions left Catholic leaders feeling alienated. DP propagandists worked hard to combat the perception that the party was anti-Catholic, and anxiety emerged that Catholic voters would cast "blank ballots," supporting neither major party. As the election approached, the DP organs *Nové prúdy* and *Čas* reneged on the party's earlier commitments to nationalize (and de-parochialize) Slovak schools. Spokesmen made promises of a more inclusive organization and greater sensitivity to confessional

[55] Šutaj, *Slovenské občianske politické strany,* no. 35.
[56] Letter from Gustáv Husák, addressed to the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, 1 May 1963. Quoted in Pešek, *Komunistická strana Slovenska,* 34.
[57] While there were almost certainly Slovak nationalist-separatists and former HSPP figures in the DP, the CPS had also sought to bring former Ľudáks into their party; see the example of Pavol Čarnogurský described by Barnovský in *Na ceste*, 76.
[58] *Pravda,* 12 July 1945, 1.

differences.[59] Taking a page from their rivals—and aware of their growing vulnerability to the charge of "reaction"—the Democrats also drew a distinction between the Ľudáks who had destroyed Czechoslovakia and the party "rank and file" caught up in autonomy politics. The heroism of Slovak Catholics fighting for Czechoslovakia during the Uprising was highlighted.[60] Leaders courted high-profile "Uprising Catholics" like Andrej Škrábik, the influential bishop of Banská Bystrica, whose credentials as resistance figures and clergymen put them above reproach.[61] A party brochure entitled "The Way of the DP" lauded Catholic leaders who had, with few exceptions, offered their help to the rebels during the SNU.[62] At once Uprising heroes and emblems of faith, justice, and national duty, these figures were made to fit the mold of an important new icon in postwar Slovakia and other formerly occupied countries: the Partisan.[63]

The alignment of the Democrats' political brand with *both* Catholicism and the stuff of Uprising legend was not an easy task, however. In fact, it could exacerbate internal friction. One DP faction, represented by Protestant members of the resistance, was distressed at the party's efforts to attract former HSPP voters by bringing, in their view, compromised clerical figures and former Ľudáks into the fold.[64] Catholic priests and their allies, frustrated by what they saw as a Protestant bias in the DP, also began working to form a separate Catholic party. They succeeded in launching the Freedom Party (FP), announced in the early spring of 1946.[65] This development panicked DP leaders Ursíny and Lettrich, who judged

[59] Felak, *After Hitler,* 42-43.
[60] Ibid, 41.
[61] Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati,* 218.
[62] Felak, *After Hitler*, 31.
[63] *Čas*, 6 March 1946, 1.
[64] Barnovský, *Na ceste,* 136-39; Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati,* 220-21.
[65] The CPS insisted that the FP drop its original name, the Christian Republican Party. In the first declaration of its program, the new party emphasized its allegiance to the Košice Program and the "principles announced

that the defection of Catholic deputies would result in a split vote favoring the Communists. As FP representatives traveled to Prague to secure acceptance in the National Front at the end of March, Ursíny and Lettrich scrambled to negotiate. Looking for victory at the polls, DP and Catholic leaders ultimately ratified a kind of *concordat* in which the party made strong concessions to clerical interests.[66] Announced on April 7, 1945, this so-called "April Agreement" promised to rally Slovak Catholics to the Democrats and shift the electoral balance decisively in their favor.

The strategy worked. The results of the vote for the National Assembly on May 26, 1946, gave the DP 62 percent of votes, doubling the Communist's share (about 31 percent).[67] But the April Agreement alone does not explain the victory; the DP's campaign had, at least temporarily, successfully alloyed the nationalist, agrarian, and Catholic values reflected in the Slovak State with a democratic-nationalist reading of August 1944. One DP election poster, for example, depicted Janošik—a popular, folkic figure identified with Slovak nationalism, the partisan movement, and the Uprising—above a caption reading, "The Democratic Party: Protector of Slovakia."[68] Campaigning on a pro-Catholic but studiously anti-fascist message, the party also appealed to notions of civic freedom, spiritual renewal, and "moral reconstruction" in government.[69]

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by the Slovak people during their rising." USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, March 14, 1945 – December 31, 1946.

[66] Polak, "In the Spirit," 126-27.

[67] *Štatistická príručka Slovenska 1947*, Bratislava, 1947, 307-309. The remaining 7 percent went to two Slovak splinter parties, the Slovak Freedom Party (led by Vavro Šrobár) and the Communist-leaning Slovak Labor Party.

[68] Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati,* 242.

[69] *Čas*, 8 May 1946, 3.

The DP's considerable margin of popularity across Slovakia indicates that fear and suspicion of Communism played some part in their victory, as well.[70] The Communist program was particularly unpopular in deeply Catholic, eastern areas where Red Army looting and NKVD terror had taken a heavy toll.[71] The Democrats also apparently tapped into popular disgust with Communist leadership in the NCs. The DP criticized "morally and nationally irresponsible behavior" in the Committees, and denounced their domination by a "dictatorship of political parties."[72] According to the historian Stanislav Šikora, the May elections stripped the CPS of control in all but four of eighty district NCs. The few that remained in their hands were home to industrialized cities that lay in the core of Uprising Slovakia's territory. Areas dense with mills and factories, such as Brezno nad Hronom and Revúca, went to the CPS by decisive, though not overwhelming margins.[73]

The DP's victory demonstrated the degree of enthusiasm for Slovak national rights and the place of Catholicism in public life. Unfortunately for the Democratic leadership, or at least its Uprising cadre, both these currents could easily be read as a turn toward regionalism (and separatism) and away from the Košice ideal of Czechoslovak unity. Voices in both Slovak parties decried the April Agreement as a "betrayal of Uprising ideals."[74] Signs of unease with the direction of DP victory grew within the National Front; the SNC was coerced into signing a Second Prague Agreement, which decreed that major Council initiatives were subject to approval from a Czechoslovak minister. It also permitted the President to nominate all high-ranking officials and civil servants, as well as university

[70] Syrný, *Slovenskí demokrati*, 254.
[71] See previous note on National Committees in eastern Slovak districts. Postwar Slovakia's southeastern-most districts had fallen under Hungarian control for most of the war. They had experienced neither the Slovak State nor the Uprising, but had not been spared Red Army occupation.
[72] *Čas*, 8 May 1946, 3.
[73] *Štatistická príručka*, 13-24, 307-309.
[74] Barnovský, *Na ceste,* 43; Syrný, *Slovenský demokrati,* 229.

professors.[75] In radio broadcasts and public appearances after the elections, meanwhile, DP officials tried to reassure the public that the country had abandoned all claims to independence. Any remnants of fascism, Lettrich promised on June 5, were confined to the fringe and would soon be "liquidated" in accordance with the Uprising program.[76] Ambassador Steinhardt remarked that the tenor of these speeches reflected "a more and more open bitterness" between the two major Slovak parties.[77]

For the CPS, the landslide election loss showed that they had lost the tug-of-war over the Catholic vote and could not gain power at the ballot box. The Communists now redoubled their bid to portray the DP as a party of reactionaries leading fascism back to power.[78] These accusations were probably not just cynical gamesmanship: in 1946, there were certainly some elements within Slovak society, and perhaps within the DP itself, which longed for a return to 1939. But, for the CPS inner circle, according to Chairman Široký, the DP had become an imminent threat to a democratic Republic and, notably, the Soviet Union.[79] And precisely because the SNU—at least in its immediate postwar interpretation—had signified the inviolable bonds between Slovakia and these bodies, it became a useful tool in a larger CPS-CPC strategy of weakening their opponents' influence in the National Front and SNC. Making themselves into the exclusive stewards of the vaunted Uprising legacy, the Communists hoped to define the DP as anti-Republican, anti-Soviet, and ultimately illegitimate.

It was here that the complexity, or perhaps multivalence, of their interpretation of the SNU helped to further weaken the Democrats. As concern over resurgent Slovak separatism

[75] Kirschbaum, *A History,* 228.
[76] USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, March 14, 1945 – December 31, 1946.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Felak, *After Hitler,* 60.
[79] Polak, "In the Spirit," 149-50.

grew in Prague, the DP's view of the Uprising as movement for both Slovak national rights *and* Czechoslovak unity made it more vulnerable to Communist smear tactics. This dynamic became evident almost immediately after the elections, when an incident during a May 30 Bratislava football match turned a local imbroglio into a national crisis. Reported widely in the press, the incident apparently occured after the Czech team scored a winning goal against the Slovak side. Anti-Czech, pro-Tiso, and nationalist slogans erupted amongst Slovak fans and a brawl broke out in the stands.[80] Rumors circulated that Slovakia was alive with all manner of double agents and subterfuge, and some deputies cited the riots as proof of the dangerous pull of separatism.[81] *Čas* and other pro-Democrat organs played defense, condemning the soccer episode as "tasteless," and again returning to the claim that the SNU proved that sovereign Slovakia was committed to a shared Republic.[82]

This was, however, not the prevaling view: during a meeting of the Central Government on May 31, convened to discuss the soccer match incident, Fierlinger and Gottwald concluded that it was proof-positive of the pro-Hlinka, pro-Tiso (and therefore anti-Czechoslovak and anti-Communist) underbelly of politics in Slovakia, emboldened by the DP's election victory. Not all Czech parties agreed with this assessment—the Czech People's Party echoed *Čas'* claim that the Uprising proved Slovakia's commitment to unity—but the CPS nevertheless stepped up its efforts to undermine the Democrats' resistance credentials and fully appropriate the Uprising.[83] An article in the worker's daily *Svět práce* argued that such riots were proof that there was "much confusion amongst the Slovak people" during the Uprising, and though some Slovaks rightly considered "the struggle for

[80] Abrams, "The Politics of Retribution," 264-65.
[81] There has been speculation that the riot was acculately incited by Communist *agents provacateurs*. Polak, "In the Spirit," 152.
[82] *Čas,* 1 June 1946, 7.
[83] *Lidová demokracie,* 5 June 1946, 1; Polak, "In the Spirit," 159.

freedom to be the struggle for a new Czechoslovak Republic," there were unfortunately "those who had reckoned on an independent Slovakia...."[84]

A similar approach was apparent in the Communist press' coverage of the SNU's second anniversary celebration a few months later, in August 1946. While the CPS-controlled *Partizán* painted the Uprising as a Communist battle to bring Slovak workers under the Czechoslovak flag, *Rudé pravo* excoriated *Čas* for failing to affirm the pro-Czechoslovak, pro-Soviet character of the Slovak resistance and accused the paper of attempting to "silence a member of the government" by under-reporting Prime Minister Gottwald's keynote speech during the anniversary celebrations in Banská Bystrica.[85] Vowing that the SNU was only the beginning of a "war of liberation," Communist activists in Slovakia had begun to turn the Uprising discourse against the Democrats.[86]

Trials and Tribulations

By late 1946, the SNU had clearly become a contested symbol in an internecine political struggle. But the legal system installed in 1945 to mete out punishment for acts of treason committed under the Slovak State showed that the Uprising was becoming a juridical category, as well. As described in Chapter IV, the punishment of supposed collaborators had begun during the summer of 1944, but most of these trials had been carried out on a hot-blooded, ad hoc basis. Nevertheless, the legal norms for prosecuting those accused of treason and war crimes emerged, like the Slovak national organs themselves, from the meetings of the Slovak National Council in September of 1944. Members of the Council were convinced that Slovakia would be roughly handled under the London Government's

[84] 860F.00 Internal Affairs Of States, Czechoslovakia, Political Affairs, March 1945 – Dec. 1946; *Svět práce,* 29 August 1946, 1.
[85] *Partizán,* 29 August 1946, 1.
[86] Ibid.

retribution laws, and therefore declared that "it was not the Slovak nation that betrayed the Republic and the Czech nation, but rather a handful of renegades whom the nation had long ago condemned and [would soon] hold accountable before the law."[87] The SNC's opposition to a principle of collective guilt, at least as it concerned Slovaks, was addressed in the draft Košice program.[88] The text dictated that, along with Tiso and his associates, it was those who "had actively opposed the Slovak uprising" who should be singled out for prosecution.[89]

Shortly following the war's end, a National Court was established to try high-ranking Ľudáks; extraordinary Peoples' and District Courts were assigned less prominent cases. In all Slovakia's retribution courts, the conduct of the accused during the SNU was taken as a primary metric of culpability. SNC statutes criminalized any act deemed counter to the rebellion or otherwise impeding it.[90] Loosely defined and haphazardly applied, this precedent meant that defendants often had to prove that they hadn't been "passive" during the summer and fall of 1944.[91] Conversely, those determined to have somehow aided or participated in the Uprising could receive reduced sentences. Imrich Kárvaš and Emil Zaťko, two HSPP cabinet members who had helped organize the Uprising, escaped trial under this provision. Hlinka Guard leader Alexander Mach won a reduced sentence for having saved captured rebels from deportation during the German occupation.[92] Ladislav Nižňanský, a

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[87] Samuel Belluš, "Ľudové súdy a naše stanovisko," in *Demokratická strana a problémy dneška* (Martin, 1945), 3-4.
[88] According to the so-called Beneš Decrees of 1945, Czechoslovakia's ethnic Germans and Hungarians were designated as enemies of the state, stripped of wealth and property, and expelled *en masse*.
[89] USNA, 860F.01, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, February 14, 1945 - September 23, 1949.
[90] Róbert Letz, *Slovensko v rokoch 1945-1948: Na ceste ku komunistickej totality* (Bratislava: ÚSKI, 1994), 205.
[91] Michal Malatinský, "Retribučné nariadenie SNR ako právny podklad retribúcie na Slovensku," in *Roky Prelomu: Slovensko v rokoch 1945-1948*, ed. Peter Sokolovič (Trnava: Ústáv pamäti národa, 2015), 23.
[92] Anton Rašla, *Ľudové súdy vo Československu v druhej Svetovej vojne ako forma mimoriadneho súdnictva* (Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied, 1969), 108.

former Slovak army officer who was later convicted of war crimes *in absentia,* was released (and subsequently escaped to Germany) after presenting evidence of his participation in the Uprising to a Bratislava People's Court.[93]

Though it is unclear how many citizens successfully claimed an Uprising defense, retributive justice in Slovakia appears to have been relatively lenient. According to one informal estimate, of the roughly 20,500 Slovaks tried for collaboration or treason, only 8,000 were convicted. Sixty-five were executed and 300 were sentenced to prison terms longer than ten years, though nearly 50 percent of those served only two years or less.[94]

The composition of the courts and the conduct of the trials were highly politicized. Within the SNC there was disagreement over the selection of judges and prosecutors. The DP leadership argued that only trained jurists should participate in the trials, while the Communists successfully countered that the process should be laicized. An Uprising pedigree, membership in a resistance group, or support from Slovak partisan unions were seen as important credentials for potential judges, often playing to the CPS' advantage.[95] Both Slovak parties regarded the trials as a means of revenge against the populists, but the CPS, due to its disproportionate suffering under the HSPP, was more eager to vent grudges. The party also used its outsized influence in the Ministry of the Interior and State Security (*Štátna bezpečnosť*) to select and detain its opponents for prosecution.[96] While research on postwar justice and retribution in Slovakia is still sparse, preliminary examination suggests that, as elsewhere in Europe, the Communists' use of the courts as a bludgeon against

[93] Syrný, "Od odboja ku kolaborácii," 227. For more on Nižňanský's involvement in post-Uprising atrocities, see Chapter IV.
[94] Author's interview with Marek Syrný, historian of the Slovak National Uprising, February 20, 2014 at the Museum and Archive of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.
[95] Rašla, *Ľudové súdy,* 127-28. As explained in Chapter III, Slovak Communists were, if only moderately, more numerous in the anti-Ľudák underground than any of their competitors.
[96] Letz, *Slovensko,* 81-82.

potential opponents was *de rigueur*, and their accusations frequently focused on a supposed "betrayal" during the SNU.

The trial of Slovakia's former priest-president Jozef Tiso, which unfolded in Bratislava's National Court from December 1946 to March 1947, illustrates the extent to which postwar justice revolved around the Uprising and its aftermath. In preparing for the proceedings, the SNC agreed that the events of summer 1944 would form the cornerstone of the state's case. As the DP's Milán Polák explained in a pre-trial meeting of the Board of Commissioners, "both we and the public know very well that Tiso's greatest crimes occurred during and after the Uprising. We must therefore place great emphasis on [the Uprising] in the chief indictment."[97] Gustáv Husák, too, suggested to Gottwald in December 1946 that the most damning evidence against Tiso was his brutal suppression of the rebellion.[98]

The Communist Party seems to have exercised a disproportionate influence over the course of the trial itself. Despite protests from the DP, Šmidke insisted that Igor Daxner, a well-known "fellow traveler," serve as chief prosecutor based on his record as an anti-fascist fighter during the SNU.[99] The CPS also used a steady drumbeat of sensational testimonials from partisans, their widows, and orphaned children, to try Tiso in the court of public opinion. Communist partisan organizations provided material evidence for the state's case. Moreover, as the historian Bradley Abrams has pointed out, the trial offered the Communists a chance to sow discord between the Catholic and Uprising wings of the DP (represented by *povstalci* like Polák). It is likely that, by focusing on the brutality displayed by some Ľudáks

[97] Karel Kaplan, *Dva retribuční procesy: Komentované dokumenty, 1946-1947* (Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny ČSAV, 1992), 145.
[98] Ibid, 175.
[99] Felak, "After Hitler," 95, 110.

in the Uprising's aftermath, they succeeded in exacerbating these simmering tensions within the party.[100]

This strategy came into stronger relief in April 1947 after Daxner handed down a death sentence for Tiso. The DP risked losing Catholic votes if Tiso was executed and they argued fervently against the decision; CPS representatives countered by decrying the public demonstrations supporting clemency as clear signs of "reaction."[101] Partisan unions groups claimed that a stay of execution would profane the victories of the Uprising and pose a grave threat to the Republic.[102] The pro-Communist *Bojovník*, a weekly newspaper for Slovak anti-fascist fighters, claimed that the Democrats had no authority to defend the priest. In their view, only the (Communist) anti-fascist guerilla movement, as the "true" bearer of the Uprising legacy, could claim that right.[103] Perhaps more effectively, the CPS and its allies argued that the failure to execute Tiso would endanger Slovakia's fragile reputation—established by the Uprising—as a democratic European nation. In the end, despite a popular petition in support of the former Slovak president, the clemency bid failed. This was in no small part thanks to Polák, who, holding the decisive vote on the panel deciding the appeal, seems to have succumbed to pressure from fellow Slovak partisans to reject it.[104]

Tiso's execution on April 18, 1947, left the DP defeated and isolated; Catholic voters and their most prominent leaders began leaving the party in droves, dismayed at the loss of a beloved leader. The Democrats' support for clemency, condemned incessantly in the Communist press, also helped cement widespread suspicisions of a Ľudák "fifth column"

[100] Abrams, "The Politics of Retribution," 262.
[101] Barnovský, *Na ceste,* 70.
[102] *Pravda,* 18 April 1947, 1.
[103] *Bojovník,* 27 April 1947, 1.
[104] Abrams, "The Politics of Retribution," 272-73.

lurking in the party and Slovak society. The non-Communists' claim to the Uprising legacy, and with it their key to legitimacy in postwar Slovak politics, was now all but invalidated.

The Fall Crisis and the Changing History of the Uprising

In the wake of the trial, the CPS more boldly proclaimed itself the sole force behind the wartime resistance and the SNU. Partisan organizations like the Union of Slovak Partisans (*Zväz slovenských partizánov* [USP]) took on a more active role as a Communist pressure group, calling for ever-wider purges of "reactionaries" in the SNC and the DP, spreading conspiracy theories, and labeling the Democrats as "fascists."[105] As Slovak scholars have shown, the USP and other partisan organizations were both influential and heavily politicized, but they weren't driven by political convictions alone. Many signed on in the hope of receiving land grants and positions of influence in the security apparatus, or worse, to despoil Slovakia's remaining Jewish population.[106] According to one former partisan, the groups were flooded with freebooters in search of personal or financial gain, many of whom had been in the Hlinka Guard or had checkered histories in the Slovak populist movement.[107] Marek Syrný, a historian of the Slovak resistance, also notes that the total number of Slovak partisans participating in the Uprising was between 2,500 and 4,000,

[105] Leaflets and letters calling for the reestablishment of a Slovak Republic, distributed and exchanged by groups of exiled Ľudáks and their sympathizers at home, helped the Communists drum up suspicion of widespread treachery. The general mistrust of Slovaks and their politicians in the Czech lands encouraged the public to speculate on such "anti-state" plots. See: Martin Lacko, "Najhorlivejší pomocníci komunistov: Sväz slovenských partizánov a udalosti na Slovensku v rokoch 1945-1948 " in *Február 1948 a Slovensko: Zborník z vedeckej konferencie*, ed. Ondrej Podolec (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2008), 531.

[106] Ibid. See also: Ivica Bumová. "Protižidovské vytržnosti v Bratislave v historickom kontexte, August 1946" in *Pamäť národa*, no. 3, (2007): 14-29. Bumová describes how, in August 1946, partisans at a USP convention in Bratislava managed to spark a pogrom and looted valuables from the city's Jewish population.

[107] František Mišeje, *Revolučnou cestou: Spomienky na roky 1938-1948* (Bratislava: Pravda, 1989), 136.

while membership in the USP had climbed to 9,000 by 1948.[108] Nevertheless, as Martin Lacko has pointed out, the organizations consistently couched their activism (often amounting to intimidation of perceived "enemies of the state," vigilante justice, and mob violence) as a continuation of "the fight for freedom and democracy begun in the SNU."[109]

Partisan activism contributed to an atmosphere of panic in 1947, but the unsettled mood also reflected the Soviets' tightening grip on Eastern and East-Central Europe. In July, Czechoslovakia agreed to accept the US offer of Marshall Plan aid, only to reverse course after Stalin intervened.[110] By August, Soviet-backed Communist parties had gained de-facto control in several countries in the region, including Hungary, Poland, and Bulgaria. The Cominform, a Soviet-sponsored forum for global Communist cooperation, convened for the first time that summer. Rudolf Slánský, the chief Czechoslovak delegate at the Cominform's inaugural meeting in Szklarska Poręba, Poland, announced that the CPC's first priority was to "strike at reaction in Slovakia."[111] A few weeks earlier, an American envoy in Bratislava wrote that the Slovaks already "[found themselves] under heavy and perhaps ultimately decisive pressure to assimilate" to the "political orientation of [their]…[Communist] neighbors."[112]

To be sure, the ground was well prepared for Slánský's proposed offensive. Ukrainian nationalist bandits (*Banderovci*) marauding in eastern districts and food shortages caused by summer drought had already made the public restive and susceptible to rumored

[108] Author's notes from interview with Slovak historian Marek Syrný, February 20, 2016, at the Museum and Archive of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. Former partisans still receive state benefits and official honoraria in today's Slovak Republic.
[109] Lacko, "Najhorlivejší pomocnici komunistov," 534.
[110] USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, Jan 7, 1947 – Sept 30, 1947.
[111] Giuliano Procacci, ed., *The Cominform: Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948/1949* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1994), 285. Quoted in Felak, *After Hitler,* 160.
[112] USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, Jan 7, 1947 – Sept 30, 1947.

plots of Catholic-Fascist treason spun by Communist propaganda.[113] Moreover, the general distrust of Catholic Slovaks voiced by Czech parties and fomented in the Czech press put the Slovak non-Communists in a weak position. Assassination attempts on prominent Czech ministers, including Jan Masaryk and Prokop Drtina, deepened the impression, particularly in the Czech lands, that Ľudák loyalists were trying to topple the government. A September report on subversive activities issued by the Slovak Ministry of the Interior, which was under Communist control, compounded these suspicions. The CPS exploited the discovery of several anti-state and anti-CPS leaflets across the Republic to open investigations against prominent DP members.[114] Backed by the Ministry, a "militant" CPS organized purges of Democrats in local and district NCs; the goal, according to an internal memorandum, was to "alter the entire political structure....[of] the organs of popular administration."[115]

The arrival of "Uprising season" that summer brought the country to the brink of chaos. In the third week of August, as Slovak authorities prepared for large SNU celebrations in several cities across the country, there came an ultimatum. Raising once again the bugbear of Slovak fascism, the USP demanded "the removal of all outstanding adherents of the former regime in our state apparatus" to coincide with the Uprising's anniversary.[116] The Union also petitioned to be rearmed for the fight against the *Banderovci* and other "dangerous elements." Some former partisans, already mobilized, refused to disarm until Slovak Democrats were removed from district national committees.[117] On

[113] Polak, "In the Spirit," 183.
[114] Ibid, 184-85.
[115] Sikora, "Národné výbory," 426-27. Based on preliminary research, a closer examination of the conflicts within local and district NCs is likely to reveal the extent to which members' activities under the Slovak State and during the Uprising—real or fabricated—figured into their political fates in 1947-1948.
[116] *Partizán*, 17 August 1947, 1; Barnovský, *Na ceste,* 193-94; USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, Jan 7, 1947 – Sept 30, 1947.
[117] Barnovský, *Na ceste,* 193.

August 29, Slánský penned a vitriolic editorial in *Partizán,* claiming that faithfully fulfilling the Uprising's legacy meant defeating the "anti-revolutionary" forces plaguing the Republic.[118] USP president Samo Falťan went a step further, arguing that the anniversary showed that it was finally time to take the Slovak nation's proletarian strivings during the SNU to their revolutionary conclusion.[119]

It was the character of the 1947 anniversary celebration itself, as the following months would prove, which offered the most prescient glimpse of the SNU's changing legacy. According to US State Department reports, the most notable feature of that year's events was the "presence of a large and well organized Communist section directly in front of the podium which dominated the affair by cheering Communist speakers vociferously" and shouting down and denouncing DP speakers. The main rally was followed by a USP-led military parade and an address by Gottwald in which the Prime Minister gave "all the credit for the Slovak uprising to the wise direction of Generalissimo Stalin and to the assistance of the Red Army."[120] The reporting US official also explained that mounting pressure for purges was reinforced by these public events, and that despite their "present obstinacy," the DP would surely face "disastrous concessions" if the Communists continued in this vein. His prediction came true: the events boosted support for the USP's "anti-fascist" ultimatum and at the end of September, the National Front expelled 17 members of the DP. Most of those would be arrested later that fall, along with almost 300 others suspected of treason.[121] In the

[118] *Partizán,* 29 August 1947, 2.
[119] Ibid, 3.
[120] USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, Jan 7, 1947 - Sept 30, 1947.
[121] Barnovský, *Na ceste,* 195.

aftermath, the State Department attributed the DP's collapse in part to the partisans' ability to "excite public opinion" against the party.[122]

The partisan unions had become a social embodiment of the potent, shifting "ideals of 1944," and they played a pivotal role in the run-up to the Communists' seizure of power in 1948. Building on the momentum of conspiracy theories and exploiting divisions within the DP, the partisans' September ultimatum had weakened the Democrats' standing in the National Front by impugning their Uprising credentials.[123] Another crisis the next month, prompted this time by Communist-controlled partisan and resistance organizations as well as trade unions, represented a kind of dress rehearsal for the coup in Prague in the coming February. Pushing for resolution to a "crisis" largely of their own making, on October 30 the USP demanded that the SNC's Board of Commissioners resign and be replaced by "honest" Democrats (those with Uprising backgrounds), trade union officials, and Communist members of the resistance, along with other CPS leaders.[124]

Some Democrats in the SNC refused to resign, ultimately blocking their ouster with a series of large public demonstrations and a spirited defense of their wartime record in the press. Within months, however, the withering pressure of Communist propaganda eroded support from the public and the Czech non-Communist parties, sapping the DP's morale and finally cleaving the Catholics from the Uprising cadre. When a government of "Action Committees" was instituted during the February crisis the only Democrats deemed acceptable were CPS fellow travelers like Polák.[125] The defeated DP leadership—including

[122] USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, Jan 7, 1947 – Sept 30, 1947.
[123] *Partizán,* 10 October 1947, 1.
[124] Václav Vondášek, "Ľudacká karta v období podzimní krizu na Slovensku v roku 1947" in *Február 1948 a Slovensko: Zborník z vedeckej konferencie*, ed. Ondrej Podolec (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2008), 421.
[125] Barnovský, *Na ceste,* 240-43.

Lettrich, Ursíny, and the entire Catholic wing of the party—was expelled or fled in hopes of escaping arrest.

The Sovietization of the Slovak National Uprising, 1948-1963

In the months and years after "Victorious February," the official history of the Uprising was transformed and standardized. Denunciations, arrests, and trials worked to silence voices supporting more Slovak autonomy within the party while validating Gottwald's cult of personality, a renewed policy of Czechoslovak centralism from Prague, and the Republic's fealty to the Soviet Union. Members of the "Civic" resistance, many of them DP figures who had already escaped abroad or simply disappeared, were the first to be labeled "asocials" and anti-Soviet traitors.[126] Many were tried in absentia. Non-Communist and dissenting partisan figures faced similar persecution; Viliam Žingor, a high profile leader celebrated for his heroism during the SNU, was arrested in 1949. Žingor, a Communist convert who had served in the famed M.R. Štefánik brigade, had become disillusioned with the CPC and resigned his membership in 1947. According to the Slovak historian Martin Uhrín, the charasmatic Žingor's defection was an embarrassment to the party and led to the accusations of "anti-state activity" and treason.[127] He was executed in Prague in 1950.

The secret police and courts were soon turned on those "deviators" within the party leadership itself. Rudolf Slánský, whose support from abroad in organizing the Uprising had earned him a standing ovation at the fifth-anniversary SNU celebrations, was arrested, tried,

[126] *Zborník Ústavu SNP,* 135.

[127] Uhrín, "Druhá Partizanská Brigada, 104. Žingor has gained a reputation in Slovakia as a martyr to postwar anti-Communism. See: "Justičná vražda partizánskeho veliteľa" in *Hospodárske noviny,* 18 July 2008. Available online: http://hnporadna.hnonline.sk/relax/289969-justicna-vrazda-partizanskeho-velitela. Accessed November 30, 2016.

and executed for "Titoist-Zionist" treason three years later.[128] Husák, Novomeský, and a handful of their Slovak comrades in the CPC had already been arrested and charged with crimes of "anti-state activity" and "threatening the social order," in the winter of 1950-1951.[129] The group endured three years imprisonment before they finally went to trial in Slovakia's supreme court in April of 1954. When the three-day proceedings concluded, each defendant had received a sentence of no less than ten years in prison; Husák, evidently seen as the most dangerous offender, received 25 years.

The "Uprising Communists" were found guilty of several evils: in the court's view, the SNC had unlawfully commandeered the Slovak Army in a putsch designed to suppress the people's class interests. Moreover, the defendants were branded as separatists who had plotted to undermine the unitary Czechoslovak state.[130] Their vocal support for a federalized Czecho-Slovak Republic during the SNU was linked to the "international bourgeoisie's" conspiracy against the emerging Soviet order; the defendants represented "the remnants of the capitalist system attempting to create the conditions for the restoration of capitalism."[131] Likewise, the Slovak Communist intelligentsia's post-1948 support for economic restructuring in Slovakia was interpreted as "wrecking"—an act of sabotage on central planning in the Republic's economy.

Beyond the halls of party institutions, the public observations of the SNU's anniversary took on a rote, ritualized character. Carefully choreographed theaters for the new official history, the celebrations featured banners, monuments and memorials that made

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[128] Jozef Jablonický, *Glosy o historiografiu SNP: Zneužívanie a falšovanie dejín SNP* (Bratislava: NVK interational, 1994), 15.
[129] Ján Štefanica*, Vybrané právne aspekty procesu G. Husák a spol.* (Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2013), 358, 361. Available online: https://www.law.muni.cz/sborniky/dejiny2013/setkani2013.pdf. Accessed January 25, 2017.
[130] Ibid, 262.
[131] Ibid, 361.

use of familiar Soviet images and symbols: red stars, the Soviet drum-barreled machine gun (known as the PPSh-41) popular amongst partisans, and the hammer and sickle. The party's directives for “the elimination of distinctive national patterns” and "Sovietization" of the Uprising meanwhile spawned a vibrant industry of ideologically "correct" books, magazines, memoirs, monuments, popular films, and songs on the topic. In most of these works, any distinct national role for Slovaks in the resistance was bowdlerized and the Soviet Union and the CPC's “selfless” and “decisive” contribution praised.[132] Continuing a tradition begun before 1948, the CPC also used the rebellion to prop Gottwald up as a "little Stalin": the Czechoslovak Premier was lauded for having personally engineered the rebellion, consulting with Stalin, the Red Army high command, and Khruschev’s Kiev headquarters. The regime thus sought to promote the Uprising as a story of Communist mass mobilization accomplished in the formation of Communist National Committees and inspired by a newly discovered class-consciousness in Slovakia.[133] Soviet and CPC leadership was foregrounded and the Communist partisan brigades became the stars of a new state mythology, effacing the involvement of the Slovak army, the "Civic" resistance, and the nationally minded Communists in Husák's group.

As the Slovak scholar Elena Mannová and others have argued, the state also sought to link the SNU with a massive industrial modernization project in the 1950s.[134] In an issue of *Pravda* covering the tenth anniversary SNU celebrations in 1954, an article titled “Fulfilling the Legacy of the Uprising through the Industrialization of Slovakia” made it

[132] Gordon H. Skilling, *Czechslovakia's Interrupted Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 26; Michela and Kšiňan, "The Slovak National Uprising," 43; *Pravda,* 28 August 1954, 1; *Pravda,* 29 August 1954, 1.
[133] Ľudoviť Holotík, *Slovenské národné povstanie* (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 1954), 256; Mannová, "Slovenské národné povstanie," 227-28; Miloš Gosiorovský, *Ilegalný boj KSS a Slovenské národné povstanie* (Bratislava, 1949), 36.
[134] Mannová, "Slovenské národné povstanie," 218.

clear that the present "economic and cultural flowering" of the Slovak lands showed that the SNU had been launched to join Slovakia to the Soviet Union in the "progressive camp" of European nations.[135] *Pravda*'s nearly weeklong coverage of the "glorious days" of August 1954 featured photo spreads of workers toiling diligently in steel mills and rail yards, shattering production targets, and dedicating their Stakhanovite triumphs to the SNU's memory.[136] Campaign after campaign of state propaganda proclaimed that the Uprising had brought about the conditions for a harmonious new social order, eliminating exploitation and opening the path to rapid economic and social development. Moreover, Czechs and Slovaks, as brother nations, would now find abundant opportunities for material and cultural enrichment under Stalin's "principle of equality among nations."[137] The Uprising was thus positioned to validate a policy of Czechoslovak centralism, albeit in a Marxist-Stalinist guise. Worker and farmer, Czech and Slovak, were brought together in socialist unity, a concept that resembled the interwar Czechoslovakism that many SNU leaders—both Communist and non-Communist—had emphatically rejected in the summer of 1944.

The Uprising and the Slovak Spring, 1963-1968

The Stalinist-era interpretation of the SNU, like Czechoslovakia's hardline CPC leadership, remained dominant long after the dawn of Khruschev's thaw in 1956. From his appointment as President and CPS First Secretary in 1957, Antonín Novotný resisted the reforms embraced in other Soviet satellites; he upheld the theory of a Slovak "bourgeois nationalist reaction" and refused to rehabilitate those accused of "deviation," including leading Communists languishing in prison. But a constellation of factors—vanishing public trust in

[135] *Pravda,* 28 August 1954, 1.
[136] *Pravda,* 29 August 1954, 1.
[137] Ibid.

party leadership, a sharp downturn in the Czechoslovak economy, and pressure from other states within the Eastern Bloc—encouraged fresh critiques of the regime, of the evils of Stalinism, and of the distorted treatment of Slovak history.

Revelations about the unjust persecution of once-celebrated resistance figures (such as the aforementioned Viliam Žingor) prompted historians to reconsider their role in the "deformation" of the Slovak past.[138] In 1961, their focus shifted to previously unexamined aspects of anti-fascist resistance. New research recovered the integral role of the so-called "civic resistance" (including non-Communist resistance groups and leaders in the Czechoslovak Army) in planning and launching the SNU.[139] Meanwhile, what reform-minded party members saw as the lagging pace of rehabilitation for so-called "bourgeois nationalists"—still opposed by Novotný—sharpened calls for action within the CPC. Taken together with party historians' challenges to the charges of "bourgeois nationalism," these developments led to the appointment of a special de-Stalinization commission, which concluded that the accusations of treason and conspiracy leveled at non-Communist members of the resistance had been completely unjustified.[140] In large part due to the efforts of Czech and Slovak historians "the Uprising was largely cleared of the some of the derogatory features" attached to it under Stalinism; Husák, Novomeský, and others were quietly rehabilitated.[141]

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[138] Jablonický, *Glosy,* 45-46.

[139] The Slovak journal *Historický cašopis* published a bibliography of new, expansive works covering the Uprising on the occasion of the SNU's twentieth anniversary. Topics included: the Slovak army's role in the SNU, activities of the Slovak resistance abroad, and the question of Slovak nationhood in 1944. See: *Historický časopis*, HÚ SAV, vol. 8, no. 2 (1965): 309-28.

[140] Skilling, *Interrupted,* 50. For more detail, see also: Stanislav Sikora, "Slovakia and the attempt to reform socialism in Czechoslovakia, 1963-1969," in *Slovakia in History*, eds. M. Teich, D. Kovač, and M. Brown (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 299-300.

[141] Ibid, Skilling.

Any meaningful change in the interpretation of the Uprising was not immediately reflected in the annual state-sponsored SNU celebrations of the early 1960s, however. As Jablonický later noted, "the new evaluation of the SNU came to light only slowly, with difficulties, sudden turns, and reversals."[142] While the participation of various "non-Communist elements" was noted in the pages of the popular Slovak weekly newspaper *Kultúrny život* beginning in 1963, the form and content of SNU celebrations remained basically unchanged.[143] In an illustration of just how calcified the official rhetoric had become, the CPC deputy František Dvorský's 1962 keynote address in Banská Bystrica copied word-for-word a section of a speech Novotný had given in 1959. As a result of the SNU, he remarked, the Slovak people "recognized who its best friend was. It was the Soviet Union that gave our people full support during its struggle."[144] That the Uprising continued to serve as a justification for centralizing and mismanaging the Czechoslovak economy also raised consternation from Slovak party members who favored market measures designed to jumpstart stagnant growth in Slovakia.[145]

Despite officials' public resistance to their findings, the tide of revisionism amongst historians gathered pace. The "rehabilitation" of the SNU was gradually becoming a concern for a wide swath of Slovak society, and a handful of Slovak party figures joined the conversation.[146] Former CPS secretary and historian Miloš Gosiorovský advocated in the journal *Historický časopis* in 1963 that the Uprising "be purged of all deformations."[147] A June 1964 conference in Smolenice organized to mark the twentieth-anniversary

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[142] Jablonický, *Glosy*, 48.
[143] *Kultúrny život,* 31 August 1963. Quoted in Jablonický, *Glosy,* 49.
[144] *Pravda,* 28 August 1962, 1.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Scott Brown, "Socialism with a Slovak Face: Federalization, Democratization, and the Prague Spring," *East European Politics & Societies,* vol. 22 (Summer 2008), 478.
[147] *Historický časopis*, HÚ SAV, vol. 11, no. 4 (1963), 650. Quoted in Jablonický, *Glosy,* 50.

celebrations featured several papers, which, as the Slovak historian Miroslav Kropilák observed in the published conference proceedings, removed all "schematic, dogmatic, erroneous opinions" from research on the topic.[148] The Smolenice gathering followed closely on the heels of Alexander Dubček's 1963 appointment as First Secretary of the CPS, and Dubček joined Novomeský and Husák as conference participants. Husák's newly published work on the SNU, *Testimony on the Slovak National Uprising*, sparked heated discussion and considerable criticism for its attacks on Stalinism and its full-throated rejection of the charge of "bourgeois nationalism."[149]

If, as the Slovak novelist Peter Karvaš noted, the reappraisal of the Uprising was helping to trigger a "broader revival" in Slovakia's social and intellectual life, it also catalyzed a discussion about the troubled state of Czech and Slovak relations.[150] According to the historian Ľubomír Lipták, the SNU had already demonstrated a new national consensus in Slovakia, the existence of a distinct Slovak community, and a desire for a shared but federated state with the Czechs.[151] Indeed, the sincerity of these aspirations had been recapitulated in the "Declaration of the Slovak National Council," the Košice program's "special charter," and even Gottwald's April 1945 "Magna Charta for the Slovak Nation," which had declared that "Slovaks should be lords of their homeland just as Czechs should be lords in their own."[152]

Nevertheless, the promised condition of "equal with equal" had scarcely been achieved in the intervening decades. After the Third Prague Agreement of 1947 had

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[148] Miroslav Kropilák, *Slovenské národné povstanie roku 1944* (Bratislava: SAV, 1965), 8-9. Quoted in Jablonický, *Glosy*, 52.
[149] See: Husák's *Svedectvo.*
[150] Brown, "Socialism," 478.
[151] Lipták, *Changes of Changes,* 148.
[152] *Slovenské národné orgány*, 548.

subordinated the SNC to the Republic's ministries, the Czechoslovak constitution of 1960 had eliminated what little autonomy Slovakia still possessed by assigning the central government control over local Slovak administration.[153] Many in the Slovak party felt that because state policy privileged the Czech lands' economic development, Slovaks were left with an inferior standard of living. Slovak intellectuals, particularly economists, observed that Slovakia could obtain equality only if it were treated, as had been promised in the Košice program, as a discrete national, political region.[154]

On top of these perceived affronts, the regime's treatment of the SNU and its history continued to trample Slovak patriotic feeling within party circles. Slovak deputies bristled at the official, ham-fisted denial of a distinct Slovak national identity, that had become typical of the rhetoric and symbolism surrounding SNU celebrations.[155] Ceremonies in Banská Bystrica, Bratislava, and Prague throughout the 1950s had characterized the SNU as a struggle for the "brotherly union" of Czechs and Slovaks, and they had frequently glorified Czechs' participation in the Slovak resistance and the Uprising.[156] The Novotný leadership insisted that the rebellion represented a "further convergence" of the two peoples, and it seldom made mention of Slovaks' unique role in the event. [157] As late as 1964, in a SNU ceremony in Prague's Old Town Square, Novotný delivered an orthodox historical

[153] Skilling, *Interrupted,* 51.
[154] Ibid, 52.
[155] Brown, "Socialism," 473.
[156] *Pravda,* 31 August 1954, 4; Kšiňan and Michela, "Uprising," 63. Czech partisans, soldiers, and resistance members had indeed fought in the Uprising. The descendants of nineteenth century Czech settlers in the Volhynia region of Ukraine made up about 15 percent of the roughly 2,000 troops in the Second Czecho-Slovak Paratroop Brigade. The Brigade, commanded by General Ludvík Svoboda, was deployed in Slovakia from the Soviet Union during October 1944. See: Karel Richter, *Dobývání domova I.* (Praha: Ostrov, 2005).
[157] *Pravda,* 29 August 1964, 1.

interpretation of the Uprising flanked by banners expressing the "Czechoslovak People['s]" affection for its "best friends," the Soviet Union and the CPC. [158]

Many outside the party blamed Novotný for Slovakia's weakness in the Republic, but the CPS had done little since his rise to address such concerns, either. Turnover in the party's leadership brought new impetus to Slovak national interests from 1963 to 1964, however. And, concurrently, the twentieth anniversary SNU celebrations took small, but noticeable steps away from Czechoslovak centralism.[159] Slovakia's *Pravda* reported that the Uprising was mainly the work of Slovaks and had even involved some non-Communist elements, including certain unnamed "Slovak patriots."[160] First Secretary Dubček spoke of the SNU as a lasting "pillar of our Czechoslovakia," but also described it as a rejection of "Czechoslovakism." The Communist intellectual Ladislav Novomeský, a newly rehabilitated member of the Uprising SNC, penned a somewhat equivocal commentary that located the SNU's significance in international proletarian solidarity, but still honored its national roots.[161] This trend toward revisionism in the SNU's history fell in line with a set of theses on the Uprising ratified by Czech and Slovak party officials in April 1964. Regime historians would admit previous distortions of the Slovak resistance movement, but remain watchful against supposedly dangerous forms of Slovak nationalism.[162]

Parallels between support for federalization and the "rehabilitation" of the Uprising would not come from top CPC leaders, nor would they be heard at official Uprising celebrations. But some CPS deputies, particularly Gosiorovský and Husák, connected the SNU with a resolution of the "Slovak question" in subtler, written forums. Shortly before

[158] *Pravda,* 28 August 1964, 2.
[159] Skilling, *Interrupted,* 56.
[160] Stanley Riveles, "Slovakia: Catalyst of Crisis," *Problems of Communism* 17 (May-June 1968), 4-5.
[161] *Pravda,* 29 August 1964, 3.
[162] Skilling, *Interrupted*, 50.

Gosiorovský's rather nationalist defense of the Uprising was published in *Historický časopis*, he sent a memorandum to other Slovak cultural journals and Central Committee members chiding Novotný for his blindness to outstanding Slovak concerns, including the lingering charges of "bourgeois nationalism." The memorandum also again made the case for federalization.[163] Through reviews and other articles, particularly in *Kultúrny život*, Husák's writings generated public interest because they described the SNU as a Slovak effort to forge a discrete political entity within the new Republic.[164] In 1967, for example, Husák authored a lengthy series of articles about the late Slovak Communist Vladimir Clementis—himself a martyr to the injustices of the 1950s—that praised his contributions to Slovak national liberation in 1944.[165] Husák's *Testimony* garnered even greater attention. For the Slovak intelligentsia, the Uprising memoir made him a "symbol of the resistance movement, democratic reforms, and the battle for an equitable solution to the relations between Slovaks and Czechs."[166]

By contrast, in the years before his ascent to Czechoslovak Party Chairman, Dubček and the Central Committee of the CPS did not seize on the history or traditions of the Uprising to leverage arguments for liberalization or federalization. While he acknowledged a Slovak "national heritage" and expressed misgivings about the treatment of the Uprising in Czechoslovak history, Dubček did not openly advocate for the revitalization of Slovak

[163] Pešek, *Komunistická strana Slovenska,* 165. This article was deemed too critical of the party and therefore not published until 1968.
[164] Husák, *Svedectvo*, 60-61; Jablonický, *Glosy,* 68.
[165] Gustáv Husák, "Spomienky na Vlada Clementisa," *Kultúrny Život*, 4 August 1967. Clementis was a prominent member of the interwar Communist party who had spent the war in London. After the Coup of 1948, which he had helped to organize, he replaced Jan Masaryk as Czechoslovakia's Foreign Minister. He was convicted and hanged on charges of Trotskyite-Titoite-Zionist conspiracy alongside Rudolf Slánský in 1952.
[166] Jablonický, *Glosy*, 54.

national organs in connection with the Uprising or on its anniversaries.[167] This is perhaps indicative of his focus on economic revitalization as the driving force of liberalization, but it also evidences his preoccupation with confronting and unseating Novotný. Husák and Gosiorovský's statements in favor of national reform had made them anathema to Czechoslovak party elites: Novotný had attempted to punish them for their public statements on national history and Stalinist injustices.[168] Taking up the issue of Uprising history would have likely made Dubček more vulnerable to the Central Committee's ire and impeded his attempts to reform the party from within. Even though by the mid-1960s the Uprising and federalization seem to have been widely discussed in Slovakia, Dubček and the Central Committee of the CPS had declined to prioritize either of these key concerns.

"We Shall Not Betray": August 1944 and August 1968

If a reappraisal of the Uprising had never been a major goal for the highest-ranking members of the Central Committee, it is not surprising that the SNU was not widely invoked in the week following the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. Launched by Soviet Bloc leaders to quash the liberalization program begun by Dubček after his ouster of Novotný in January of 1968, the military incursion coincided with the date of a storied moment of Slovak resistance to foreign occupation. There was not a great deal of commentary linking the two events. The pages of *Pravda* during those tense days were more focused on the details of the CPC's negotiations with the Soviets than the rituals of SNU commemoration or their applicability to the crisis at hand.

[167] Skilling, *Interrupted*, 55n-56n. Dubček, whose father was a founding member of the CPS, fought as a partisan and was wounded in the SNU; his brother Július was also killed in the fighting.
[168] Ibid, 50-51n; 56n.

To be sure, the SNU anniversary was overshadowed by a profound moment of disappointment and disillusionment in Czechoslovak society. Radio addresses by Dubček and President Ludvík Svoboda on August 27 announced a full capitulation to Moscow's demands that the "new course" of liberalization be abandoned, and that foreign troops would remain on Czechoslovak soil. Following a week of peaceful resistance and proud defiance, Czechs and Slovaks had hoped for vindication but received calamity. Desperation reigned in party headquarters and on the streets. All newspapers, including *Pravda*, agreed to suspend publication for a day in order to permit "reflection."[169] When it reappeared on August 29, 1968, the CPS newspaper no longer touted the "nation's unconditional sovereignty," as it had done in previous days. Instead, a bitter Marxian dictum was now featured in large type: "a nation cannot be free while it oppresses others."[170]

Pravda's lead article on August 29, 1968, entitled "August 1944, August 1968," came from Gosiorovský and contained perhaps the boldest assessment of the SNU voiced by a party figure since 1948. In a tone both proud and somber, the author argued that the Uprising was fueled by Slovakia's national aspirations. August 1944 for Slovaks, he wrote, belonged to a tradition of Slovak national struggle beginning with Štúr and extending down through the years, with each generation fighting to protect the gains of its predecessor.[171] Nevertheless, the Slovak nation had at times strayed from the SNU's principles and allowed "a number of obstacles to pile up on the road to socialist development." The changes begun in January of 1968, he continued, represented the attempts of progressive forces to correct

[169] Kieran Williams, *The Prague Spring and its Aftermath: Czechoslovak Politics, 1968-1970* (Cambridge, SK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 145-46.
[170] *Pravda*, 27 August 1968, 1; *Pravda,* 29 August 1968, 1.
[171] *Pravda,* 29 August 1968, 2.

those missteps.[172] Gosiorovský concluded by affirming that, despite the "hard realities" of the Warsaw Pact invasion, the Czech and Slovak must continue working toward the "goals already laid out," presumably as dictated by Central Committee's blueprint for reform, the April Action Program. Identifying the Uprising legacy with the party's new liberalizing spirit, he maintained that the ambitions of August 1944 "are becoming reality."[173]

Former partisans also expressed great dedication to the party and the Dubček platform. That the still highly active and organized partisan unions threw their support behind the leader testifies to the overpowering mandate he and the New Course appear to have enjoyed in August 1968. As we saw earlier in this chapter, Slovak partisan unions had often behaved cynically and with hostility toward the putative forces of "reaction." At the same time, their enthusiasm for party orthodoxy had established them as the supposed guardians of the SNU's legacy after 1948, and in this capacity they called for the public's compliance with Dubček's and Svoboda's directives. As the forces of the resistance had done in 1944, one former partisan argued in *Pravda,* the public must remain disciplined and loyal to the CPC, the government, and all administrative organs.[174] Calm, order, and obedience were to be the order of the day. Students and youth in particular were urged to maintain "composure and discretion," because such qualities "confirmed continuity with the celebrated Slovak National Uprising."[175] Now was not the time for unrest or ferment, but for vigilance and unity.

The absence of even an oblique reference to the Soviet Union or the Red Army in the commentary surrounding the SNU's twenty-fourth anniversary in *Pravda* is notable. Even

[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.

after the reassessment of the SNU earlier in the decade, the CPC had uniformly praised the Soviet Union in August and September celebrations and reaffirmed its "lasting bonds" to Czechoslovakia. That an invasion ordered by its "greatest friend" represented a national tragedy was acutely felt across the country, but even more so in the CPC Central Committee: the first priority of the Czechoslovak leadership, Dubček argued on August 31, was the removal of foreign armies as soon as could be arranged.[176] While some Committee members remained defiant, others felt there was no option but to accept Moscow's demands for a reversal of liberalization and to work to salvage whatever elements of reform possible.

Reference to the Soviet Union—in any capacity, even negative—would have complicated both of these goals. The familiar refrains of resistance to foreign domination—among the strongest tropes of SNU symbolism during anniversary celebrations— promised to aggravate an already outraged population and were therefore avoided. Despite *Pravda*'s claim that only Czechoslovakia had the right to direct its internal affairs, the struggle of 1944 in August of 1968 was invoked more for its patriotic spirit than its rebellious deeds.[177] The upheaval caused by the occupation also meant that the usual August Uprising commemorations took place later in the fall, in some cases delayed until October.

"Normalization" and the Accession of Husák's Uprising

Most portentous for the changing interpretation of the Uprising, and indeed for the future direction of the Republic, was the August 29, 1968, announcement of Husák's appointment as First Secretary of the CPS. Husák's ascendancy signaled the victory of the "realist camp" within the CPC and paralleled what came to be called the process of "normalization." He

[176] Williams, *Prague Spring,* 146.
[177] *Pravda,* 29 August 1968, 2.

quickly defined himself as a pragmatic and energetic leader, anxious to end the crisis and secure his own political power simultaneously.[178] By April 1969, as a result of "months of persuasion, rationalization, crisis fatigue, ambition and opportunism," Husák had replaced Dubček as First Secretary of the CPC.[179] The change in leadership sounded the death knell of Dubček's "New Course."[180]

In his first months of leadership, Husák quickly installed the mechanisms of "normalization": censorship was reintroduced, a purge of the party undertaken, and most outposts of the free press shuttered, including *Kultúrny život*. As concerned public discussion of Slovak national history, a new approach emerged. The historian Adam Hudek notes that the nominal resolution of the "Slovak question" following the Republic's federalization on October 27, 1968, reflected a kind of nationalist-Marxist reformation in historical analysis.[181] This shift was clearly discernable in the historiography of the SNU. Slovak academics and regime officials alike reshaped the story of the SNU to showcase, as *Pravda* explained in August of 1969, Slovakia's "sovereign" path to "political, economic, and cultural development" in a self-governing socialist republic. Moreover, the Communist Party had been able to take a leading role, *Pravda* explained, because it had a unique grasp of the need for a new, equitable arrangement for Slovaks in the Republic.[182] Thus the Communist leaders of the Uprising, as Husák had maintained in *Testimony,* were invariably depicted as simultaneously class- and nationally conscious. Renewed emphasis on Communists' historic support for Slovak self-determination could do little to conceal a

[178] Williams, *Prague Spring,* 153.
[179] Ibid, 209.
[180] Ibid, 226.
[181] Adam Hudek, *Najpolitickejšia veda: Slovenská historiographia v rokoch 1945-1968* (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2010), 214.
[182] *Pravda*, 27 August 1969, 1.

renewed subservience to the Soviet Union, however. As the new Czechoslovak leadership restored the Republic's fealty to Moscow, the SNU again became a means to demonstrate Slovakia's deepest gratitude to its "liberators and friends."[183]

What the prominent Slovak historian Samuel Cambel called the "creative development" of Marxist historiography in regime-sponsored institutions after 1969 in fact amounted to ideological acrobatics. Like the move toward federalization itself, the "official" version of national history was revamped to promote the illusion of national sovereignty while concentrating power in the CPS, and later the CPC.[184] The only existing model of a Slovak national state, Tiso's Slovak Republic, posed a major obstacle here. A re-nationalized SNU required that party theorists differentiate Slovakia's newfound, federated form of sovereignty from wartime independence. Štefán Sádovský, a newly-appointed Slovak member of the Federal Assembly, tackled this task in his keynote speech on the Uprising's twenty-fifth anniversary in August 1969. Slovaks, he explained, had not risen against the Slovak State in 1944 because they were opposed to an autonomous Slovakia, but because the struggle against fascism had instilled them with class-consciousness. Having realized its place in the international proletarian struggle, the Slovak people pursued Slovak nationalism as a step toward building a socialist society. In a nod to the newly empowered Slovak federal organs, Sádovský concluded that the Slovak national committees and councils supplied the links between the nation and Marxist praxis.[185]

The twenty-fifth anniversary celebrations of the SNU showed that Slovak history had fully succumbed to "normalization." With a new spotlight on Slovak nationalism, large public events in Banská Bystrica and Bratislava were once again sensationalized in the

[183] *Pravda,* 28 August 1969, 2.
[184] *Nové slovo*, 1 February 1979, 4.
[185] *Pravda,* 29 August 1969, 1.

press. Timed in conjunction with the celebrations was the opening of a recently constructed SNU museum in Banská Bystrica. There, for the first time, Slovakia played host to large party delegations from Warsaw Pact countries. With a full array of newly appointed Slovak party bureaucrats on display—replacing those expelled for their association with Dubček's dangerous scheme—the anniversary was embellished with award ceremonies and dedications of new monuments. Husák himself received the prestigious "Order of Lenin" medal from the Soviet Union for the occasion. His *Testimony on the Slovak National Uprising* also entered its second round of publication. Conversely, beginning that year, non-conforming historians—those who had spent years revising the "deformed" history of the SNU—were gradually driven out of public life or adopted self-censorship. As museums and institutes for the study of wartime Slovak resistance, many of which had been established as part of the SNP's "rehabilitation" in the early 1960s, were gradually purged or disbanded, regime "experts" worked to erase evidence of a "Civic" resistance that had been documented in recent scholarship.[186] *Testimony* became the new orthodoxy, praising the Soviet-led Communist movement during the Second World War, characterizing the SNU as the birth of a hybridized Slovak socialist-nationalism, and validating its natural expression in the newly declared Czecho-Slovak federation.

The question of whether Slovaks internalized the new history of the SNU, propagated by the Husák regime until its collapse in the fall of 1989, is not within the purview of this study. Nevertheless, this "normalized" Uprising was, like the party that created it, if not popular, apparently accepted. It is notable that between 1969 and 1975, the new SNU museum in Banská Bystrica received more than double the visitors its predecessor

[186] Jablonický, *Glosy*, 85-89.

had in the previous fifteen years.[187] Moreover, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, a rich variety of regime-sponsored popular entertainment, cultural initiatives, and public rituals sprang up around the Uprising. From dozens of films and the enduringly popular eight-part television series *Uprising Tales* (*Povstalecká história*, 1984), to collections of Uprising-themed music and poetry, the SNU was presented to new generations as the crucible of a modern Slovak-Communist political *and* cultural identity. More research on this period is needed, but we can be certain that the proliferation of these cultural forms, combined with forty-five years of contentious, perpetually transforming interpretations of 1944, has left Slovaks in the post-socialist era with views on the Uprising that are far from uniform.

Conclusion

This chapter has revealed some of the ways in which Czechs and Slovaks invoked the Slovak National Uprising to support or challenge collective norms and various forms of political legitimacy. Based on this examination of three key periods in postwar history, I conclude that the emergence and metamorphosis of the SNU as a discursive subject—much more than its military or geopolitical impacts during the war itself—is the best evidence for the Uprising's lasting salience in Czechoslovak history. The "collective effervescence" that took hold of Slovakia during the summer of 1944 (described in Chapter IV) had evidently invested the events of that summer with a great deal of emotive power; memories, imagery, and speech associated with the rebellion could be conjured and refracted in a variety of

[187] Ján Stanislav, *Päťdesiat rokov Múzea Slovenského národného povstania* (online). Quoted in Kšiňan and Michela, "The Slovak National Uprising," 45. The increased public interest in the SNP museum may have been in part due to organized school trips or other compulsory visits.

scenarios to generate or sustain concrete forms of social change and state policy. We might refer to this phenomenon as the evolution of an "Uprising discourse."

In the three years following the war (1945-1948), forms of this discourse appeared in both the backstage diplomacy of political elites and in the public sphere. Throughout negotiations with London and Moscow officials in early 1945, recourse to the Uprising buttressed the SNC's argument for Slovak rights and guarantees of equal treatment in a joint Republic. This tack proved successful: provisions for Slovak governing bodies based on the SNC's wartime model were confirmed in the Košice Program, and the Czechoslovak Constitution of 1946.

But while this first iteration of the Uprising discourse supported Czechoslovak unity and equality in the Republic, it was quickly challenged. In electoral contests, public demonstrations, and postwar trials, both major Slovak parties laid claim to the SNU's legacy. After losing at the ballot box in 1946, the Communsts increasingly relied on a strategy of "playing the Ľudák card" to criminalize and divide the Slovak Democrats.[188] To this end, they found it expedient to cast the DP as "reactionary" traitors to the Uprising, damaging their credibility and ultimately weakening their influence in the SNC and the NCs. In part on these grounds, the competencies afforded the Slovak National Council were also gradually eliminated, and non-conforming Democratic representatives were driven out of government and often out of the country.

Czech and Slovak Communists wasted no time refitting the Uprising discourse to consolidate their rule after the coup of February 1948. SNU anniversary celebrations that year provided the impetus for a witch-hunt of leading Catholics and Democrats across the

[188] Vondášek, "Ľudácka karta," 420.

country. More anti-state plots were "revealed" at the end of August 1948 and more of the party's opponents in the DP were arrested and charged with treason during this Uprising-season sweep. Moreover, according to U.S. State Department observers, the anniversary's military parades were orchestrated to "impress the populace with the might and invincibility of the regime and….discourage further attempts to demonstrate against the government."[189] In the 1950s, some of the SNU's leading Slovak Communists found themselves on the wrong side of the regime's view of Uprising history. Driven by allegations of "bourgeois nationalism," show trials sent many of them to gaol for supposed "deviationism" during the SNU, effectively silencing their calls for Czechoslovak federation. From 1948 to 1963, the SNU was also consistently propagandized to promote the adoption of Marxist dogma in public life, a pro-Soviet stance in the Cold War, and a Stalinist industrialization campaign.

When the tide of de-Stalinization finally reached Czechoslovakia in the mid-1960s, the intraparty movement to exorcise the worst "excesses" and abuses of the foregoing era also touched upon the Uprising. The CPC chief Antonín Novotný's intolerance for any expression of Slovak national feeling fed a desire to redress the "deformation" and de-nationalization of Uprising history. Strengthened by other grievances over the uneven benefits of modernization in the postwar Republic, historians' attempts to rewrite the story of 1944 helped galvanize support for Czechoslovak federation among party figures and intellectuals alike. The "new course" begun by the reformist government of Alexander Dubček in early 1968 encouraged this trend, but it also revealed the limitations of the Uprising discourse. Dubček and his Central Committee only tentatively referenced the

[189] USNA, 860F.00, Internal Affairs of States, Czechoslovakia, Oct. 14, 1948 – May 11, 1949.

"spirit of August 1944" to defend Czechoslovak self-determination during the August 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion that effectively ended the Prague Spring.

Somewhat paradoxically, the period of "normalization" that followed—a hardline roll-back of Dubček's "socialism with a human face"—saw some Slovaks' SNU-inspired aspirations for federation realized. Under the leadership of the rehabilitated Slovak Communist Gustáv Husák, the most enduring scion of the SNU, the party dictatorship embraced the Uprising as a revolutionary, Marxist-nationalist creation myth for modern Slovakia and a federated Republic. Functioning at the same time to legitimize Husák and the rule of a repressive dictatorship, this iteration of the Uprising discourse would remain entrenched until the fall of the Czechoslovak Communist regime in 1989.

This discussion has revealed how, just as it supplied an effective discursive tool of political legitimization following the war, the Uprising also became an immanent but malleable feature of Slovak national culture. Whether deployed within the context of Czechoslovak centralism, Soviet-style socialism, or Czecho-Slovak federation, the SNU and its mediated legacies were consistently bound to the socio-political structures governing postwar Slovakia in each of its re-articulations.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this study, I asserted that the Second World War stands at the heart of Slovakia's twentieth century. The emergence of the Slovak State (1939-1945) and the 1944 rebellion that aimed to subvert and supplant it, became, as we have seen, some of the most important historical referents with which Slovaks have told and retold their modern story. But what is the significance of this story? Is its meaning knowable? How, and with what tools, might this meaning be affixed?

In the foregoing chapters, I have treated printed cultural productions—magazines, newspapers, and transcriptions of speeches and radio broadcasts—as the most reliable available evidence of Slovaks' efforts to make sense of these events. The pages of Hlinka Party periodicals like *Slovák, Nástup,* and *Gardista* reveal the admixture of Catholic-corporatist, Italian Fascist, and homegrown nationalist-populist precepts that shaped the HSPP's articulation of a "New Slovakia" following the ruptures of Munich and the descent into continental war. In reports from Slovak and German security services, the social, political, and economic structures behind a "Slovakia for the Slovaks" appear to have elicited a dynamic set of reactions from 1939 to 1943. As the mood turned from cautious enthusiasm to apathy and self-interest, contradictions between the regime's posturing and daily reality cost the Ľudáks the hearts and minds of Slovakia's people—if indeed they had ever succeeded in capturing them.

More research is needed to identify the stratification of views across the population, but most Slovaks tended to approach the state as a paternal source of munificence, morality, and social and spiritual order. As they faltered in these pastoral duties, the party and its

representatives were increasingly regarded as "false prophets" or pathetic slaves to a soulless German master. Only for a minority did they remain the legitimate guardians of Slovak nationalism and the bearers of a new political order.

Pamphlets, placards, and other printed propaganda from the Slovak underground, as well as dispatches from local HSPP officials, indicate that the country had fallen into a profound state of insecurity by early 1944. An atmosphere of social, political, and perhaps even spiritual dislocation was exacerbated by new existential threats: supply shortages, Allied bombing raids, and fear of Soviet invasion destroyed the remaining pillars of the HSPP system. In the spring and summer of 1944, the already fragile structures governing Slovak society thus became open to transformation. However, because the ideals articulated by interwar Czechoslovakist elites and the Slovak clerical class could no longer command the public's allegiance, those at the margins of wartime politics in Slovakia now seized an opportunity. Slovak Agrarians, Social Democrats, and Communists in the underground had finally agreed upon a common political agenda and, with help from turncoats in the Slovak military and the HSPP, the rebellion they launched after the Nazi occupation of Slovakia on August 29, 1944, turned this group of conspirators (calling itself the Slovak National Council) into rebels for a new form of Slovak state- and nationhood.

What "revolutionary" story did the SNC evince from the Uprising? Reflected in *Pravda*, *Čas,* broadcasts of the "Slovak Free Transmitter," and various homespun broadsheets, there were multiple tellings. The most dominant of these saw a re-awakened, more confident Slovak nation take up the traditions of the 1848 Slovak Uprising to fight the "Fascist beasts" threatening the People's extermination. Threads of pan-Slavism were woven into this narrative, describing a greater Slavic nation expressing its unity in battle, in alliance

with the Soviet Union, and in the movement for a renewed and reformed Czechoslovak (or Czecho-Slovak) Republic. Factions within the Council, grouped around the Slovak Communist Party and the Democratic Party, elaborated their own storylines in connection with the Uprising: for the former, it inaugurated a proletarian revolution; for the latter, a renaissance for Christian morality and Masarykian liberal humanism.

Beneath these storylines, however, there was a more significant process taking shape. The rupture of the Uprising produced panic and violence, but it also engendered a kind of transcendent solidarity in Slovakia and began a new era of discovery and reflection about the nature and future course of a Slovak nation. The act of opposition to German occupation, which for many (but notably not all) of the Uprising's participants was also an act of opposition to the Ľudák regime, was quickly construed as a demonstration of the nation's sovereign will and its desire to transform the political system. The collective understanding of what was "really happening" during the SNU became a kind of cultural canvas upon which ideas about Slovak national rights, morality, and socio-economic justice were drawn and revised—a "revolutionary imaginary" of Slovak statehood. William H. Sewell, Jr. has documented an analogous phenomenon in the context of the French Revolution. A "Parisian uprising" on July 14, 1789, did not become "revolutionary" in the mere act of taking the Bastille.[1] Rather, this meaning was designated and reinforced afterwards by the National Assembly. In revolutionary Slovakia, as in revolutionary France, the "true meaning" of the Uprising stemmed from its mediation and codification by presiding authorities in the SNC, not the self-conscious aspirations of its participants.

[1] Sewell, "Historical Events," 855, 851-52.

The fall of Uprising Slovakia in October 1944 and the months of Nazi-directed reprisals that followed destabilized and subverted, but did not destroy, this "revolutionary imaginary." The Uprising state and its leaders were either killed or driven underground and, unlike in France, the "King" was not cowed by the rebellion; Jozef Tiso remained *Vodca,* and he and other Ľudák leaders worked hard to subsume the SNU within the narrative of "New Slovakia." For them, this "putsch" was the bloody work of Czechs, Jews, and Bolsheviks—an affront to the Christian order that could never reflect the sovereign will of the Slovak nation. Amongst soon-to-be exiled Ľudák leaders and their heirs, this view lived on; at home in Slovakia, six more months of war prevented the SNC from consolidating its own version(s) of the Uprising story on any significant scale.

In the immediate postwar period, the Uprising was harnessed by Czech and Slovak politicians as a key discursive element of a reconstructed Czechoslovak Republic. However, it remained divisive: in 1945, while the London Government talked up the "Czechoslovak" character of the rebellion, Czech and Slovak Communists were touting its Marxist-Leninist aspirations; and Democrats saw it as a kind of national rebirth for Slovakia. Each group hoped to bind the Uprising to their own re-articulation of Czechoslovak society following the war. The divided and progressively weakened position of the SNC in the National Front after 1946 made the meaning of the SNU—which was by now deeply intertwined with debates over Slovak sovereignty and the political direction of the state—impossible to consolidate. Moreover, representatives of both major Slovak parties seem to have regarded the ending to the Uprising story as yet unwritten. If, as I have argued, August 29, 1944 was its foundational act, the Slovak revolution was apparently seen by the CPS and DP as very much in progress from 1945 to 1948.

A new phase in the SNU's elevation as the bedrock of national and political mythology began with the "Glorious February" revolution of 1948. Under the Czechoslovak Communist regime, this mythology supported the state's reification of the "popular will" behind a variety of policy aims.[2] But the adoption and dissemination of an Uprising narrative as "official truth" after 1948 also had important effects on the longer-term spread of Slovak nationalism. A Slovak national consciousness, which had gained considerable purchase during the five years of wartime Slovak independence, found—particularly following the Prague Spring of 1968—an effective vessel in the Uprising. Persistently invoked in politics and propaganda, memorialized in countless monuments, books, and films, and occasioning several annual public rituals, the SNU provided a means to diffuse the idea of a Slovak nation, as well as to reflect on its content. As members of the Uprising SNC and later the lead Communist proponents for Slovak sovereignty, Husák and Novomeský represented a new generation of patriotic Slovak activists (picking up where Hlinka and Tiso had left off) and they embraced the SNU as an important Marxist-nationalist creation myth for Slovakia.

Evidence of a "nationalization" of Slovak society comes into stark relief following the collapse of the Communist party-state in 1989. On the eve of the Second World War, Slovak national consciousness had been largely limited to clerical elites and a small Slovak bourgeoisie; roughly fifty years later it had evolved into an expansive movement, expressed by all political parties and embraced by a wide majority of Slovaks.[3] The war years'

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[2] Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 488.

[3] Miroslav Hroch, referenced in Chapter I, describes the creation and growth of nationalism as a three-phase process. In the second and third phases, national consciousness is transmitted by a core group of proponents and is adopted on a societal scale. See: Miroslav Hroch. *Evropská národní hnutí v 19. století* (Praha: Svoboda, 1986).

contribution to this process is difficult to understate: not only had Slovak nationhood been born and reborn in 1939 and 1944, respectively, but both the Slovak State and the Uprising helped Slovak nationalism to attain a mass character that it had never before possessed. In tandem, the Slovak State and the SNU set in motion a generative process, producing a lexicon of symbols and historical memory that became building blocks of a new, postwar Slovak national identity, and finally swept away the dwindling mandate of Czechoslovakism in Slovakia.[4]

Beyond its implications for the study of Slovak nationalism, this study suggests several avenues for future research and opportunities for fruitful comparisons, whether in relation to East-Central European nationalisms, European fascisms, or the myriad legacies of World War II resistance movements. While I have outlined in broad strokes the debates surrounding the SNU in 1945-1948, there is much more to learn: how exactly was the Uprising correlated to specific initiatives, both Democratic and Communist? To what extent did former Ľudáks or "collaborators" claim a part in the SNU story? What functions did individuals' purported ties to the resistance serve under Communism more generally? In this respect, a Slovak fascination with the archetype of the partisan, a phenomenon particularly visible in Tito's Yugoslavia, suggests possibilities for further examination and comparison.

Likewise, corollaries to Slovak "clerical fascism" in Pavlić's Croatia and Franco's Spain deserve closer scrutiny. How have those regimes—and internal resistance to them—been positioned in contemporary narratives of national history? Furthermore, how might applying "civil war" as a heuristic approach to these "collaborationist" states strengthen a

[4] The historian Alexander Maxwell has described how attempts to construct a Czechoslovak ethnic identity were undercut by the "Slovakizing" effect of a Slovak language dialect in the Slovak area of the interwar Republic (See: Maxwell, *Choosing Slovakia*, 184-85). The present research suggests that the rupture of 1944 worked to a similar effect.

longue durée historiography of modern Europe? As I have argued elsewhere, the forces behind wartime violence in Slovakia have nineteenth-century antecedents. Political rivalries, cultural divides, and intra-national conflicts took root in conjunction with the Habsburg empire's attempts to subjugate or assimilate the many national groups under its rule.[5] The internecine destruction that seized Slovakia during the war was at least in part a consequence of that empire's dissolution. In what ways did the years 1939-1945 then supply the conditions for a diffuse kind of civil war for Habsburg succession, in which the Slovak National Uprising was a climactic but inconclusive battle?

That the SNU and the Slovak State remain polarizing topics reminds us that the uses of Second World War history in the "short twentieth century's" aftermath remain under-explored.[6] In Slovakia's case, the recent drift away from a liberal democratic consensus on the Uprising offers proof that politics in post-Communist Slovakia remain both divisive and historicized.[7] Marian Kotleba's People's Party—Our Slovakia (PP–OS), which won over 8 percent of the vote in Slovakia's parliamentary elections in March 2016, is another sign that ultra-nationalism is alive and well in Slovak society. The party's infatuation with Tiso, embrace of HG-style drill uniforms, and disdain for the Uprising and its public sanctification, constitute a major departure from the positions of Slovakia's mainstream nationalist parties—even Čarnogurský's CDM and Vladimir Mečiar's "Movement for a Democratic Slovakia"—in the 1990s. Nevertheless, this neo-Fascist party enjoys the support

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[5] See: J. Luke Ryder, "Občianská vojna na Slovensku? Načrtnutie teoretického prístupu k Slovenskému národnému povstaniu," in *Slovenské národné povstanie: Slovensko a Európa v roku 1944*, ed. Marek Syrný (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Dolis, 2014).

[6] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Abacus, 1995), 3.

[7] Pekník, "Slovenské národné povstanie," 440-41. Pekník's article uses public opinion surveys from 2003 to 2007 to document the Slovak public's increasing acceptance of the SNU as an important event in progress toward a democratic and integrated, European Slovakia. At the same time, the author notes an enduring minority view of the SNU as a "Communist betrayal" or an otherwise unjust attack on legitimate Slovak statehood.

of a majority of first-time voters.[8] Its growing appeal also appears ominously, and perhaps paradoxically, correlated to data showing that a lack of knowledge about the Uprising, and Slovak history in general, are at an all-time high amongst young adults in Slovakia.[9] Decades of constant revision to "orthodox" history, a familiar phenomenon in formerly Communist East-Central Europe, has likely encouraged distrust and disinterest in the Slovak National Uprising in contemporary culture.

While it is clear that the revival of radicalism in Slovakia puts the country squarely in line with current European trends, the Kotleba party's attachment to the era of Slovak independence is not so straightforward. Indeed, what makes the popularity of Kotleba and the PP–OS somewhat perplexing is its base of operations: as the governor (*župán*) of Banská Bystrica, Kotleba has found favorable ground in the capital of Uprising lore, an area that has been typically dominated by left-wing parties.[10] Likewise, the issues reportedly most important to PP–OS supporters—fighting corruption, for example—do not appear derived from the model of the Slovak State or its ideology. And yet common threads are still discernible: in its antipathy toward Slovak Roma, NATO, and the European Union, PP–OS returns to the Ľudáks' insistence on the "first-order right of Slovaks to Slovak bread."[11]

Over the past quarter century, a latent tension between the SNU and the Slovak State, as two foundational models of Slovak statehood, has continued to inform the modern Slovak national imaginary. Recall Kotleba's provocations during SNU holiday celebrations

[8] *Aktuality,* 8 March 2016. Available online: https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/319782/kde-zobral-kotleba-svojich-volicov-nevolili-ho-len-extremisti/. Accessed December 13, 2016.
[9] Carol Skalnik Leff, "Contested History: The Politics of the Wartime Slovak State and the Slovak National Uprising in Post-Communist Slovakia," presentation given at the annual conference of the Association of Slavic, Eastern European, and Eurasian Studies, Washington, DC, 17 November 2016.
[10] Prior to Kotleba's election in 2013, the Banská Bystrica region was a stronghold for SMER, a Social Democratic party.
[11] *Slovák,* 2 October 1938. Quoted in Ward, "The 1938 First Vienna Award," 80.

in August 2014, which I touched upon in Chapter IV, or his party's (unsuccessful and roundly criticized) motion in April 2016 to hold a moment of silence in parliament on the anniversary of Tiso's execution. On the other side of the aisle, the director of the Archive and Museum of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica, himself a former member of the CPS, recently vowed to oppose Kotleba for the governership in the next round of elections. Stanislav Mičev has attacked Kotleba and his ilk as "fascists and neo-Nazis" who have profaned the deeds of "those who laid down their lives for democracy."[12]

These two seminal events have thus become dialogic elements in each subsequent articulation of Slovak state- and nationhood. As we have seen, after years of "deformation" in the hands of the Communist party, Slovakia's leaders retooled the "Uprising discourse" to suit a westward-looking integrationist program after 1989. And though in the early 1990s Ľudák nostalgia invigorated a reactive Slovak ethno-nationalism, by the time of Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004 the vision of Slovak democracy embodied in a neoliberal interpretation of the SNU appeared hegemonic. More than a decade later, in an era of "dislocated" pluralist democracy perhaps edging closer to rupture, Tiso and the Slovak State have become resurgent referents for a new blueprint for Slovak society.

Inhabiting Slovak national space, it seems, means to inhabit contested space. Protestant and Catholic, autonomist and centralist, nationalist and Communist, Democrat and authoritarian—these faultlines resurface in guises both old and new. That Slovak "stateness" is so often perceived through the binaries of the Slovak State and the SNU, of fascists and freedom fighters, of patriots and traitors, reinforces the adage: nowhere more than East-Central Europe does one's view of history dictate one's view of the contemporary.

[12] *Nový čas,* 4 November 2016. Available online: http://zivot.cas.sk/clanok/34144/stanislav-micev-chce-zosadit-kotlebu-zo-zupanskej-stolicky-z-tvrdenia-ze-je-fasista-neupustim. Accessed December 5, 2016.

As I have argued here, the elemental rupture of the Second World War remains a critical and contested nexus between the Slovak past and the Slovak present.

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