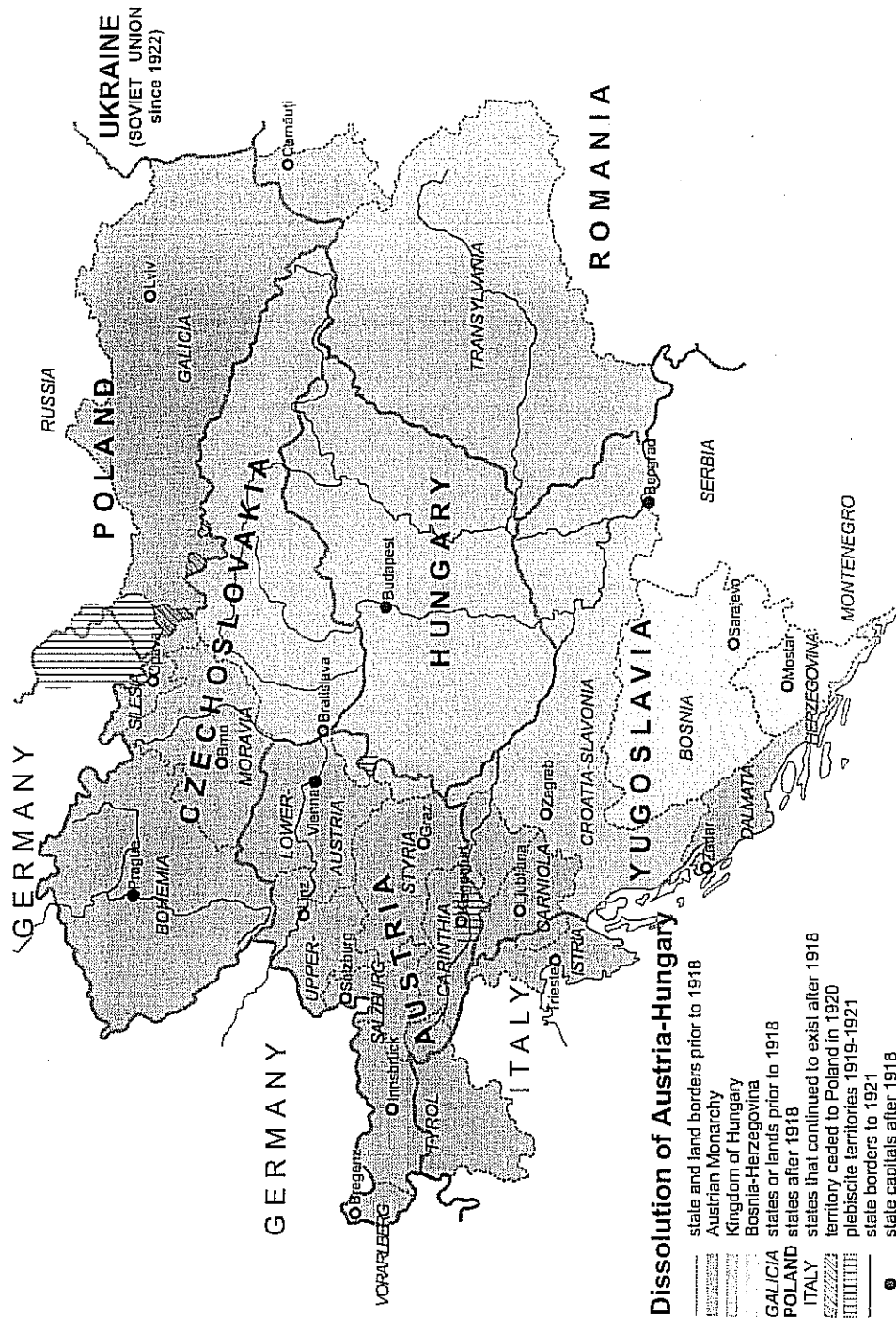


STUDIA HISTORICA SLOVACA XXI

A Concise History  
of SLOVAKIA

Edited by Elena Mannová

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# Slovakia in the 20th century

## 1. Slovakia between the Wars

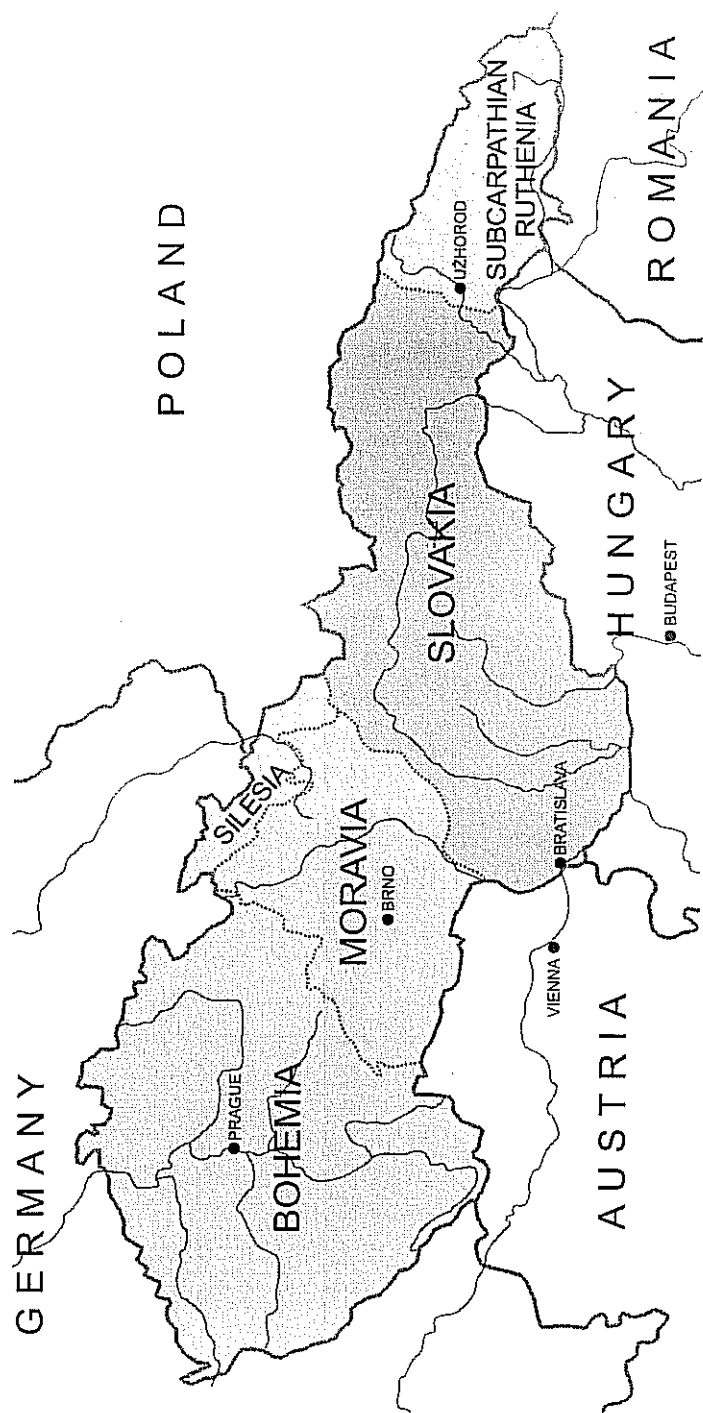
### 1.1. The Struggle for Slovakia

The declaration of the Slovak National Council on 30th October 1918 was an expression of will to separate from the old Kingdom of Hungary and create a common state with the Czechs. However, the implementation of this decision was not simple. The Slovak National Council did not have military units; Slovak national councils and armed militias formed in towns and villages struggled for power with officials, military units and policemen, who obeyed only the Budapest government. After the revolution of 1st November 1918 in Budapest, Hungarian national councils, loyal to Károlyi's government, were also formed in the territory of Slovakia.

In some parts of Slovakia, like in many parts of the disintegrating Monarchy, anarchy prevailed. Armed soldiers, returning from the front, supported spontaneous uprisings.



Oath of the Czechoslovak Army in Bratislava, 4th February 1919



in villages and small towns. Violence and looting were directed against the hated state administrators, notaries and policemen, as representatives of the injustices of the years of war, but also against shopkeepers, innkeepers and the propertied classes.

Károlyi's government tried to keep Slovakia within the framework of Hungary with a promise of autonomy, but the Prague government acted energetically. Slovak members were coopted into the newly formed National Assembly in Prague in November 1918, and the first provisional government of Slovakia began its activity in western Slovakia on 6th November. On 7th December, Vavro Šrobár was appointed minister with full power to administer Slovakia, with his seat in Žilina. After the occupation of Bratislava by the Czechoslovak Army on 31st December 1918, Šrobár's government moved there. Slovakia had its capital city for the first time in history.

By 20th January 1919, after brief battles, the Czechoslovak Army, strengthened by legionaries from France and Italy and by volunteers, pushed the Hungarian units to the south, beyond the demarcation line, determined in December 1918 by the Entente. A new administration was established in the liberated territory. Šrobár's ministry, an extended organ of the Prague government, quickly liquidated all competing power centres and authorities. The revolutionary councils, militias and their central authority, the Slovak National Council, were dissolved. Its liquidation was enabled by the fact, that it was too weak to enforce the power of the new state against Budapest, since only the central government in Prague had the most important instrument of power at the time – an army. The dissolution of the Slovak National Council symbolized the direction of the building of the new Czecho-Slovak state in a centralist form and the relative strengths of the Czech and Slovak political elites.

Czechoslovak power in the territory of Slovakia came into crisis only once, in the spring of 1919. After the communist coup in Budapest on 21st March 1919, conflict broke out between the Czechoslovak Army and the Hungarian Red Army, which occupied a significant part of Slovakia in June. In hard, bloody battles, involving artillery, aircraft and armoured trains, the progress of the Red Army was stopped, and after an ultimatum from the Entente, the territory of Slovakia was cleared by the end of June. With the departure of the Hungarian Army, the short-lived Slovak Republic of Councils (Soviets), declared at Prešov on 19th June 1919, also disappeared.

Up to 1918 Slovakia was not a separate administrative unit, and so did not have precisely defined frontiers. In the north and west, there were the historic frontiers of the Kingdom of Hungary with the Austrian provinces of the Empire; in the east an administrative boundary was defined in 1919, between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Podkarpatská Rus), which had been joined to Czechoslovakia. The frontier with Hungary to the south was confirmed only after prolonged negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference, by the Treaty of Trianon, signed on 4th June 1920. The frontier was determined with the use of ethnic, economic and military-strategic elements. The Hungarian Parliament ratified the treaty, but no more significant political force in Hungary was reconciled to the break up of the old Hungarian state and the union of large parts of its territory with Yugoslavia, Austria, Rumania and Czechoslovakia. Hungarian revisionism and the defensive anti-revisionism of the Successor States became an important part of politics in the Danubian region in the following decades. In the north, Poland enforced the transfer of 25 communities in 1920. This impeded mutual relations during the inter-war period.

## 1.2. The Political System

Slovakia within the frontiers fixed in 1920 had an area of 49,006 km<sup>2</sup> and 2,998,244 inhabitants. It formed 35% of the area of Czechoslovakia and contained 22% of the population. Agriculture and forestry involved 60.6% of the population; in the Czech Lands only 31.6%. In the industrialized western parts of the state, 39.6% of the population worked in construction, banking and industry; in Slovakia 17.4%. There were also important differences in the levels of urbanization and education, but above all in the level and intensity of political and social organization and mobilization. Up to 1918, Czech society had a better possibility to develop than the Slovaks in the Kingdom of Hungary. As a result, the Czechs entered the new state with well organized political parties, voluntary associations, managing elites, a complete Czech education system up to university level and a tradition of Czech statehood. The majority of Czech members of the Constitutional Assembly already had years of experience in the Vienna Parliament or in the provincial councils. Among the 54 Slovak members, only 6 had such experience and mostly only very briefly. Apart from experienced political and economic elites, Slovakia also lacked integrating personalities. General Milan Rastislav Štefánik, who could have played an important role, based on his position as a leading figure in the liberation struggle abroad, was killed in an air crash in May 1919, when returning to his homeland.

It can be said that, while the well developed Czech society already lacked only the superstructure and crown of its own statehood, the Slovaks found in the new state above all the possibility to rapidly achieve that which Magyarization and the undemocratic regime in the Kingdom of Hungary had not allowed them to develop. The origin of Czechoslovakia undoubtedly accelerated the development of Slovak society. In particular, the democratic system created favourable conditions for this.

The 1920 constitution constituted Czechoslovakia as a republic with a bicameral parliament – the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. The head of state was a president elected by parliament for 7 years. From 1918 to 1935, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk was president, and from 1935 Edvard Beneš. The elections to parliament, in 1920, 1925, 1929 and 1935, as well as to local government bodies – community, district, county and provincial councils – were held on the basis of a very progressive election law with universal, direct, equal and secret voting, including for women. Compared to Hungarian elections, this was a striking difference, and the whole system of civil rights in the republic was also very progressive by the European standards of the time.

Universal suffrage and extensive possibilities for organization enabled the development of a system of political parties on pre-war foundations. The parties influenced the whole of public life to an unprecedented degree. They were organized on three principles, which overlapped and combined in various ways: the first was national, the second social class and the third confessional.

The nationality question had several levels in the inter-war period. The first was the existence and position of national minorities in Slovakia. In 1930, 17.8% of the inhabitants of Slovakia declared Hungarian nationality, 4.6% German, 2.2% Jewish and 2.9% East Slavonic nationality. However, the proportion and influence of Hungarians and Germans in the social elites was much higher. From one day to the next, the Hungarians, entirely unexpectedly, changed from members of the nation controlling the state into a minority. They regarded the republic as a temporary phenomenon, the product of a certain

international situation, which could rapidly change. The majority of voters of Hungarian nationality voted for the Hungarian Christian Social Party or the Hungarian National Party, which united in the 1935 elections. Some Hungarians voted for the Social Democrats, while agricultural workers on large estates in southern Slovakia could support the Communist Party.

Before 1918, the Germans, like the Slovaks, were subjected to Magyarization, and in Czechoslovakia they enjoyed a sort of national renaissance. However, they were divided between several isolated areas of settlement in western, central and eastern Slovakia, which established contacts only after 1918. Their political, economic and cultural organizations were strongly influenced by the German organizations in the Czech Lands. At first this helped, but later, in the second half of the thirties, it proved to be a step towards future tragedy.

The East Slavonic population of north-eastern Slovakia was politically and culturally weakened by quarrels between three different national orientations: Rusyns – supporters of a separate East Slavonic nation, Ukrainian and finally Russian. This division was reflected in the weakness of their political parties and cultural associations. The situation was further complicated by membership of two competing churches – Orthodox and Uniate.

Members of the Jewish religion formed 4.1% of the population. Half declared Jewish nationality, one third Czechoslovak and the rest Hungarian or German.

The position and activities of the Czechs had a specific character. After 1918, they came to Slovakia as officials, teachers, soldiers, policemen, railway workers, post office workers, but also as entrepreneurs and tradesmen. In 1930, 120,926 of them already lived in Slovakia. Although they were only 3.7% of the population, their influence on social, cultural and economic life was much greater. They were an important part of the basic pillar of the nationality question in the inter-war period: Slovak-Czech relations and the problem of the position of Slovakia in the state.

In 1918, the Slovaks became, according to the terminology of the time, a “state forming nation”. After the revolution, it was found that the intellectual and political potential of the Slovaks was higher than it had appeared to be in the deformed situation of the Kingdom of Hungary. Many superficially Magyarized Slovaks returned to their original nationality, and the revolution brought numerous new personalities to the surface. However, just as the Slovak forces were not sufficient to achieve liberation during the disintegration of the Kingdom of Hungary, post-revolution Slovakia depended on Czech help in the functioning of the state administration, post service, railways, security forces, but also basic schools and secondary schools. The importance of Czech help in the revolutionary period and during the consolidation of the regime in Slovakia, was obvious and so generally recognized, but it became a problem, when it proved to be also an instrument for the imposition of the conception of a unitary, centralized state.

Prague centralism was partly a heritage from the Monarchy, but also a product of the situation in the new state. The social storms after the revolution supported the wish for a “firm hand”. Experience of the opposition of the German and Hungarian minorities to the new state, at the time of its formation, did not promote confidence in efforts to achieve territory autonomy on the ethnic principle. The ideas of Prague about the form of the state were to a large extent determined by the existence of a German minority of more than three million in the western parts of the republic. Without the Slovaks, the Czechs formed only 49% of the total population. Precisely the Czech-German relationship

strongly influenced the tenacious persistence of the Czech political elite with the conception of a "Czechoslovak nation". It had a certain function, during the promotion of the future Czechoslovak state with the Entente politicians during the First World War, but it did not correspond to history or to the real situation, and above all it was in conflict with the feelings and convictions of the majority of Slovaks. Unexpectedly liberated from Hungary, and often with a fresh, and so sensitive national consciousness, they unambiguously wanted that, which was previously denied to them: the opportunity to be Slovaks. They saw this as one of the main benefits of the republic. The adherents of ethnic Czechoslovakism, who understood the Czechs and Slovaks as one nation, historically only temporarily divided, and destined to reunite, included only a handful of people in Slovakia, although they were political influential. The idea of a political Czechoslovak nation remained a minority view, although it was the official ideology of several powerful parties, especially the Agrarians and Social Democrats.

Ethnic Czechoslovakism was also anchored in the preamble of the 1920 constitution ("We the Czechoslovak nation") and in the language laws, which spoke of a "Czechoslovak language". Real life and Slovak opposition rapidly forced a modification of the decrees about the use of this non-existent language. In official proceedings, it was supposed to be used in two variants: the "Slovak variant" and the "Czech variant". In Slovakia, where the development and preservation of the Slovak language had played a great role, not only in the national revival, but also in the following struggles up to the First World War, this was a very sensitive issue and an instrument of political mobilization.

The weakness of the Slovak political elite in the period of the formation of the state, the economic and cultural dominance of the Czech Lands and Prague, the centre of the state, led to a situation in which legislation, the organization of the state, the prevailing ideas and style of politics were dictated by the situation outside the territory of Slovakia, and so not always corresponding to its traditions and real economic and political situation. At first, the Slovak Club attempted to promote the ideas and needs of Slovakia in parliament, but after the strengthening of political parties, it dissolved. The powers of the Ministry with Full Power to Administer Slovakia were gradually reduced, until it was abolished in 1927. The idea of creating a union of all the Slovak counties, to represent the whole of Slovakia in Prague, did not succeed. Instead, the counties, which did not correspond to the Czech tradition, were abolished. In 1928, following the examples of Bohemia and Moravia, a Slovak Provincial Office (*Krajinský úrad*) and elected Provincial Assembly were created, but they had only limited legal powers. Thus, the problem of real autonomy for Slovakia remained open until 1938.

The question of Slovak autonomy already appeared at the time of the origin of the state, at the session of the Slovak National Council in Martin, but in the first years, the basic dividing lines in the Slovak political spectrum were different, mainly social problems. Supply difficulties, unemployment, requisitioning of livestock and grain in the villages, impatience and radicalism accumulated during the war led to a complete change in the pre-war political structure. In the first general and secret parliamentary elections in 1920, the Social Democrats won with 38.1%, and together with the German and Hungarian Social Democrats 46%. However, the power of the left was undermined in 1921, by the splitting away of the Communist Party. The Communists in Slovakia, part of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, received twice as many votes as the reformist socialist parties in 1925, but from 1929 the latter achieved a moderate predominance, and maintained it during the thirties, in spite of the long years of economic crisis.



*Milan Hodža, first Slovak prime minister of Czechoslovakia*

Ideas, formed in the post-revolutionary national euphoria, of creating a united Slovak civic party, proved to be unrealistic. The trend of the pre-war years towards party crystallization continued. The pre-war national and conservative, the so-called Martin and Hodža's agrarian orientation, took part in the 1920 elections jointly, but then formed a strong Slovak branch of the Czech Agrarian Party. This Republican Party of Agricultural and Small Farming People never received the most votes in Slovakia, but it was the most influential in filling places in the state administration, in the granting of state subsidies to farmers, it had the best supported press, network of societies and a strong agricultural base in the well-developed co-operative movement. The Agrarian Party also provided Prague with the largest number of Slovak ministers and high officials, and in 1935 its leader Milan Hodža became the first Slovak to hold the position of prime minister in the Czechoslovak government.

From the middle of the twenties, most votes went to the Slovak People's Party, which continued the pre-war tradition of the Slovak People's Party and other Catholic or Christian social movements. In 1925, it was renamed according to the name of its leader Andrej Hlinka, as Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSLS). After the revolution, disturbed by the secularizing trends, especially in the western part of the state, it emphasized defence of Catholic education and church property threatened by land reform. However, this brought it only 17% of the votes in 1920. After separation from the Czech Catholic party in 1921, it already emphasized the nationality question, as well as confessional problems. In 1922, the HSLS submitted to parliament the first proposal for the autonomy

of Slovakia. This demand, introduced in the Pittsburgh Agreement of May 1918, which promised autonomy to Slovakia, was the constant, core and most successful instrument of agitation of the People's Party up to 1938. It interpreted autonomy as the most effective instrument for solving the social problems of Slovakia, because it would pay more attention to Slovakia's special needs and interests. It would be an effective barrier against the penetration of secularism, atheism and socialism from the western part of the state, a shield for traditional values.

The autonomism of the People's Party moved within the framework of the Czechoslovak state. Groups, which wanted to use the autonomy of Slovakia only as a stepping stone to the revival of the old Hungarian state, were marginal among the Slovaks, and underestimated the intensity and speed of the raising of national consciousness after 1918. In the conditions of the democratic state, authoritarian tendencies and imitation of Mussolini were also unsuccessful. The most numerous of them *Rodobrana* (Home Defenders), part of the People's Party, openly declared support for Italian Fascism. After its leader Vojtech Tuka was convicted in 1929 of spying for the Hungarian Home Defenders, it was dissolved, but was revived on the eve of the Second World War.

The majority of political parties were handicapped in advance by limited electoral bases, either confessionally, as in the cases of the Jewish Party and the clearly defined National Party, which was mostly Protestant or by social class, as in the case of the Tradesmen's Party. All the large and successful parties were mainly parties of the villages and countryside, even the Communist Party had its most faithful support on the large estates. Compared to the pre-war years, the ethnic element, but also confessionality were more significant factors in political mobilization. The continuing strength of confessionality is shown by the high number of priests in parliament, the leadership of parties and editorial offices, but also by the inability of Catholic and Protestant autonomists to coordinate their policies, except for a brief period in the years 1932-1935.

A significant feature of the inter-war Slovak political elite was its opposition to the government. With the exception of the first post-war years and the period 1927-1929, when the HSLS was part of a right-wing coalition government, the proportion of opposition voters reached 60-70%. This also reduced the willingness of the parties in the ruling coalition to seriously consider the political autonomy of Slovakia in the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic.

### 1.3. Economic Problems and the Social Consequences

Throughout the inter-war period, political life was strongly marked by the unfavourable economic situation. Apart from the normal economic cycles, which produced the crises of 1921-1923 and 1930-1934, the Slovak economy was affected for a long time by the effects of the war and the break up of Austria-Hungary. The chronic structural weaknesses of the Slovak economy, especially the shortage of capital, continued.

Direct war damage to the economy was not very extensive, but the death of breadwinners of families, the disabling of thousands of soldiers, the killing of heavy livestock, the abandonment and removal of capital from businesses had longer term effects. The effects of the war were worsened by the fact that they had to be overcome in a complicated environment.

The determining factor was the disintegration of the economic space of the Monarchy, that is the loss of the established market for Slovak industry, forestry and agriculture. The new states surrounded themselves with customs barriers, and in the first years there were also immense transport and currency obstacles. The Slovak economy had to adapt to the changed conditions, while faced with strong competition from its much stronger Czech partner. In the thirties, when statistics already enable a more precise comparison, Slovakia had 36% of the agricultural land, but only 23% of the agricultural production of the whole of Czechoslovakia, less than 8% of the industrial production, and the banks in Slovakia administered only 7% of the state's total capital. Only a few companies were financed by capital from the territory of Slovakia. The pre-war pattern of control by Budapest and Vienna banks partially continued, and was partly replaced by banks with their headquarters in Prague. The set of various factors: disintegration of the market of the Monarchy, capital shifts, the state's preference for the Prague centre and banks close to Czech companies, led to the mass liquidation of industrial companies, especially iron works, glass works, wood processing and textile factories and mines. Contemporaries gave this phenomenon the name "elimination of industry", and it became an important element in criticism of the economic and social policy of the new state. The newly constructed factories were not enough to replace these losses. The liquidation of companies also continued during the great crisis of 1930-1934. A change came with the boom in arms production after Hitler came to power in Germany.

Slovakia was still an agrarian country with islands of industry. Agriculture had very differentiated forms. On one side, large estates prospered, and found markets in the Czech industrial agglomerations, while on the other small scale agriculture eked out a living, often in unfavourable mountain conditions. The 88% of farms with up to 10 ha had 30.9% of the soil, while the 0.6% of farms with over 100 ha had 35.2%. Therefore, the majority of farmers placed great hope in land reform, the foundations of which were already laid by laws from 1918 and 1919. The reform enabled the sale to farmers of 21% of agricultural land. Although finally implemented to a lesser extent, it was a strong instrument for the Agrarian Party, which controlled the reform. The sale of 291,000 ha of land to small farmers did not significantly change the structure of agriculture, but it permanently anchored the slogan "The soil belongs to those who work it", in the consciousness of the village, and this was abundantly used in the political struggle, especially during the struggle for power by the communists after 1945.

Social tension continued in the villages. The southern frontier with Hungary prevented the traditional annual migration for seasonal work by agricultural labourers and small farmers from the mountain areas, and the flow was only gradually reoriented towards the Czech Lands, Austria, Germany and France. Emigration to the USA, an important outlet for population pressure in the villages before the war, was limited by the introduction of immigration quotas in 1921. The new targets for emigration – Canada and Argentina – did not fully compensate for this.

The agricultural population consumed the majority of its own production; the market production of the whole of agriculture was only 30%. This was one of the main causes of the low level of capital formation, a long term problem of the Slovak economy. The natural resources of Slovakia, with a few exceptions such as wood and magnesite, were not very attractive to foreign investors, and the position of the country on the edge of industrialized Europe disadvantaged Slovakia on Western markets. The hope that the Slovak economy





A traditional market

would orient itself towards the south-east was not fulfilled. The name of the newly established trade fair in Bratislava indicated this. At first it was the Oriental, later the Danubian Trade Fair. The agrarian states to the south east – Rumania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria – were poor, and they gave priority to building up and defending the simpler branches of industry, that is, those which also existed in Slovakia. Economic contacts with Hungary were also restricted for political reasons.

Economic integration of the Czech and Slovak economy proceeded slowly. Many serious problems, which burdened the Slovak economy, such as lack of unity in railway tariffs, which disadvantaged production in Slovakia, continued for many years. In fact, some unifying measures required extensive investment and a longer time, for example redirection of the main rail links. From the originally prevailing north-south direction (to Budapest), new east-west routes had to be constructed, connecting Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia with the Czech Lands.

Extensive restructuring of the economy after 1918 was associated with large-scale social upheavals and the decline of whole regions distant from the new economic centres. Chronic unemployment and rural poverty were probably not significantly greater than before the war, but in the new conditions, the possibilities for social mobilization and protest were increased. The number of trade union organizations and their members multiplied, as did the number and intensity of strikes, especially on large estates, in extractive industries and timber processing. In the radical post-war atmosphere, employees benefited from a whole series of social laws, which had long been in the programmes of the socialist parties in the old Kingdom of Hungary, but were only very

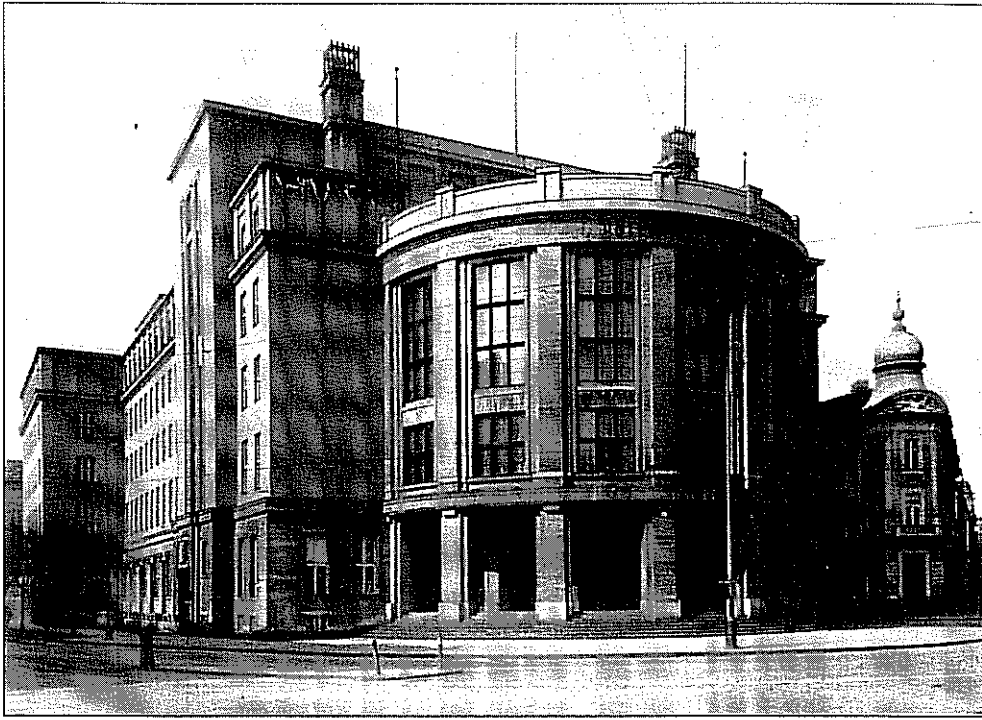
distant possibilities. An eight hour working day, unemployment benefit, health insurance and collective bargaining with employers were introduced. The democratic regime raised the self-confidence of workers, which led to a weakening of many traditional humiliating practices in the employer – employee relationship, and the post-feudal lord – dependent relationship typical of the former Kingdom of Hungary.

Contemporaries also regarded the economy as the weak point of the new state, but the general cultural development was usually considered to be a positive aspect, and the greater part of historiography agrees with this. It was partly a matter of modernization trends from before the war, but especially the removal of ethnic oppression and the general democratization of social and public life were new and accelerating elements.

Immediately after the revolution, official business in “Czechoslovak” was introduced, that is in practice, in the Czech and Slovak languages. The language act no.122 from 1920 also enabled the use of minority languages in areas where more than 20% of the population belonged to a minority. Teaching at basic and secondary schools was in Slovak, Hungarian, German and East Slavonic languages, for the first time after decades of Magyarization. Teaching in the mother tongues helped to improve teaching and facilitate access to higher education also for children from the less propertied classes. An act from 1922 extended compulsory education from 6 to 8 years. The number of secondary and vocational schools was increased. Elizabeth University, founded in Bratislava in the last years of the old Kingdom of Hungary, was closed when its professors refused to accept the origin of the Czechoslovak Republic, and Comenius University was established in its place, with faculties of Law, Philosophy and Medicine. Students from Slovakia also attended the University in Prague and the Technical University in Brno. A technical university was established in Košice only in 1938 after many struggles. Education was the subject of sharp political disputes, especially concerning radical secularization or the maintenance of the influence of the Church in education.

Democracy also accelerated the construction of a modern civil society. Alongside the political parties, but often also in their framework, trade union, employers', tradesmen's and farmers' association, numerous co-operatives, sports, gymnastic, charitable, social, educational and cultural associations arose, with various political and national colourings. Alongside the secular and Czechoslovak oriented *Sokol* gymnastic organization, the Catholic *Orol* and socialist oriented gymnastic organizations also functioned. Apart from communist, social democrat and agrarian trade unions, there were also *Ludák* (HSLS) trade unions. Along side the Catholic cultural *Society of Saint Vojtech* were the Protestant *Tranoscius*, Hungarian *Uránia* and German *Kulturverband* cultural societies. There were state, Czechoslovak oriented scouts, but also Catholic and Jewish scouts. Many sports competitions and hiking unions were also organized on an ethnic or political basis. Mutual relations in such an ethnically, confessionally and socially structured cosmos of associations and societies were varied, from rejection and strong competition, to close co-operation or at least coexistence.

The activity of societies was not entirely new after 1918, but it flourished to an unprecedented degree. It was also an area where the Slovaks, formerly limited, but politically placed in the position of the majority nation by the revolution of 1918, had the possibility to apply their new status, and really form their self-confidence and national consciousness. Activities in the framework of the structures of a civil society partially balanced the low representation of Slovaks in the social elites, where Hungarians, Germans and Jews still predominated, supplemented after 1918 by Czechs.



Comenius University in Bratislava

The creation of new or full recognition of older national symbols also contributed to shaping the civil and national self-confidence of the Slovaks. For the first time, Slovakia had its own capital city, with its name officially changed from German *Pressburg*, Hungarian *Pozsony* and Slovak *Prešporok* to *Bratislava*. The Slovak patriotic song *Nad Tatrou sa blýska* (There is lightning on the Tatras) became part of the Czechoslovak national anthem, the blue stripe from the Slovak tricolour became part of the Czechoslovak flag in the form of a triangle, and the Slovak cross with two pairs of arms placed on three hills became part of the Czechoslovak state shield, together with the Czech lion. The national cultural institution *Matica Slovenská*, dissolved by the Hungarian authorities in 1875, was revived. A Slovak Nation Theatre, Slovak national educational, economic and sporting organizations and centres, administrative and financial offices were gradually built up. Their activity, although they often had only limited authority, created, stabilized and made ever more obvious the fact of the existence of Slovakia a separate entity. This was something the Hungarian political elite had constantly denied before 1918, and part of the Czech political elite cast doubt on it after 1918. This fixing of Slovakia in the consciousness of the Slovaks, and partially also in that of the neighbours, is one of the important and long-term results of the inter-war period.

After a brief post-war wave of radicalism, the general trend of the internal-political development of Slovakia tended towards the gradual evolutionary use of the possibilities provided by the parliamentary democratic system. This was manifested in the stabilization

of the extreme left in the form of the Communist Party, at a level of around 10% of the electorate, and in the growth of reformist socialism, the failure of attempts to create radical workers' movements, but above all in the shifts within the civil parties towards the centre, to more moderate and longer term programmes and demands. This trend continued into the thirties, but was modified by two factors: the great economic crisis and substantial changes in the international position of Czechoslovakia.

An agrarian crisis started in Slovakia in 1928, the majority of branches of industry were effected in 1930, and the greatest depth was reached in 1933. The statistical records do not enable us to precisely calculate the decline of Slovak industrial production, but there was a decline of about 40% in the whole of Czechoslovakia, that is more than the world average. The crisis affected branches with markets outside the territory of Slovakia, such as mining, cellulose production, the textile and leather industries, and branches with production mainly for home consumption, such as the food industry and the production of building materials. The crisis stimulated a new wave of liquidations of industrial enterprises, especially in metal production and processing, textiles, glass production and paper making.

The crisis in wood processing, sharpened by the stopping of exporting of wood to Hungary, in retaliation for limitation of the importing of agricultural products to Czechoslovakia. By the end of 1930, 80% of sawmills were not working, and the number of workers was reduced by 50%. Work extracting and transporting timber in the mountain areas was also lost, and this had often also been a vital source of income for small farmers. Social tension was also increased by the loss of additional income from seasonal agricultural work. The number of hired seasonal workers in Slovakia fell by a third, the number of jobs for them in the Czech Lands, Austria and France fell, while Germany rejected them completely. Agricultural workers, both permanent and seasonal, formed the main part of the unemployed, 130,937 of whom were registered in 1933, which is not the whole number, because during the crisis, the basis of the social net in the form of mediated work was only being constructed. The majority of the unemployed did not fulfil the demanding conditions for regular support, and were dependent on charity, the distribution of food vouchers by officials, or irregular aid activities.

The Czechoslovak economy was highly dependent on foreign markets, but in 1933 exports fell to 28% of the pre-crisis level. As a result, the possible anti-crisis measures from the government were limited. To solve the crisis and its results, parliament gave the government special powers. The creation of a grain monopoly in 1934 was the most important of the numerous state interventions. In spite of state support and devaluations of the crown in 1934 and 1936, which reduced its gold content by a third, Czechoslovak exports in 1937 reached only 80% of their pre-crisis level in terms of physical quantity, and 40% in terms of value. Thus lack of money in state and local government treasuries hindered extensive development of investment activities, which could have revived the economy, as well as locally reducing unemployment.

A change in the trend of development of the economy came only from 1934, but it is difficult to be sure how far this was caused by the natural development of the economic cycle, and how far by the basic change in the international position of the state after Hitler came to power in neighbouring Germany. However, in Slovakia, the strengthening of defence and armaments from the middle of the thirties, were clearly a significant stimulus of revival.





Frontier fortifications, 1938

#### 1.4. The International and Internal Crisis of the Thirties

The strategic conception for the defence of Czechoslovakia, regarded the territory of Slovakia as an area where the Czechoslovak forces would retreat after defensive battles with the German army. Thus it would create the possibility of military intervention by allies, above all France and the Soviet Union. Strengthening the defendability of Slovakia would paralyse the efforts of Hungary, which perceived the possibility of revision of the Treaty of Trianon with the rise of a revisionist Germany. The construction of armaments factories began, with the existing armaments companies in the western part of the state building so-called "shadow works", which would replace their production in the event of war with Germany. The foundations of the armaments complex, which formed the backbone of Slovak industry until 1989, were laid precisely in these years. The construction of east-west roads and railways was accelerated, while iron and concrete fortifications were built on the frontiers with Austria and Hungary. The relocation of some regiments and higher commands to Slovakia required the construction of barracks, housing, airfields and stores. The extensive construction activity revived the building industry, production of cement and building materials. In 1937, the number employed in heavy industry exceeded the pre-crisis level by 17%, but 105,000 remained unemployed, and Slovakia was still a mainly agrarian country.

From the beginning of the crisis, the limited possibilities to absorb the surplus rural population, intensified the considerations and disputes about the economic future of Slovakia. The conception, which regarded an agrarian Slovakia as a natural supplement to the industrial Czech Lands, was never very popular among Slovak politicians and economists. Slovak agriculture certainly had great reserves, and with reform it could have become one of the resources for the accumulation of capital, but it had no chance to adequately revive the country on its own. The starting point could only be industrialization, the development of industry as the motor of social and cultural development as well. This idea was most strongly formulated by the communists. In 1937, in an attempt to create the political basis for the creation of an anti-fascist front, they collected into one document various proposals and projects of the non-communist Slovak parties, for the development of investment, land reform, support for small businesses, building up of vocational education and social reforms. The other parties ignored the project, but in the following decades, it was an effective argument from the communists, that they had grasped the key problems of the country early.

The economic crisis led to sharp social conflicts, storms, strikes and demonstrations, which were often suppressed in very brutal and bloody ways. In the thirties, the gendarmerie shot people in Holíč, Telgárt, Pohorelá, Košúty, Polomka, Čierny Balog and other places. Their actions provoked protests and questions in parliament. But the crisis had relatively little influence on the regime. Some laws were passed, which weakened the freedom of the press and the activities of local government in comparison with the past, and the possibility of stopping the activities of political parties was introduced, but the key law from 1933, which empowered the government to act before a law was approved by parliament, was limited in time, and only applied to purely economic matters. Thus, the system of parliamentary democracy was preserved in Czechoslovakia, in contrast to all the neighbouring countries.

The political consequences of the destruction caused by the great economic crisis appeared most significantly in the sharpening of the national quarrels in the state. The sharpening of the situation in the German areas of the Czech Lands was of key and fateful importance for the state. The former system of political parties completely collapsed there. The *Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront*, led by Konrad Henlein, won most votes among the Germans in the 1935 parliamentary elections. This party gradually became an instrument of Hitler. The activation of nationalism was also manifested among the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, where the Hungarian National Party and Hungarian Christian Social Party merged in 1936. There was not very much change among the voters for the Slovak political parties, but the national question played an ever more important role.

Hlinka's Slovak People's Party was part of the ruling coalition in 1927-1929, but after going into opposition, it submitted a new proposal for Slovak autonomy to parliament in 1930. Effective public demonstrations, such as that held in August 1933 to celebrate the 1100th anniversary of the foundation of the first known Christian church at Nitra, co-operation with the autonomist, mostly Protestant, Slovak National Party, enabled the party to renew its position, weakened by participation in the Prague government. In the 1935 parliamentary elections, it gained 30.12% of the votes, together with the Slovak National Party and small Rusyn and Polish parties. The party still relied on its charismatic leader Andrej Hlinka, but the post-revolutionary political generation, represented by

Jozef Tiso, Karol Sidor and an even younger group, especially of fresh graduates of already Czechoslovak schools, had already come into the foreground. They demanded the federalization of the state. In the radicalized environment, the authoritarian features of the ideology of the HSLS, demonstrated in the slogan "One God, one nation, one party" at the 1936 conference, and in the party's traditional anti-semitism, were increasingly apparent. The anti-Czech agitation, pointing to the occupation of places in the state administration, army, railways, post office and schools by Czechs to the disadvantage of Slovaks, the insensitivity of the central authorities to the needs of the Slovak economy, and the language question, were effective and attractive.

The Slovak representatives and organizations of the coalition of Czechoslovak state parties – the Agrarians, Social Democrats and others – were in a disadvantageous position in relation to the nationalist offensive. They condemned many doubtful actions of the central authorities themselves, but their criticism was ambiguous and either had no success, or succeeded only in the long term, so that they had little political effect at the given moment. From the historical point of view, it is clear that the policy of evolutionary balancing of the differences in the state, between its western and eastern parts was successful, that Slovak society was becoming modernized and Slovakized very rapidly, but this was happening at such a rate and with such long term horizons, that it required many decades: that is a time limit, which was not granted to the democratic Czechoslovak Republic. Many Slovaks, especially the younger members of the Czechoslovak state parties realized this, and in the mid thirties, they began to form a sort of "democratic autonomism" as a counterweight to that of the Ludáks, but this happened hesitantly and ineffectively.

Hitler coming to power in 1933 substantially worsened the prospects of Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak security system relied on the post-war peace treaties from the suburbs of Paris, very active participation in the work of the League of Nations, treaties with France from 1924 and 1925, and treaties with the states of the Little Entente – Rumania and Yugoslavia. The Little Entente was united mainly by fear of Hungarian revisionism. After an alliance was concluded between France and the Soviet Union in 1935, Czechoslovakia also made an alliance with Moscow. From the middle of the thirties, the state prepared for defence very intensively. The length of military service was extended, the army was enlarged, extensive rearmament and the construction of frontier fortifications began.

The orientation towards defence of the state was supported by the majority of the population, in Slovakia especially as a result of fear of Hungarian revisionism. However, the People's Party rejected the alliance system of the republic, together with the whole coalition policy, which it considered too leftist. It designated Czechoslovakia, France with its popular front government and the Soviet Union, the "Bolshevik Trefoil". The sympathy of the Ludáks for the authoritarian dictatorships and definitely anti-socialist regimes did not have a very significant influence on state policy at the time, but it was fully expressed in the crisis of the state in 1938.

### 1.5. *Autonomy for Slovakia and the Origin of the Slovak Republic*

The Anschluss of Austria on 12th March 1938 substantially worsened the strategic position of Czechoslovakia. The German frontier was shifted to the suburbs of Bratislava, and

the inactivity of the great powers was a bad sign. In the Anschluss of Austria, Hitler used his Nazi agency there. In Czechoslovakia, Henlein's Sudeten German party played a similar role. It deliberately made continual increases in its demands. In September 1938, Henlein's units, armed from Germany, attempted a putsch. The attempt was frustrated, and on 23rd September the government replied to threats from Hitler, with general mobilization of the army and occupation of the frontier fortifications. But in the end Czechoslovakia capitulated before the pressure of the great powers. Britain and France did not want to risk war for the sake of a small Central European country. A bad assessment of the real aims of Hitler's aggression led them to sign the Munich Agreement on 29th September 1938. Germany, Italy, Great Britain and France, without the participation of Czechoslovak representatives, dictated Czechoslovakia's new frontiers with Germany, which made the state defenceless against Hitler. At the same time, they dictated a deadline for Czechoslovakia to agree new frontiers with Poland and Hungary. The Munich dictate was an important step towards the outbreak of the Second World War, and in circumstances favourable to the aggressor. Its acceptance by the Czechoslovak government and by President Beneš politically and morally marked Czech and Slovak society for decades.

Slovakia did not play a primary role in the Munich crisis. Although, the People's Party had carried on intensive agitation from the beginning of 1938, neither communal elections in the spring, nor numerous political assemblies and activities indicated that the HSLS could succeed by itself. In the summer of 1938, it worked out a new proposal for autonomy, and intensively discussed it with the government and President Beneš. The government was already willing to make extensive concessions, but the decision was delayed and postponed with regard to the talks with Henlein. The "Slovak question" was ever more the hostage of the "German question".

Munich dramatically changed the political map of the state; old alliances disintegrated, the Western democracies lost credibility, while adherents of the authoritarian, vigorous and, at the time, successful regimes came into the foreground. The People's Party promptly used the crisis of the regime. On 6th October 1938, the executive committee of the HSLS declared the autonomy of Slovakia in Žilina, with the support of representatives of five other parties. The central government in Prague accepted the declaration of autonomy, and appointed a Slovak government headed by Dr. Jozef Tiso. On 22nd November 1938, the national assembly passed a law on the autonomy of Slovakia.

The first serious problems, with which the autonomous government was confronted, were the territorial demands of Poland and Hungary, resulting from the resolutions of the Munich Conference. In an effort to avoid a more serious conflict, the Czechoslovak government ceded parts of Silesia and northern Slovakia to Poland in November. The talks with Hungary, which was endeavouring to acquire the whole of Slovakia, were unsuccessful. On 2nd November, in the Vienna Arbitration, Germany and Italy decided on the new frontiers of Slovakia. Hungary was awarded 10,390 km<sup>2</sup> of territory with 854,217 inhabitants, more than 270,000 of them of Slovak nationality. The signatories of Munich, France and Britain already did not participate in the decision in Vienna. The hegemony of Germany in this region was clear.

Munich meant the end of system of parliamentary democracy in the whole state, which was already officially called the Czecho-Slovak Republic. The name used for the period from Munich to March 1939 – the "Second Republic" – expresses not only the reduced area of the state, the autonomy of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, but



*The Vienna Arbitration*

also the change of regime in an authoritarian direction. The Bratislava government constructed its own version of dictatorship. The leftist political parties were liquidated, the civil parties either dissolved or pressurized into voluntarily merging with the HSLS in the united party *HSLS – Party of Slovak National Unity*. Numerous societies were dissolved, the trade unions were forcibly united, and the regime dissolved inconvenient local government organs. The elections to the autonomous parliament were held on 18th December 1938 by the plebiscite method and using a united list of candidates. Among 63 members of parliament, 47 were Ľudáks, the rest defectors from other parties and representatives of the German and Hungarian minorities. The coercive forces of the party, the Hlinka Guard, received a great role in public life. It was the driving force and implementor of the first anti-Jewish measures of the autonomous government.

In foreign policy, the Bratislava government, like its partner and opponent in Prague, was oriented towards Germany. At the time of Munich, Slovakia had still not appeared in Nazi conceptions, but this changed in October-November 1938. In his plan to liquidate the remnant of Czechoslovakia, Hitler gave Slovakia a role similar to that of the Nazis in Austria and Henlein's supporters in Czechoslovakia, that is of a detonator, justifying aggression and occupation as a result of "internal disintegration". At numerous discussions and negotiations between Ľudák representatives and Nazi politicians, the latter indicated that they would support Slovakia, but only if it became independent. This strengthened the originally weak current in the People's Party, which aimed at full independence. The leadership of the party attempted to build independence gradually, step by step, by occupying positions in the administration the army and police. Such a long term development did not suit Germany. The intervention of the Prague central government in Slovakia on 9th March 1939 facilitated the radical denouement for the Nazis.

The central government was disturbed by reports on the discussions of Slovak government figures in Berlin. President Háchá dismissed the prime minister of the autonomous government Jozef Tiso, introduced a military dictatorship in Slovakia, and the Ľudák Karol Sidor became the new prime minister. The Nazis used the unclear situation, and energetically pressed the Ľudáks to break away from Prague. Hitler ended several days of uncertainty in a radical way, by inviting Tiso to Berlin. He was already received on 13th March as a head of state. In discussions, Hitler gave Tiso and unambiguous choice: an immediate declaration of independence, or the prospect of the division of Slovakia between Germany, Poland and Hungary. On the next day, 14th March, Tiso presented a report on his talks in Berlin to a hurriedly summoned Parliament, and the Parliament declared the origin of an independent state. On the same day, Hitler repeated his threats and pressure on the Czecho-Slovak President Emil Háchá, who finally signed a document accepting a German protectorate over the remainder of Czecho-Slovakia. At that time, German army units were already heading for Prague.

The inter-war republic was a brief, only twenty year section of Slovak history. However, it was the only period before 1989, when a full-blooded parliamentary democracy functioned in Slovakia. Society was rapidly modernized, not only technically, but also from the point of view of structure. The following regimes and dictatorships took an officially critical attitude to this period, but in many ways they lived and drew on it. The disintegration of the First Republic, the relationship of long term and historically accidental elements, the relationship of external and internal aspects, the ethical questions around the Munich capitulations are permanent, constantly answered but unanswered questions of Slovak and Czech historiography.

## 2. The Slovak Republic 1939-1945

### 2.1. *The International Position of the Slovak Republic and its Political System*

The Slovak Republic had an area of 38,004 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 2,655,053. In the west, and after the defeat of Poland in September 1939, also in the north its neighbours were the German Reich and territories occupied by it. In the south and east it had frontiers with Hungary. It had all the institutions and symbols of an independent state: a parliament, government, president, national anthem, state shield, flag, currency (the Slovak crown) and representatives abroad. It was recognized by 27 states, including all the great powers except the USA. However, the existence of the state was in the balance from the beginning. In April 1939, Hitler already offered Slovakia, or part of it to Poland as compensation for concessions in Gdansk and the corridor to Prussia. After this was rejected, the Germany army used Slovakia as one of its assembly areas against Poland in September 1939.

In the years of the war, the Slovak Republic had the function of a sort of show case in Nazi policy. It was intended to demonstrate, especially to the nations of south-east Europe, that Hitler not only occupied countries, but also "liberated" nations. Slovakia was also an area for experiments, for example in building the position of the German

minorities in south-east Europe, or the so-called solution of the Jewish question. In the role of "model state", and thanks to its position, the Slovak Republic was about half way between an occupied country or protectorate, such as Bohemia and Moravia, and a sovereign state under German influence, such as Hungary, Rumania or Bulgaria.

The position of Slovakia in the German sphere of influence was determined by the Treaty of Protection, signed on 18th - 23rd March 1939. According to this treaty: "The German Reich will protect the political independence of the Slovak State and the integrity of its territory" (§1). In exchange Slovakia committed itself to conduct its foreign policy in "close agreement with the German government", and to construct its army "in close agreement with the German armed forces." A Protected Zone was created along the western boundary of the state, in which the German Army had sovereign rights. Further treaties and protocols secured German influence in the use of natural resources and industrial enterprises important to the war effort. The taking over of the positions of especially Czech and Austrian capital in banks and industry by German concerns, especially the Deutsche Bank, Dresdner Bank and the Hermann Göring Werke armaments company, also secured control of the economy. The share of German capital in industrial joint stock companies grew from 4% in 1938 to 51.6% in 1942.

The foreign policy dependence on Germany was crushing, but also uncertain. Immediately after the origin of the state, it was found to be ineffective, when the Hungarian Army occupied Subcarpathian Ruthenia in March 1939, and began to advance into the territory of Slovakia. After several days of conflict, with the use of aircraft and tanks, the Slovak Republic had to surrender to Hungary a further 1,697 km<sup>2</sup> of territory with a population of 69,639. The minister of foreign affairs Ferdinand Ďurčanský attempted to balance the unfavourable geopolitical position of the state, by establishing contacts in the West, but after the defeat of France in 1940, the Germans energetically put a stop to such efforts. At talks on 28th July 1940 in Salzburg, Hitler forced President Tiso to reorganize the government and dismiss Ďurčanský. His place was taken by the prime minister, the Nazi oriented Vojtech Tuka, while the radical commander of the Hlinka Guard Alexander Mach became minister of the interior. Slovakia had good economic and cultural contacts with the Soviet Union, but they were limited by ideology, and especially by the fact that the Soviet Union regarded Slovakia as part of the German sphere.

The government had two main aims in foreign policy. The first was preservation of the existence of the state and its strengthening within the German controlled sphere. The acceptance of Slovakia as a member of the alliance between German, Italy and Japan on 24th November 1940 was considered an important step. Paradoxically, this also made the Slovak Republic formally an ally of Hungary. However, precisely the confrontation with the southern neighbour was the second main component of the foreign policy of the Slovak government. It attempted to create more bearable conditions for the Slovaks in the territory occupied by Hungary, but above all to achieve revision of the Vienna Arbitration from November 1938. In the context of the hegemony of Germany in the Danubian region, both basic aims of foreign policy led to efforts to present Slovakia as a reliable ally of Germany, in both external and internal matters. In foreign policy, this was expressed in the participation of Slovak units in the campaign against Poland in September 1939 and in the war against the Soviet Union from June 1941, as well in the declarations of war against the USA and Great Britain in December 1941. In relation to Hungary, this effort did not bring short term results. The Nazis delayed solution of the



*Dr. Jozef Tiso visiting Hitler's military headquarters*

Slovak-Hungarian dispute until "after the war". However, the foreign policy activity closely associated the state with the fate of Nazi Germany, and internal policy had a similar effect.

The independent state enabled the People's Party to implement its conception of the organization of Slovak society. The war time conditions partly complicated this, but also facilitated it in many ways. In the end, the origin of the state was only enabled by fundamental power shifts in Central Europe. The war facilitated radical interventions in political and public life, corresponding to the authoritarian and quasi-fascist components in Ľudák ideology and politics.

The development after Munich already showed the contours of the regime. The constitution adopted by Parliament on 21st July 1939, stated in §58 that "the Slovak nation participates in state power by means of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (the Party of Slovak National Unity)." The constitution still formally preserved some features of the pre-Munich constitution - an elected president and elected parliament - but the regime gradually developed towards the strengthening and deepening of dictatorship. Parliament was gradually excluded from decision making, and the right of the government to rule by decree was strengthened. The president received the right to supplement parliament with appointed members. The development of the regime culminated in 1942 with the act on Hlinka's Slovak People's Party. The president received the title "Vodca" (Leader), and the personal connection of the functionaries of party and state, from village level,

through the districts and counties to the highest state organs, was secured. The leader principle also derived from the corporate system of Catholic social teaching, which was supposed to be one of the pillars of the political system. The corporations replaced the suppressed trade unions. They obligatorily associated employees and employers, and were under the direct control of the party. The "Leader" system, taken over from the Nazis, was also consistently applied in the organization of the ruling "state-party", the HSLS.

Two conceptions met in the shaping of the regime, reflecting the currents within the People's Party or movement, but also the attraction and influence of the then so successful German Nazism. The group represented by Jozef Tiso, from October 1939 president and from 1942 also "Leader", wanted to build a dictatorship, using the traditional structures of the party, with pragmatic inclusion of non-Ludák colleagues and defectors. In ideology and everyday politics it made maximum use of traditional clericalism and conservatism, in economic policy of Catholic social teaching. A second group, around Professor Vojtech Tuka, who replaced Tiso as prime minister in October 1939, supported more radical methods and more consistent following of Nazi examples. Tuka, in the twenties leader of the fascist *Rodobrana* (Home Defence), propagated "Slovak national socialism", against Tiso's "people's Slovakia". In contrast to the effort to use tradition, he emphasized "permanent revolution". Tuka's main support was the Hlinka Guard, headed by Alexander Mach. It was organized according to the model of the German SA, and demanded a more significant share in state power.

In the controversy about the form of the dictatorship in Slovakia, Tiso relied especially on the party, which had about 300,000 members in 1944, and he also had the support of the Catholic Church. Priests were strongly represented among the functionaries of the party, in parliament and the state council. Tiso himself was a Catholic priest. The Church supported the social, cultural and educational policies of the government, the authoritarian and paternalist elements of the political system also suited it, but it was not willing to support the consistent copying of the Nazi model. Tiso's and Tuka's groups intensively competed for German support. Each side had its patrons, the guardist wing especially in SS circles. However, Hitler, as the most important and decisive figure, gave priority to Tiso, who was a better guarantee of stability in conditions of spreading war, than the noisy, but weakly rooted groups of "Slovak national socialists". But Hitler did not allow Tiso to consistently liquidate his opponents, Tuka remained in office, and the SS trained selected groups of Hlinka Guards in Germany. The radicals were a sort of reserve and a means of pressure.

The organization of the German minority also fulfilled a pressure and control function in favour of the Nazis. After Munich, the Carpathian German Party led by Franz Karasin changed itself into the *Deutsche Partei* (DP), which obtained from the government, a monopoly on organizing and representing the whole German minority. The DP created a dense organizational network, a parallel organization to the Hlinka Guard (the *Freiwillige Schutzstaffel*), youth, women's, trade union and sports organizations, and its own administration of schools. The wish of some Germans in Slovakia in 1938-1939 to join Germany was not supported by Berlin, which promoted the conception that during the war, the role of the minority was to be a guarantee of German interests in Slovakia, and a model of the position of a minority in south-east Europe. The Germans had special units in the framework of the Slovak Army, from 1942 there was mass recruitment to the SS, and from spring 1944 obligatory service in the SS.

The attempts at an exclusive position in the state, the arrogant behaviour of the *Deutsche Partei* as representative of the will of the "protecting power" led to a previously almost unknown estrangement and finally to open Slovak-German antagonism. Among Slovak supporters of the regime, the claims of official representatives of the minority led by Franz Karasin offended against their freshly acquired idea and illusion of sovereignty and independence. To opponents of the regime, the activities and public behaviour of the minority organizations recalled Nazism, Hitler, violence, anti-Semitism and aggression. The islands of anti-fascism, especially of a socialist or communist character, among the Germans in Slovakia, continued until the end of the war, but could not overcome this estrangement growing into hatred.

Nationalism, one of the basic pillars of the Ludák regime, brought confrontation with all the minorities. After the Vienna Arbitration, about 60,000 Hungarians remained in Slovakia. The regime allowed the *Hungarian Party in Slovakia*, led by member of parliament János Eszterházy, to represent them politically. The Hungarians in the territory of Slovakia were to a large extent hostages to the policy of the Budapest government towards the Slovak minority in the occupied territories. Article 95 of the Slovak constitution gave ethnic minorities the same rights as Slovaks had in the territory of the minority's "mother country". In practice, this led to permanent disputes between Bratislava and Budapest about approval of minority schools, cultural societies, newspapers, sports clubs, and mutual reciprocal harassment and persecution. The Slovak and Hungarian governments constantly complained and denounced each other in Berlin, where they tried to moderate the disputes, but without lasting results.

The Rusyn minority was also represented in parliament, although it did not have its own political organization like the Germans and Hungarians. The state supported the Rusyn orientation against the Ukrainian, and in ecclesiastical policy, the Uniate Church. The Rusyn problem was not in the foreground of the government's interest, and the Rusyn elites did not seriously compete with the Slovak elites. The radical nationalism of the regime was presented especially in relation to the Czechs and Jews.

In the period of autonomy, the Bratislava government already insisted in Prague on the transfer 9,000 state employees to the Czech Lands. After March 1939, more soldiers, railway and post office workers, administrators, teachers, judges, technicians and doctors followed. By 1940, the number of Czech state employees fell to 2,205. Irreplaceable experts, husbands of Slovak women and similar cases retained their positions. The enforced exodus had less effect on the employees of private companies and on businessmen. The overall number of Czechs is estimated at one third compared to 1930. As a result of fear of resettlement in the Protectorate, where living conditions were much more unfavourable, some Czechs already declared Slovak or German nationality. The Czechs were a constant subject of attacks from the radicals, who saw them as a fifth column, agents of the Czechoslovak government in exile in London, and periodically demanded the "complete cleansing" of Slovakia. The expulsion of the majority of Czechs, although without brutal excesses, nourished in Czech society, a feeling of having been "betrayed" by the Slovaks, of their unreliability in state affairs, was significantly manifested in the controversies and considerations about the position of Slovakia in the renewed republic during the war and after it, with reverberations until 1992.

The dictatorship and aggressive atmosphere, created by Nazi Germany through war, supported the change of the traditional Ludák anti-Semitism into a brutal, systematic and state directed form, which finally led to the killing of the majority of Slovak citizens of the Jewish religion.



In 1939, about 90,000 Jews lived in the territory of the Slovak Republic, including thousands of refugees from Germany and Austria and citizens of foreign states. Forcible deportation and other actions already affected the immigrants under the autonomous government. Propaganda accused the Jews of causing the Vienna Arbitration. A newspaper and leaflet campaign prepared the ground for the actions developed after March 1939.

On 18th April 1939, the government issued a decree, defining the term "Jew" on a religious basis. The group of citizens defined like this, was subjected to constantly increasing discrimination. They were excluded from some professions and from education higher than basic, their businesses, land and shops were gradually "Arianized" in favour of interested Slovaks and Germans, who supported the regime. The Jews were gradually deprived of their civil rights, degraded to inhabitants of a lower level. The various anti-Jewish measures were collected on 9th September 1941 into the 270 articles of government decree no.198, the so-called Jewish Code, which defined the term Jew on the racial principle, as in the German Nuremberg Laws. The Jews had to wear a five pointed yellow star, their letters had to be marked with it, their right to travel was limited, they could not own means of transport, radios or cameras, they had limited access to parks, cinemas, swimming pools, cafes and restaurants. They had limited hours for shopping and free movement in towns. They had to leave their homes in some streets, they were exposed to systematic hate propaganda and physical attacks from the Hlinka Guard and Freiwillige Schutzstaffel.

The most effective defence against the anti-Semitic wave was emigration, but many countries were not willing to accept Jewish immigrants. At the beginning of the war some transports to Palestine were stopped on the way. Jewish organizations and opponents of anti-Semitism could only moderate its results by creating work opportunities for Jews in special labour camps, granting exceptions on grounds of "economic necessity", and baptism.

By the end of 1941, the state began to see the Jews, deprived of property and work, and pushed to the periphery of society, as a burden. The establishment of ghettos was prepared, but met with opposition from local figures in the chosen towns. At this time, an offer came from the Nazis, to take the Slovak Jews "for work" in the German occupied territories. On 3rd March 1942, the first transport of thousands of young women and girls left Poprad. The next day they were already subjected to selection on the ramp of the camp at Auschwitz. From 25th March to 20th October 1942, 57, 628 Jews were delivered to the Nazi camps. A special law deprived them of the remnants of their property and their citizenship. The Slovak government also committed itself to paying Germany a "resettlement fee" of 500 marks for each Jew. Only a few hundred people survived from the first wave of deported Jews.

A second wave of deportations occurred from the end of September 1944 to March 1945, when about 13,500 people were deported and about 10,000 of them died. After March 1944, the flames of the Holocaust also affected the Jews who lived in the territories occupied by Hungary. They included many who had fled there in 1942 to escape the transports from the territory of the Slovak Republic.

The Holocaust practically liquidated the Slovak Jewish community and had deep and long term influence on the whole society. It revealed radical, fascist groups, but also the willingness of courageous people to help the persecuted, without regard for the risk of being labelled "white Jews". If a significant part of society accepted the regime as a "lesser evil" compared to direct Nazi occupation, the anti-Jewish actions, like participation



*The Hlinka Guard assembling Jews from Michalovce for deportation to a concentration camp*

in the war, documented the transformation of the "lesser evil" into a position of pure evil. It also pointed to the limitation and inconsistency of some important social authorities. The Catholic Church, just as it supported the authoritarian regime but stopped short of its Nazification, did not definitely condemn the whole anti-Jewish action from the beginning. It only criticized action against baptized Jews, and more definitely when the racial principle was introduced in September 1941. The protests of the Vatican to the Bratislava government and President Tiso, against the race law, were not successful, but Vatican criticism of the deportations was one of the elements, which got them temporarily stopped in October 1942.

The "solution of the Jewish question" became a huge burden on the regime and state. Arianization of property led to corrosion of the Ľudák elite by corruption, racism strengthened the radical groups dependent on the Nazis. The appeal by Slovak Jews addressed to President Tiso, already at the time of preparation of the deportations, stating that deportation meant their destruction, was gradually confirmed. Participation in the Holocaust became one of the ties binding the regime to the fate of Nazi Germany until the end of the war.

The Romany, who numbered almost 100 thousand in pre-war Slovakia, also suffered from discrimination. The legislation of the Slovak state also copied that of the Third Reich in the case of the Romany. They were deprived of the possibility to serve in the armed forces. Instead, together with the Jews, they had to perform alternative labour service. The anti-Romany measures included a ban on travelling, use of public transport, access to villages and towns outside certain days and hours. They were obliged to remove



their dwellings from proximity to public roads. "Labour units for asocials" to which mainly Romany men were assigned, existed in various Slovak towns. After the suppression of the Slovak National Uprising, SS units carried out mass killing of Romany in central Slovakia. Romany from the areas annexed to Hungary were deported to German concentration camps, especially Dachau.

## 2.2. The Anti-Fascist Struggle

The dictatorship of the People's Party met with criticism and opposition from the beginning. Disagreement with the regime was politically motivated, only to a lesser extent and in the first years by the economic situation. Strikes and demonstrations against high prices and poor provisions in the first years after the revolution, were unpleasant for the government. A strike by miners at Handlová in 1940 finally had to be suppressed by military intervention. However, the situation was gradually consolidated. Unemployment was liquidated by the recruitment of workers to work in the Reich, and there was a rapid increase in the number employed in armaments factories in Slovakia, which produced cannons, munitions, parts of weapons and machines for Germany. Consumer industries also boomed. They were freed from competition from Czech factories, which had been converted to military production. Employment in industry in the whole territory of Slovakia, including the occupied territory increased from about 105,000 in 1937 to 174,019 in 1944. Agriculture drew on the fact that Hungary occupied the most productive areas, so demand for produce from areas in and near the mountains increased. Many people worked on the construction of communications and armaments factories, but also civilian structures, because business men, learning from experience in the First World War, attempted to secure their war time profits in immovable form. Until 1944, inflation was low for a war situation, and supplies were satisfactory after the first two years. Therefore, the economic motives for protest diminished, but the intensity of political impulses increased.

Some of the discontented were driven into opposition and resistance by disagreement with the liquidation of democracy, the dissolution of societies and institutions, they had built over many years, but now their property was confiscated by the Ľudáks and the hated Hlinka Guard. Parliamentary democracy was more deeply rooted than it had appeared to be during the Munich marazma. A significant proportion of the activists of the non-Ľudák parties did not accept forcible merger with the Ľudáks or understand it as an unavoidable and temporary evil. The Protestants, who had a strong position in the economy, culture and administration, were pushed into opposition and resistance. In the definitely Catholic state, they felt undervalued and marginalized. The supporters of the regime considered this justified, as a result of their advantaged position in Czechoslovakia. Many Czechs and their relations, who remained in Slovakia, maintained contacts with the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and some with resistance circles there. The liberally oriented part of the intelligentsia was also alienated from the regime by its political clericalism. The left formed a large segment of the part of the discontented, which progressed to the level of organized resistance.

From 1939, civil resistance groups already assisted the escape of soldiers through Hungary and Yugoslavia to the West, they sent reports on the political situation and on

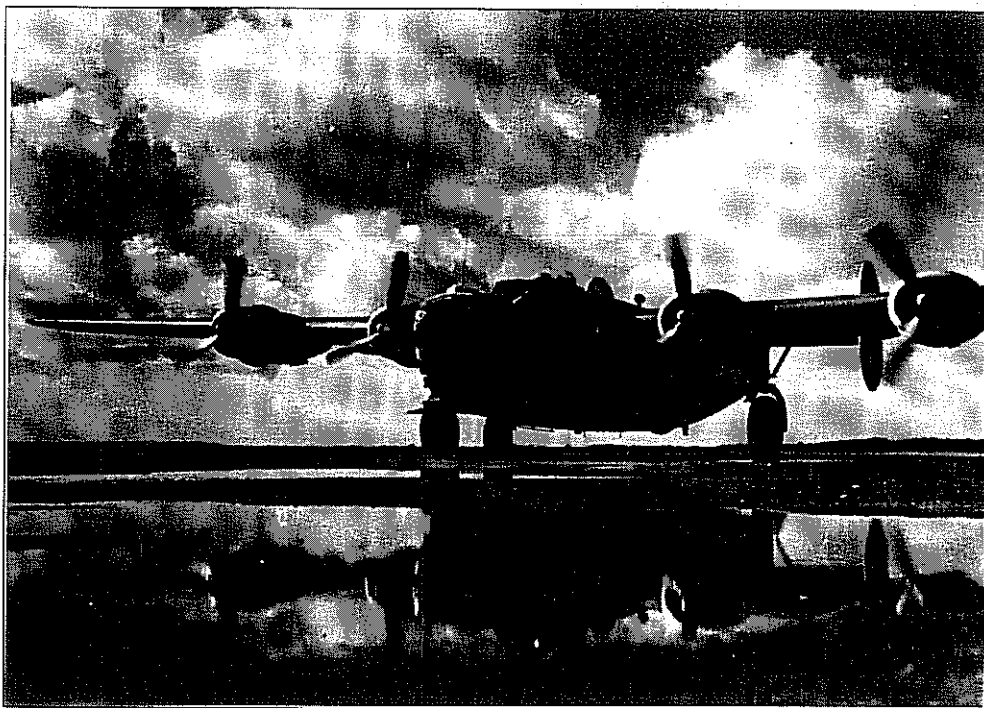
the military movements of the Germans. The civil groups also had collaborators and agents among the high state functionaries. Some formed small cells, others were quite numerous, as in the cases of the *Demec*, *Obrana národa* and *Flora* groups. The civil groups had links with the Czechoslovak resistance in Paris and then in London.

The communists were the best prepared for illegality by their previous activity. They were in contact with the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party in Moscow, which still controlled the party after the recognition of the Slovak Republic by the Soviet Union and the creation of a separate Communist Party of Slovakia in autumn 1939. The communists built up an illegal hierarchically controlled network throughout Slovakia, although it was constantly disturbed by the arrest and imprisonment of functionaries. Up to 1943, four illegal leaderships of the party alternated. After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, and the sending of Slovak units to the eastern front to widen their existing activities of spreading leaflets, illegal printing and intelligence, to include sabotage. From 1942, they also attempted to create partisan units. However, Slovakia, was still far from having the political or psychological conditions for this form of struggle.

For a long time the civil, communist and social democrat illegal groups existed along side each other. They did not come into open conflict, as happened in Poland or Yugoslavia, but they did not co-operate either. Different views on the future of the political system and state divided them. They rejected the Ľudák dictatorship, but the communists very vehemently propagated the installation of a Slovak soviet regime, while the civil groups supported the renewal of parliamentary democracy. The communists saw their ideal in a Slovak Republic, which would be part of a wider Soviet federation, or actually of the Soviet Union. The non-communist resistance supported the renewal of Czechoslovakia, but gradually asserted rejection of its centralized pre-Munich form. The relationship between Czechs and Slovaks was formulated as "equal with equal", that is some form of federation. The destiny and development of these ideas about the future was connected with the course of the war, and especially with the origin of the anti-fascist coalition.

From the first day of the war, Slovaks participated on both sides. The Slovak Army invaded Poland along side the Germans, and was rewarded with the return of territory taken in 1920 and 1938. However, Slovaks also joined the first Czechoslovak unit, organized in Poland in the summer of 1939. Some Slovak pilots flew to Poland, and open rebellions occurred in garrisons mobilized for war. Slovaks fought in Czechoslovak units in France, in the Near East, in North Africa, in the Battle of Britain, and after 1941 in Czechoslovak units organized in the Soviet Union. The organization of these military units helped Edvard Beneš, who went into exile after Munich, to create first in Paris, then in London, a centre of Czechoslovak resistance, later a government in exile, and achieve its recognition by the Allies.

Slovaks were also represented in the London leadership. The attempts of some Slovak politicians around the former prime minister Milan Hodža, to create a purely Slovak political centre in exile were unsuccessful. The Allies placed the renewal of Czechoslovakia among their war aims, and Moscow muffled the agitation for a "Soviet Slovakia", in the interests of the anti-Hitler coalition, of vital importance for its survival. Therefore, by 1941, the post-war position of Slovakia was clearly crystallized: in the event of Allied victory, the renewal of Czecho-Slovakia, with a still unclear internal arrangement; in the event of German victory, a fate outlined by the policy of the Nazis towards other Slavonic nations.



*Bomber with Czechoslovak crew in Great Britain*

### 2.3. The Slovak National Uprising

The turning point for the regime and the resistance movement came in 1943. Intoxication with having their own state evaporated, the regime was weakened by internal struggles, compromised by Arianization, but especially by its inability to give the population clear post-war prospects. While the governments of Hungary and Rumania could seek a way out of Germany's approaching defeat by "jumping" out of the war, the fate of the Slovak Republic was indissolubly bound to the fate of Hitler's Reich. The fellow-travellers of the regime began to distance themselves from it, and the activists were ever more isolated. The Slovak Army on the eastern front was also disintegrating. The Germans finally relocated the safety division from Bielorussia and Ukraine to Italy as a construction unit, because of unreliability and desertion to the partisans. The elite Fast Division, which reached the Caucasus in 1942, lost so many deserters during retreating battles in Ukraine, that a separate parachutist brigade was formed from them as part of the Czechoslovak Army in the USSR.

At the end of 1943, the communists and some of the civil groups concluded the so-called Christmas Agreement. They created a Slovak National Council as a joint resistance authority. The communists were represented in the Slovak National Council by Karol Šmidke, Gustáv Husák and Ladislav Novomeský, the civil block by Jozef Lettrich, Ján Ursíny and Matej Josko. Later representatives of other resistance groups were added to

the Council. The Slovak National Council had to coordinate the activity of the civil groups and resistance supporters in the Slovak Army. The main aim was to prepare an uprising to help the Allied front.

The plan of the uprising started from the advance of the Soviet forces to the Carpathians. At the right moment, the Slovak Army would open the front and enable the Soviet Army to advance rapidly through Slovakia to the gates of Vienna. The military uprising was prepared by an illegal Military Headquarters, which co-operated with the Slovak National Council, but was also authorized by President Beneš in London. The Military Headquarters was headed by Colonel Ján Golián, commander of the staff of the ground forces in Banská Bystrica. The minister of national defence of the Slovak Republic General Čatloš also worked out a similar plan independently.

A condition for success of the uprising was coordination with the Soviet leadership. A delegation from the Slovak National Council, transported by air to Moscow, endeavoured to achieve this in the summer of 1944. However, events in Slovakia went ahead of the strategic planning. In 1944, the Soviet leadership sent numerous parachutists into Slovakia, with the task of starting a partisan war. In the excited atmosphere, hundreds and thousands of civilians and soldiers joined them. The partisan units grew, and apart from diversionary and terrorist actions against collaborators and Germans, they began to occupy whole villages and valleys. The Bratislava government was powerless against them. Its power apparatus, army and police force failed. On 29th August, German units began to occupy Slovakia with the agreement of President Tiso. The illegal Military Headquarters ordered commanders involved in preparations for the uprising to resist the Germans. This was the beginning of a two month struggle, which went down in Slovak history as the Slovak National Uprising.

The uprising units succeeded in stopping the German advance to the extent that they controlled a compact territory in central Slovakia, centred on Banská Bystrica. The Slovak National Council took power here, and the First Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia was formed. By the end of September its size reached about 60,000 men. The partisan units, which operated partly in the territory of the uprising and partly in the German rear, had about 18,000 fighters. The majority of the partisans were Slovaks, but many were members of the nations of the Soviet Union, Czechs, French, Jews, Bulgarians, but also Hungarians, Germans or others. In the course of the fighting, the uprising forces were strengthened by the Second Czechoslovak Parachute Brigade, transported by air from the Soviet Union. The First Czechoslovak Fighter Squadron from the Soviet Union also operated from uprising airfields. The failure of two of the best equipped divisions in eastern Slovakia was a great loss at the beginning of the uprising. The Germans took them by surprise and quickly disarmed them. Shortages of some weapons, especially anti-tank weapons were relieved by an air bridge provided by the Soviet Airforce. American aeroplanes from southern Italy also brought weapons.

At first, the Germans could oppose the uprising only with rapidly improvised forces of about 15,000 men, because after the successful coup in Rumania on 23rd August, they were threatened with the collapse of the whole south-east. From 8th September, a rapidly organized offensive by Soviet and Czechoslovak forces, through the Carpathians into eastern Slovakia, also engaged significant German forces. The defensive struggle of the uprising, using artillery, aeroplanes and armoured trains, resisted the German advance for six weeks. The turning point came on 17th October, when the German forces grew to 30-40,000 men. Banská Bystrica fell on 27th October. Part of the army went home, while



*Digging of an anti-tank ditch during the Slovak National Uprising*

part went into captivity, including the commanders, Generals Ján Golián and Rudolf Viest, who were executed in Germany. Individual soldiers and units joined the partisans, or created their own partisan units. By the beginning of 1945, about 13,500 partisans were operating in Slovakia in the German rear.

The uprising meant the complete polarization of Slovak politics. In the territory of the uprising, the Slovak National Council and its executive organ the Board of Commissioners (*Zbor povereníkov*) directed life. The sovereignty of the Czechoslovak Republic was renewed, Hlinka's Slovak People's Party and its offshoots were banned, and racist legislation was abolished. The Slovak National Council declared its support for the anti-fascist coalition, and the Allies recognized the army of the uprising as an allied force. A new political structure in the form of the communist party, which merged with the social democrats, and the Democratic Party, uniting the civil elements, began to form in the territory of the uprising. The Slovak National Council acted self-consciously as a state organ, and the government in exile in London, headed by President Beneš, had to recognize this, although reluctantly. The uprising was a real fact, which made it difficult to return to any form of the pre-war centralism.

New political elites, formed in the uprising, played an important part in post-war development. German intervention formally protected the Ludák representatives for a time, but also seriously compromised them. The security apparatus, the Hlinka Guard and the organizations of the local Germans closely co-operated with occupying units, in the struggle against the uprising, and then for six months in defence of the German rear. In the battles



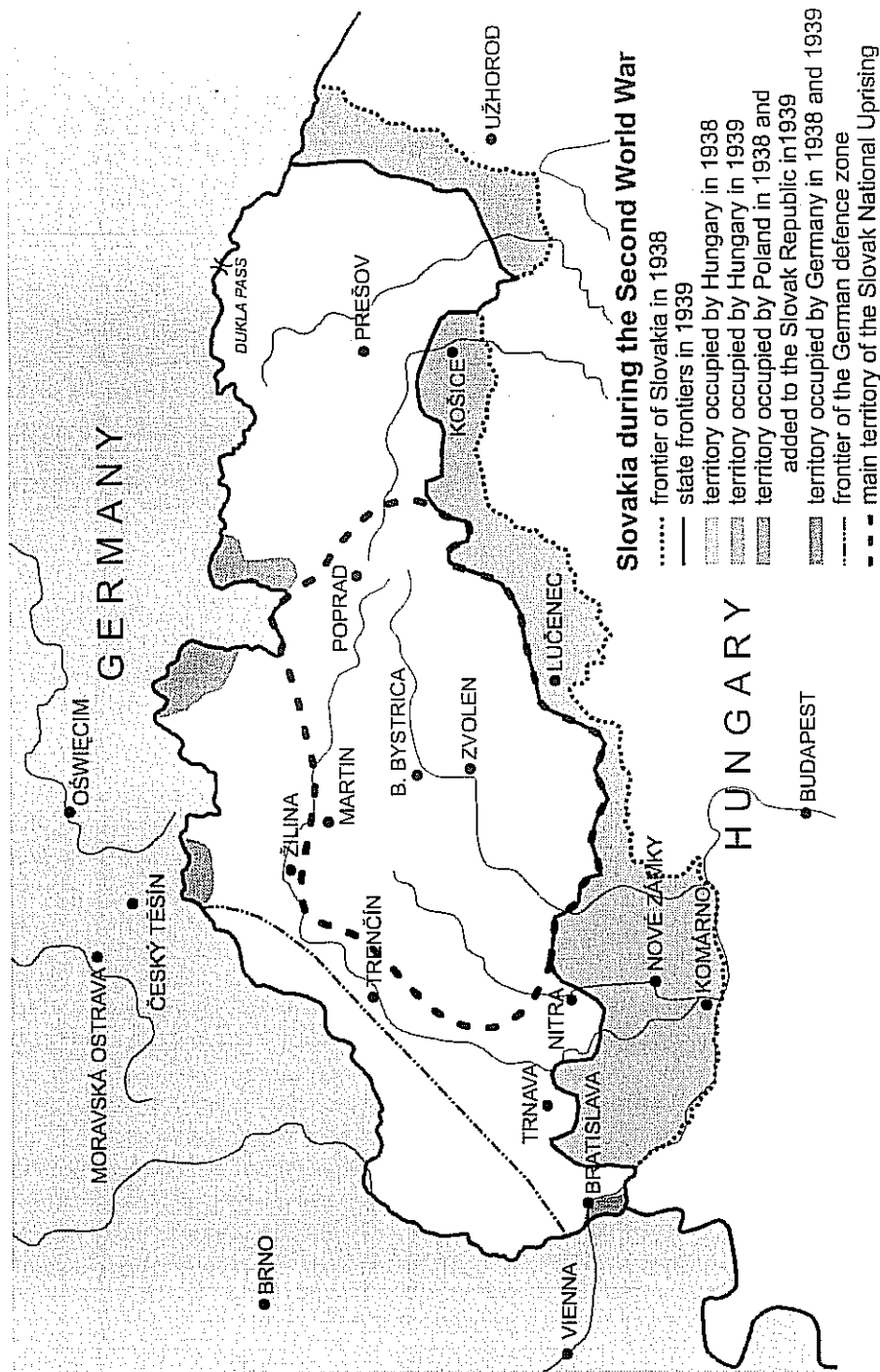
*The Slovak National Uprising. Fighting in the mountains*

and "cleansing actions", many villages were burnt, while partisans and Jews hiding from the renewed deportations, were often executed on the spot. The Bratislava government also attempted to revive the army, but after several attempts to place it at the front, it remained mostly unarmed. The Bratislava government and President Tiso, entirely dependent on the Germans, were finally evacuated to Austria and Bavaria at the beginning of April 1945.

#### *2.4. The Regions Occupied by Germany, Poland and Hungary*

At that time, the last communities in the parts of Slovakia, directly occupied by Germany and Hungary during the war, were liberated. In 1938, Germany occupied the suburbs of Bratislava on the right bank of the Danube, which made it easier to control Slovakia. It created the curious situation, in which the prime minister and minister of foreign affairs of the Slovak Republic looked directly out of their windows into the territory of the "protecting power". It was especially difficult for Slovak society to tolerate the German occupation of Devín, at the confluence of the Danube and Morava, since it had great symbolic importance for Slovak historical consciousness.

The communities in northern Slovakia, taken by Poland after Munich, were returned to Slovakia after the defeat of Poland in 1939 as a reward for the participation of Slovak units in the invasion. Territory ceded to Poland in 1920 also became part of the Slovak Republic. After the war, in 1945, the frontier returned to its pre-Munich state.



A quarter of the inhabitants of Slovakia experienced the war in territories occupied by Hungary. The occupation of these territories was a great trauma for the majority of Slovaks, since 1918 used to Slovakia "from the Tatras to the Danube". It was worsened by the fact that the denationalizing policy from before 1918 was renewed in the occupied territory. The 1941 census found only 86,716 Slovaks here, according to the 1930 census there were three times as many. A large number of Slovak schools were closed, and more than 900 teachers were driven across the frontier, as were thousands of farmers, who had received land here in the land reform. Slovak libraries, societies and the press were liquidated and destroyed. Expressions of national life were brutally suppressed by policemen and officials. The principle of reciprocity, harshly applied by the Bratislava government, and fears for the fate of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia forced the Budapest government to make some concessions. Some societies and two gymnasia were allowed, and from 1942 also a political party, the *Party of Slovak National Unity*. Its newspaper *Slovenská jednota* (Slovak Unity) also linked the Slovaks in southern Slovakia with those in other parts of Hungary, especially with the strong Slovak community in the part of Yugoslavia occupied by Hungary from 1941.

The Slovak minority was at first oriented towards union with the Slovak Republic, but from 1941, when the Allies recognized the Czechoslovak government in exile, the orientation to the renewal of Czechoslovakia also grew. This was the core of the dispute with the numerically prevailing Hungarian population of the region. After their initial euphoria over "national liberation", the local Hungarians had many objections and complaints against Horthy's dictatorship. Since they were used to Czechoslovak democracy, they found it difficult to tolerate the limitation of civil freedoms and the preference for incomers from the "mother country". The more backward social and economic situation had an unfavourable effect on them, and the standard of living fell perceptibly. However, Horthy's regime celebrated triumphs. It occupied, or in its terminology "reunited" parts of Slovakia, Rumania and Yugoslavia. Participation in the war against the Soviet Union was a further promise of the complete revision of Trianon and the renewal of Greater Hungary. Such ideas and illusions muffled opposition, and where this was not enough, the regime applied pressure. There had been enough time since 1919 for building a dictatorship. When the military situation changed in 1943, precisely this burden of occupied territory was a hindrance to the efforts of the Budapest government to detach itself from Hitler.

The radical excesses during the occupation of 1938, violence, expulsion, murder, as well as different views on the present situation and hopes for the post-war settlement, undoubtedly contributed to polarization in the relationship between the Slovaks and Hungarians in the occupied territory. The only real inter-ethnic bond was the communists, who had quite a strong position here. In 1940-1942, the whole illegal organization of the communist party, decimated by a long terror, paid for it. Many communists were executed or died in prison.

On 19th March 1944, German troops occupied the country, because of fears that Hungary would follow the example of Italy. Extreme nationalist and fascist groups came to power. The terror of the Gestapo and "Arrow Cross" organizations aimed to keep the country in the war. The Jews were deported to Nazi concentration camps. This also caused the deaths of thousands of Jews from Slovakia, who had sought refuge in Hungary before the deportations from Slovakia in 1942. Arrests, executions and forcible mobilizations among Slovaks and Hungarians, were widespread until the last moments of the war. The unsuccessful attempts of Hungary to "jump out of the war" like Finland or Rumania, led to Hungarian units fighting on the side of Germany until the last days of the war.

### 3. Post-War Slovakia

There was fighting in Slovakia for eight months. In September 1944, Soviet forces crossed the Carpathians, and on 6th October the first soldier of the Czechoslovak Army Corps in the USSR stepped onto Slovak soil. The battles for the Dukla Pass were the bloodiest engagements of the Czecho-Slovak units abroad during the war. Northern Slovakia was liberated by Soviet and Czechoslovak forces, central and western Slovakia by Soviet and Rumanian units. By May 1945, the First Czechoslovak Army Corps grew to 97,299 men, of whom 72,400 were Slovak. Although the main strategic aims were north of Slovakia towards Berlin and south towards Vienna, the intensity of the battles is shown by the losses. 60,659 soldiers of the Red Army, 10,435 of the Rumanian Army and 1,736 members of the First Czechoslovak Army Corps are buried in the territory of Slovakia.

The capital city, Bratislava was liberated on 4th April 1945, and the last larger town Žilina on 30th April. The country was devastated and paralysed. Apart from aerial bombardment and battles, great damage was caused by deliberate destruction by retreating German units. A third of the railway track was destroyed, and more than half the bridges. From 655 locomotives only 22 were usable. 93,000 houses were damaged or destroyed. The retreating army evacuated to Germany equipment from power stations and factories, as well as cattle and horses. Extensive areas were mined. The damage amounted to three times the annual national income of Slovakia.

Tens of thousands of men were in the army. Evacuees, prisoners from concentration camps, refugees from the regions occupied by Hungary during the war, returned home. Soviet security forces took thousands of people from east Slovakia to camps in the USSR. Many of them died, and some returned home only in the mid fifties. On the other hand, thousands of active supporters of the wartime regime went into exile with the retreating German Army.

The London government in exile returned to the homeland via Moscow, where it agreed the programme of the new Czechoslovak government with the communists. It was declared on 5th May 1945 at Košice in eastern Slovakia. The government of the National Front would hold power, and on the lower level national committees. In foreign policy, co-operation with the Soviet Union was emphasized. The Košice government programme proclaimed the confiscation of the property of Germans, Hungarians and collaborators, land reform, control of key industries, banks and natural resources by the state. Germans and Hungarians with the exception of anti-fascists would be deprived of citizenship. The programme was a compromise, but still retaining the basic principles of parliamentary democracy, although already significantly limited. The struggle over the interpretation and implementation of individual points of the Košice government programme formed the content of political struggles up to 1948. This also concerned the position of Slovakia in the new state.

In Moscow, on 23rd - 29th March 1945, during talks between representatives of the London exiles and the communist leader Gottwald, representatives of the Slovak National Council demanded an organization of the state equivalent to a federation. However, they gained only recognition of the Slovak nation and a promise that the position of the Slovaks in the renewed state would be solved on the basis of the principle of "equal with equal".

The internal political struggle in Slovakia, as well as the unwillingness of the Czech side contributed to the failure to implement the uprising ideas of the consistent federalization of the state in the post-war years. The core of the struggle was the fateful

question of whether the state would develop as a democracy or head towards a dictatorship of the Soviet type.

In Slovakia, the starting points for both solutions were about evenly balanced. In the Slovak National Council of the uprising, the ruling authorities in the liberated territories and the National Committees administering communities, towns and regions, the communists united with the social democrats had equal representation with the civil bloc, which represented the Democratic Party. The communists had greater influence in the united trade unions, in the influential organization of partisans, and especially in the security forces. The communists had a better organization and the ability to bring the discontented into the street. The Democratic Party had greater influence among the farmers, the largest group in society, and among the urban middle class. The active radius of the Democratic Party substantially increased in April 1946, shortly before the elections, when its mainly Protestant leadership concluded an agreement with Catholic political circles.

There were sharp clashes between the communists and democrats over economic policy, when the communists, after confiscating the large companies, also demanded the nationalization of smaller factories, farms larger than 50 hectares and limitation of small business. The political quarrel was about the maintenance of legality, but also overcoming the past. In the trials of activists in the wartime regime before special people's courts and in political purges, the democrats promoted a more moderate approach, which would enable some of the fellow-travellers of the defeated regime to participate in society. The greatest dispute concerned the fate of former President Tiso, handed over to Czechoslovakia by the Allies, with other members of his government. Tiso was condemned to death by the National Court. In spite of the efforts of the Democratic Party, the government did not support his request for clemency, and he was executed in April 1947.

In contrast to the situation in 1920, when the left gained a great electoral victory from post-war radicalization, the Democratic Party won the elections in May 1946. It received 62% of the votes and the communists 30%, with the remainder going to the revived social democrats and the Catholic Freedom Party. In the hundred member Slovak National Council, the Democratic Party had 63 seats and the Communist Party had 31 seats, while the Freedom Party and Labour Party had a combined total of 6. The chairman of the Democratic Party Jozef Lettrich became the chairman of the Slovak National Council, while the communist Gustáv Husák became chairman of its executive body, the Board of Commissioners.



*The First Czechoslovak Army Corps reaches the frontier of Slovakia at Dukla on 6th October 1944.*





*The results of 8 months of fighting in Slovakia, 1944-1945*

Apart from people prosecuted by the people's courts, Germans and Hungarians, who had been deprived of their citizenship, did not participate in the elections. The majority of Germans already left before the front arrived. After the war, those who remained or returned were concentrated in camps. By the end of October 1946, 32,450 of them were transported to Germany. The Hungarians who came to the territory occupied by Hungary after 1938 were immediately expelled. On the basis of a 1946 agreement with Hungary on exchange of population, 73,000 Slovaks moved from Hungary to Slovakia and 74,000 Hungarians moved from Slovakia to Hungary. 44,000 Hungarians were forcibly resettled in the Czech frontier regions to replace the German labour force there. In the strained atmosphere of revenge, and entirely against the sense of the long struggle of Slovaks for recognition of their national identity, 326,697 Hungarians were "re-Slovakized". In exchange for declaring themselves to be Slovaks, they received civil rights and the possibility of employment. After 1948, when rights of citizenship, schools in their own language, a press and cultural societies were returned to the Hungarians, the majority of the "re-Slovakized" people returned to their real nationality.

If it appeared soon after the war that the position of Slovakia in the state would be substantially different from the pre-war centralism, the situation quickly changed. In the three so-called Prague agreements of 1945-1946, the powers of the Slovak authorities, the Slovak National Council and its executive organ the Board of Commissioners, were substantially limited in favour of Prague institutions. The Slovak communists also became

an instrument of the renewal of centralism. They preserved from the years of the war and the uprising, a formally independent party, the Communist Party of Slovakia, which enabled the communists to occupy more places in the Prague government, and to use nationalism at home instead of the unpopular internationalism. However, the crushing defeat in the 1946 elections made the Slovak communists dependant on help from Prague in the struggle for power. In the Czech Lands, the left won the elections in May 1946. The Communist Party and the Social Democrats, already strongly infiltrated by the communists received a total of 55.75% of the votes. The communist Klement Gottwald was prime minister in the Czechoslovak government, the communists held the important Ministry of the Interior, they controlled security and the strong and militant united trade unions.

In 1947, the end of the post-war compromises, the regime of "people's democracy" was already clearly outlined. Either a return to full-blooded democracy, or development into communist dictatorship was inevitable. The international situation, with definition of the "Cold War" division also pointed towards the political denouement. The firm intervention by Moscow against the contemplated entry of Czechoslovakia into the Marshall Plan was an eloquent warning signal in July 1947.

Slovakia became a sort of experimental field in this struggle for power in the whole of Czechoslovakia. Irregularities in supply, the dissatisfaction of partisans and leftists with the "purge" and the rate of nationalization, the discontent of farmers with the slowness of the land reform and other factors created an explosive situation. Control of the trade unions, of some agricultural and resistance organizations, but above all of security, by the communists, enabled the use of this social tension against the Democratic Party. In the course of 1947, the security service uncovered several illegal groups, connected with Ludáks in exile. Further groups were provoked or entirely invented. The invented connection of these anti-state groups with the highest circles in the Democratic Party, together with social disturbances, enabled Gottwald, helped by the Slovak communists, to force such a reconstruction of the Board of Commissioners on 20th November 1947, that the Democratic Party lost its majority, in conflict with the 1946 elections.

The combination tested in Slovakia, of pressure "from below" by various communist controlled organisations, with ruthless, but also adroit use of positions of power in the government, parliament, security service, state apparatus and army, was applied by the communists in the whole of Czechoslovakia in February 1948. The resignation of 12 non-communist ministers in the Prague government on 20th February, in protest against violent actions of the security service, gave the communists a convenient starting point for a political change. On 24th February, they organized a general strike. On the next day, President Beneš accepted the resignation of the government, and appointed a new one, again headed by Klement Gottwald. They left several places in it for non-communists, but the hegemony of the communists was already complete, as the subsequent development showed.

Development in Slovakia was a reflection of the situation and scenario in Prague. The Democratic Party rejected the resignation of its representatives in the Board of Commissioners, but the Prague coup also enabled the Slovak communists to complete the power changes begun during the autumn political crisis of 1947. On 26th February, the chairman of the Slovak National Council Jozef Lettrich gave up his functions and soon went into exile. The communist Karol Šmidke became chairman of the Slovak National Council, while the communists occupied 11 out of 15 seats in the Board of Commissioners. The supporters of democracy were squeezed and paralyzed. In all social





The chairman of the Slovak National Council and leader of the Democratic Party Dr. Jozef Lettrich during the elections of April 1946

organizations, local government organs, offices of the state administration, radio and editorial offices, even in the non-communist parties, "action committees" were formed, which dismissed inconvenient people, and appointed communists or their adherents. February 1948 opened the way to more than forty one years of dictatorship.

## 4. The Communist Dictatorship in Slovakia

### 4.1. The Political System

The consolidation of the political power of the Communist Party in the whole state was done according to a unified scenario. Like the Prague parliament, they also "purged" the Slovak National Council. Some of the inconvenient members of parliament were expelled, some were already in prison, some emigrated, some were simply too afraid to attend sessions. The limited Slovak National Council elected a new chairman, the communist Karol Šmidke, and declared a programme to "definitively secure the people's democratic regime in Slovakia and prevent revival of the subversive activity of the reactionaries."

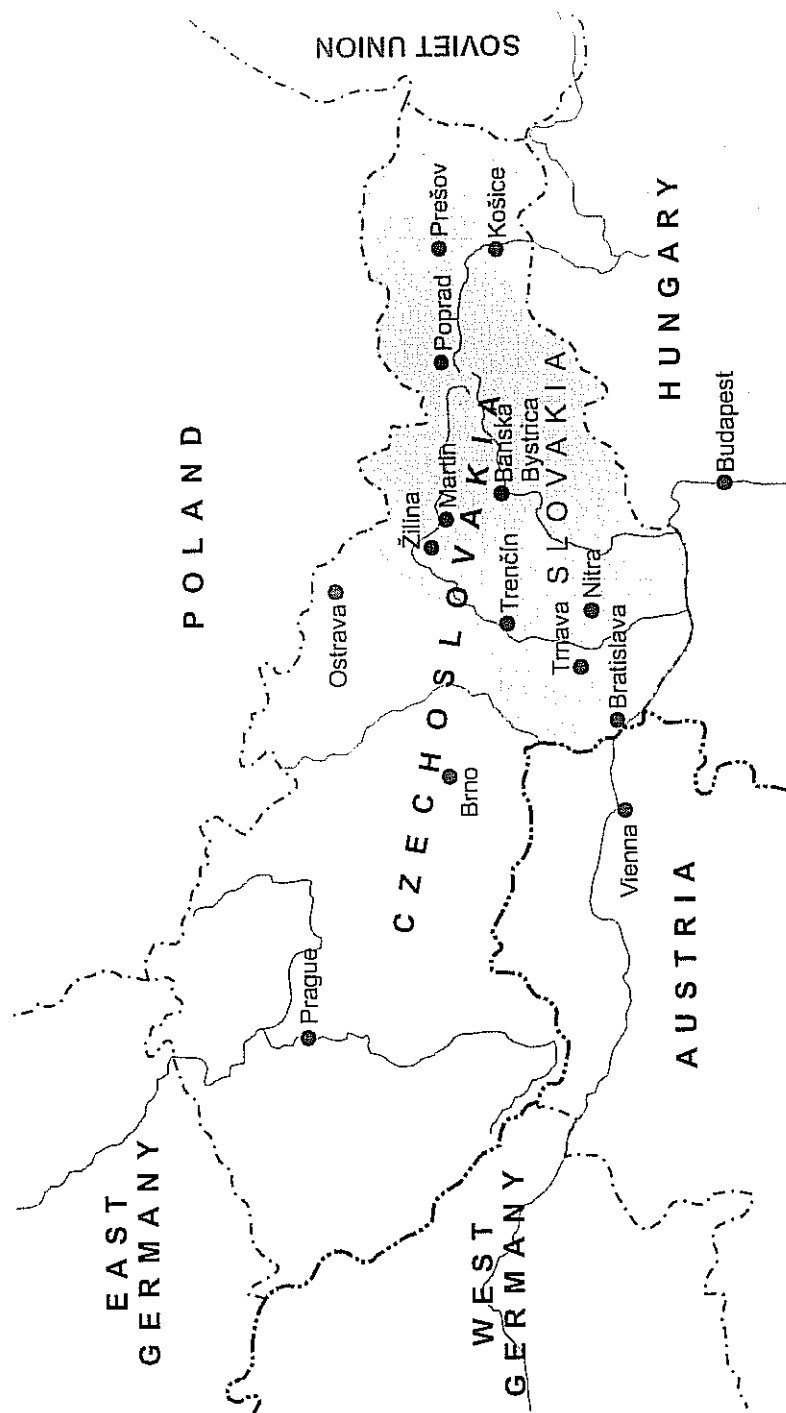
"Action committees" in offices and state institutions, societies, trade unions, schools and the local administration carried out energetic "purges". Local and district National Committees, in which the communists did not have majorities, were dissolved, so that elected local government organs remained in only a third of communities and in only 6 out of 79 districts. Workers' councils purged enterprises. In February, they began to organize an armed *People's Militia* in enterprises, for use as the strike force of the Communist Party. The illegal usurpation of all the positions of power in the state was regulated by a law of 21st July 1948, which legalized the post-February changes, although they were in conflict with the valid laws. On 29th April, the state court in Bratislava already sentenced the first politicians of the Democratic Party to long terms in prison. Political trials of real or supposed opponents of the regime became a constant instrument in the functioning of the regime.

On 9th May 1948, the National Assembly adopted a new constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, prepared over several years. After February the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia added to it a further limitation of private property, although it still allowed small and middle sized private businesses. The constitution applied until 1960, but was only a formal framework, which the dictatorship continually stepped over and ignored.

The political system was a version of the Soviet dictatorship, with the preservation of some historically and socio-economically justified differences. The state was still headed by a president, after the resignation of Edvard Beneš, Klement Gottwald was elected president in June 1948. This started the tradition of combining the functions of head of the Communist Party and of the state. The National Assembly had legislative power, while the government had executive power. On the lower level, local, district and regional National Committees combined executive power with the functions of the state administration and elected local government. The Communist Party's monopoly of political power was not included in legislative norms until 1960, but it was consistently applied. Proposal of any list of candidates was in the hands of the party. Lists of candidates were generally "united", elections were held by the plebiscite method. On 30th May 1948, the first parliamentary elections held according to the new constitution still enabled the casting of a neutral white ballot paper. This was done by 10.7% of the voters in the whole state, and by 14.1% in Slovakia. Later elections did not allow even this possibility. They were held by the standard method for modern dictatorships, with the participation of 99% of the electorate, and the same percentage of support.

The core of the dictatorship was the communist party. From February to July 1948, the number of party members in Slovakia doubled to 407,170, that is 19.3% of the adult population. Screening later reduced this figure to some extent, but the Communist Party of Slovakia remained a mass party until the fall of the regime at the end of the eighties. After the communists came to power and more significant social advancement became associated with party membership, the party permanently lost its working class character. Up to February 1948, 70% of party members were workers, but in 1949 only 41.7%.

In June 1948, the Communist Party of Slovakia merged with the Czech Communist Party, and continued to function only as a regional organization, with progressively more limited autonomy. The party achieved political mobilization, together with control, by means of mass organizations, with the umbrella organization of the *National Front*. These mass organizations were also officially designated as "transmission levers" of the Communist Party. They replaced elements of the civil society, formed from the end of



March of the Communist People's Militia, Bratislava, 1949

the 19th century, and strongly developed in the inter-war period. It was destroyed by the Ludač dictatorship, but began to re-emerge after 1945.

The National Front also included the insignificant Freedom Party and Renewal Party, which arose instead of the liquidated Democratic Party. The social democrats, who participated in the 1946 elections as the Labour Party, were forced to dissolve themselves. Politicians and the public did not take the non-communist political parties seriously. Their declarations of unreserved support for the communist programme discredited them in advance as real political parties. Other components of the National Front had real functions in the system. The *Revolutionary Trade Union Movement* included practically all employees. By means of works committees, they had some influence on questions of pay, working conditions, social policy and the provision of flats, recreation and sport. That is, they were involved in everyday life. Like the trade unions, other organizations - the Czechoslovak Union of Youth, the organizations for women, gymnastics and cultural facilities, the associations of writers, artists, musicians, and even philatelists, gardeners, fishermen and bee-keepers - were united and received monopoly positions in their spheres of activity.

Widening the monopoly of the state in the economy was also a key factor in the communist dictatorship. After the first post-war wave of nationalization in 1945, which brought large companies, banks and foreign trade into the hands of the state, smaller companies, crafts and trades followed after February 1948. In 1948, small businesses still employed 150,000 people, by 1953 only 7,500. After the nationalization of the



The Iron Curtain

wholesale trade, small shopkeepers had to "voluntarily" give up their businesses to collective centres or networks of state shops, craftsmen to communal or state enterprises. Private practice by doctors, dentists, and advocates' offices and practically all free professions, was suppressed. Houses with apartments for rent remained formally in the hands of their owners, but the state controlled them. Thus, in the course of 2-3 years, the independent urban middle class was liquidated. Part of it found existence in state enterprises, but there was a clear effort to replace it with new elites loyal to the regime. "Worker directors" were appointed to head enterprises. Workers loyal to the regime were trained as judges and secondary school teachers in courses lasting a few months. Rapidly trained offices gained positions in the army, while the security service was "strengthened" with reliable party members. The education of a new intelligentsia was supposed to solve the conflict between loyalty to the regime and expertise. Students from politically reliable families were given priority in higher education. To accelerate the process of "cadre renewal", special courses for workers, enabled them to acquire a shortened education.

Property changes, purges, screening, degradation and ostracism affected hundreds of thousands of people. Even after decades, their children still had limited access to education and qualified work. A characteristic expression of the will of the regime to break the urban business and middle class was *Action "B"*, by which thousands of families were transferred from Bratislava to the countryside, without the decision of a court, but only by administrative decision. There were also similar actions in smaller towns.

The subjugation by the regime of the most numerous group in the population, the farmers, was a more complex and longer term process than in the case of the urban middle class. In 1947, they formed 47.45% of the population. During the struggle for power, the Communist Party of Slovakia vehemently denied the intention of creating collective farms (kolchozy) of the Soviet type. Instead, it promised distribution to the small farmers of land from farms with over 50 hectares. After February 1948, the reform really began, but from 1949, the "socialization of the village" by the creation of *united agricultural co-operatives*. In comparison with the "socialization" of other areas, the collectivization of agriculture proceeded slowly. By 1953, the co-operatives cultivated 35.8% of the soil. By 1958, co-operative and state property reached 66.6%. Private farming still continued for some time, although only in mountainous and less productive areas.

The formation of co-operatives and liquidation of private farms was achieved only with constant pressure. The state monopoly deprived farmers of opportunities to freely buy machinery and fertilizer, or to sell their produce. The system of forced deliveries to the state of prescribed quantities of produce ("contingents") enabled the state to impose unfulfillable obligations on the farmers, and then label them "kulaks" and "saboteurs". The "village rich" were removed from their villages, fined, sent to forced labour camps, but the terror affected all farmers. In 1951 alone, more than 60,000 farmers were punished for nonfulfillment of contingents and other methods of "threatening the construction of socialism". About 70% of farmers were dependent on additional incomes from work in construction, forestry, industry or railways. These were given an ultimatum, to place their land in co-operatives or lose their jobs. Threats not to accept their children for study at secondary school or university were also an effective instrument of pressure.

The breaking of the resistance of the farmers retained its open terrorist aspect very actively, even after the first phase of installation of the regime. Another, comparable factor was the exclusion of church influence from public life.

In 1950, 76.20% of the population was Catholic, 6.55% Greek Catholic, 12.88% Lutheran and 3.25% Calvinist. At first, the regime tried to organize a schism in the Catholic Church by creating a collaborating church subject to the state, by misusing the so-called *Catholic Action*. After failure among the priests and faithful, the Church, like all other inconvenient organizations, was brutally subjugated. In 1949, laws on the position of the churches changed the existing supervision of the churches in their subordination to the state. After the confiscation of property, the activity of the churches was dependent on grants and pay from the state, the performance of the priestly vocation was bound to state employment, and the activity of the churches controlled by the Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs. The press, religious societies and charity were limited. At Easter 1950, the security service and People's Militia raided the monasteries, interning 728 members of religious orders, and a further 281 in the following weeks. In August, the security service also liquidated the women's monasteries, and concentrated 1962 nuns from 24 different orders. In January 1951, Bishop Ján Vojtaššák was sentenced to 24 years in prison and Bishops Michal Buzalka and Pavol Gojdič were sentenced to life imprisonment, in a show trial in Bratislava. Out of 2056 Catholic and Greek Catholic priests, 302 were imprisoned in the fifties. In 1950, the Greek Catholic Church was liquidated and the faithful forcibly transferred to the Orthodox Church, since it seemed less dangerous to the regime, because of its independence from Rome. The Protestant churches were also subjected to state control, and many Protestant clergy were imprisoned.



*Interned nuns on their way to forced labour, 1955*

The steps against the Church were accompanied by resistance from the faithful, local insurrections, attempts to forcibly liberate imprisoned priests and religious. They were suppressed by the security service, People's Militia and army, with injuries and deaths as a result. 717 opponents of Catholic Action were arrested in the first half of 1949 alone. The state gradually paralysed the most active centres of resistance, but the very existence of the Church, disturbing the communist monopoly on ideology, world view and influence on public affairs was a problem of varying intensity for the regime until the end.

#### 4.2. *The Communist Model of Industrialization and Modernization*

The destruction of traditional structures, purposefully applied terror, and economic monopoly of the state were interpreted by the ruling party as the condition and inevitable price for the achievement of their final aim – first of a socialist, then of a communist society. In Slovak conditions, this aim, embodied in five year plans and the resolutions or directives of party congresses, had the form of radical modernization, with accelerated development of the infrastructure, economy, culture, education and urbanization. The greatest intervention in the structure of society, the liquidation of the private farmers was also justified by the creation of more effective, modern agricultural units. Industrialization was defined as the key, the “red thread” of all the changes.

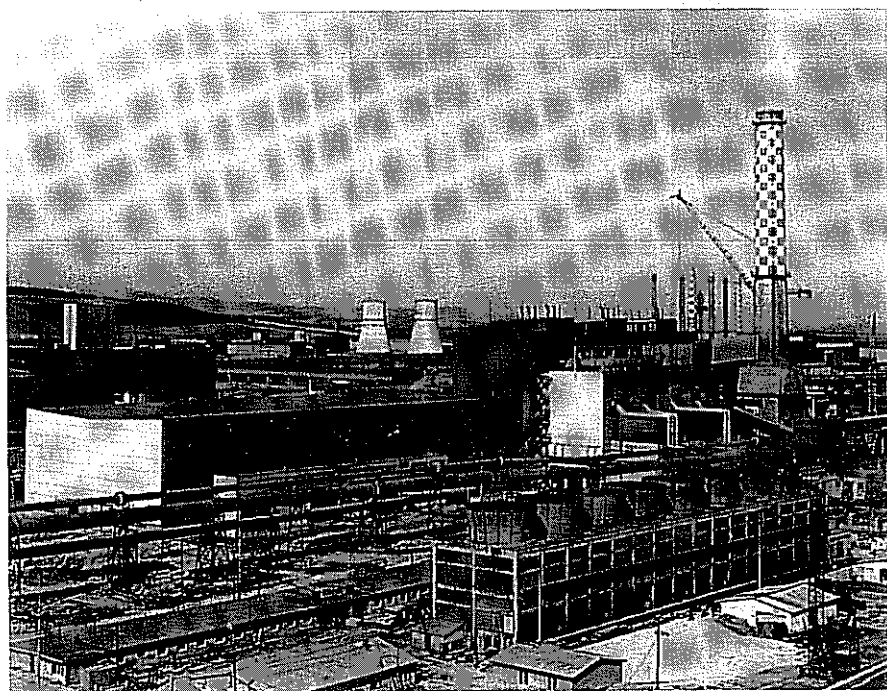
The rate of construction of industry was rapid, with the number of employees growing from 216,884 in 1948, to 409,933 in 1960, 504,844 in 1965, and continuing in the following decades, until it surpassed 800,000 in the eighties. Czechoslovakia, together with East Germany, was the most developed country in the Soviet Bloc, which was developed as

a closed, self-sufficient economic space, in the framework of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (COMECON) (1949). Traditional Czech enterprises such as Škoda were fully exploited, and they moved simpler production to Slovakia. The geopolitical position of Slovakia also determined the content of industrialization. The armaments industry was placed here, because of the greater distance from the frontier with the NATO countries. The position on the frontier with the Soviet Union and the adequate labour force also evoked the construction of factories producing consumer goods, shoes, textiles and furniture for the Soviet market in exchange for ore, gas and oil. The largest Slovak enterprise, the East Slovakia Ironworks in Košice, as well as the huge transshipment centre at the transition from the European to Soviet gauge railway at the frontier crossing point to the Soviet Union at Čierna nad Tisou, arose on the east-west transport axis. Many enterprises for the production of non-ferrous metals or chemicals arose as a result of the Western embargo on strategic products, but there was little demand for cost and effectiveness. Such a one-sided orientation of the Slovak economy was risky, but it worked for decades. It enabled modernization without excessive and prolonged drawing of resources from agriculture, as happened in the mother country of communism, the Soviet Union.

After the first difficult decade, when members of co-operatives worked on united agricultural co-operatives almost for nothing and lived from small plots of land at home and secondary incomes, life in the village began to stabilize. Thanks to state subsidies, some co-operatives also prospered, while industrialization increased the possibility of an income outside agriculture. The numerous traditional class of seasonal labourers disappeared, work in factories and services meant social advancement and security. In the sixties, the village ceased to be a risk to the regime.

From the end of the fifties, extensive construction of flats, health and cultural facilities and schools was developed in villages and towns. The number of pupils at gymnasium and especially at vocational schools grew rapidly. In 1945, Bratislava had the only university in Slovakia. Others were gradually established in Košice, Trnava, Nitra, Zvolen, Žilina, Banská Bystrica, Prešov, Martin and Liptovský Mikuláš. The network of professional theatres, musical bodies, galleries, museums, scientific and research institutions was extended. Slovak drama films were made. Just as industrialization moved a large part of society into more modern employment, and so gave them a feeling of social advancement, this “founding period” of many cultural activities employed a large part of the intelligentsia and for some time covered the frustration from the destruction of the post-February period.

The limits of the effect of “directed modernization” of the communist type appeared in the economy in the sixties, and significantly also in the nationality question. One of the declared aims of the industrialization of Slovakia was its economic, social and cultural equalization with the Czech part of the state. The differences, which already existed at the time of the origin of the state in 1918 were really gradually diminished to a significant extent, but without the political results expected from this. In the spirit of pre-war Czechoslovakism, the Czech communists appropriated the idea of the gradual ethnic merging of the two nations. As a result, the special position of Slovakia appeared to them to be unnecessary, especially since it was in conflict with the endogenous centralism and hierarchical structure of the Communist Party and regime. Therefore, limitation of the powers of the Slovak national authorities continued after February 1948, with the culmination of the process in 1960. The new constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic declared the building of socialism, which was also expressed in the change of the name of



Industrialization. The East Slovakia Ironworks at Košice

the state to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia is already explicitly defined in article 4 of the constitution as the "leading force in society", and Marxism-Leninism as the basis of culture and education.

The constitution of 11th July 1960 degraded the Slovak National Council into complete insignificance, and subordinated the whole administration directly to Prague. Like all previous important political actions, the diminution of Slovak autonomy was accompanied by political trials, intended to intimidate opponents. One of the main creators of the communist dictatorship in Slovakia Gustáv Husák was already arrested in 1951, and sentenced to life imprisonment as a "bourgeois nationalist" only after Stalin's death, that is in a period of a certain softening. Before the acceptance of the new constitution in 1960, a series of trials of representatives of the Slovak intelligentsia aimed to paralyse resistance and Slovak "separatism" in advance.

#### 4.3. The Reform Movement of the Sixties. 1968

Discontent with centralism and with attempts to renew the pre-war Czechoslovakism became an important part of the reform movement of the sixties. Signs of the revival of independent thought after the shock of the post-February terror already appeared in the second half of the fifties, encouraged by Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow. However, they were firmly

suppressed by the regime, alarmed by the revolution in neighbouring Hungary in 1956. At the beginning of the sixties, the communist dictatorship in Czechoslovakia entered a crisis. The economic model, oriented towards quantitative growth was exhausted. State enterprises shackled by arbitrary plans and the bureaucracy were not able to keep up with developed world technology. The growth of the economy stopped, and limited resources did not enable the growth of consumption. The "socialist" constitution from 1960 and the rhetoric of representatives of the regime about an early transition from socialism to communism were in sharp conflict with the reality of everyday life in Czechoslovakia and beyond the western frontier of the state. Although the state limited contacts with the world where possible, in Central Europe, isolation could never be applied as consistently as in the Soviet Union or China. Channels of information were varied, from contact with relations, through commercial and scientific contacts and journeys, Radio Free Europe, the BBC, the Voice of America, Deutsche Welle and Austrian television, to holidays in Yugoslavia. This information undermined two important arguments of the regime: the exclusiveness of development as an achievement only of socialism, and secondly, the need for limitation because of the acute threat to the "socialist camp" from imperialism.

The regime was morally eroded by public revelation of at least some of the crimes committed during its construction. As in the case of Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin in the Soviet Union, the stimulus was a power struggle within the party elite, so the revelations were inconsistent, the rehabilitations only partial, and affected mainly communists such as Gustáv Husák. Hundreds of political prisoners remained in prisons and in camps at uranium mines, and new prisoners, especially from church circles were added in the sixties. Attitudes to trials and rehabilitations was one of the stimuli to differentiation within the Communist Party into "reformists" and "dogmatists". Further questions were gradually added, above all how to revive the economy – by rigid planning and centralization, or by reform with introduction of some elements of a market economy?

The dictatorship did not enable open formulation of views or association of their adherents, criticism of the regime was mostly through substitute themes and institutes. The weekly *Kultúrny život* (Cultural Life) excelled as an organ for critical views. It progressed from criticism of simplified "socialist realism" and information about currents of thought in the West, to discussion of unavoidable reform of the economy and the position of the citizen. The route to criticism of the 1960 constitution included discussion of the Slovak National Uprising, which was a denial of unitarism and centralism. A demand to return to the uprising conception of "equal with equal" and federalization of the state arose from the formally historical discussions.

Reformist thinking and demands also penetrated into the ruling party. Since it had a legal monopoly on politics, hope of success depended on its participation. In the first half of the sixties, leading representatives of the Communist Party of Slovakia – Viliam Široký, Karol Bacílek and others – became victims of the disputes among the communist elite. They represented both communist orthodoxy and Prague centralism. Alexander Dubček, Vasil Biľak and other representatives of the younger generation came to the head of the party in Slovakia. They were less burdened by participation in the terror of the fifties, and formed a more open young generation, already not rapidly trained, but educated in standard schools. They energetically sought positions, influence and the possibility to apply their vision of society, which Alexander Dubček later called "socialism with a human face". Discontent and calls for reforms, which were perceptible throughout the state, also received a certain pathos and national dimension in Slovakia from the



offensive behaviour of the president and first secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Antonín Novotný in Slovakia. However, events in Prague were the key to solution, because of the centralism of the regime.

In autumn 1967, the reformist current in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia gained such influence, that by using power disputes in the party leadership, it secured the removal of Antonín Novotný and changes in the party leadership. For the first time in its history, a Slovak, Alexander Dubček became first secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. He was not the initiator of the reforms, but he enabled them. He started by preparing an extensive economic reform, relaxing controls on enterprises and agricultural co-operatives. A five day working week was introduced, and the reserves of the economy showed that, in spite of this, production grew. Censorship was abolished, newspapers could relatively freely publish different views, the "Iron Curtain" received substantial holes. The foreign press became available, and the jamming of foreign radio broadcasts stopped. After twenty years it was possible to travel to the West, an opportunity used by hundreds of thousands of people, especially students. Pressure on the Church was reduced. For example, believers forcibly included in the Orthodox Church were allowed to return to the Greek Catholic Church. Rehabilitations of unjustly convicted and punished people were widened to groups for which the regime had obstinately refused this. In the framework of preparations for reform of the political system, preparations for change in the position of Slovakia began, with the Slovak side unambiguously demanding federalization of the state.

The country experienced excitement and euphoria. Revelation of the crimes of the regime and opening of routes to comparison with the developed countries stimulated turbulent demonstrations, discussions and innumerable resolutions. For the first time television proved to be the key medium, with the possibility of immediately presenting various views and positions.

Political activity involved an unexpectedly wide part of Slovak society. A unifying element was the demand for federalization. Views on the necessity, depth and method of reform of the economic and political systems varied. The reformist group included views of a social democratic type to proposals for only cosmetic changes to the communist dictatorship, that is not socialism, but only "communism with a human face." This difference was still partially concealed by the struggle with the dogmatists. These had a strong position, especially in the party apparatus, but also in the parts of the economic and cultural nomenclatura, which had no qualification apart from the party legitimization. The fourth, civic current, with a vision entirely outside the framework of the post-February regime, appeared rather insignificant outwardly, for example in an attempt to form an organization of people persecuted by communism. It did not have much response. In contrast to the preceding situation, the reforms of 1968 were perceived as a substantial change, and the initiating participation of the communists, gained the communists a level of support they never had before.

The movement in Czechoslovakia, the prepared reforms, the removal of censorship and opening to the West evoked, from the beginning, discontent in Moscow and in the leaderships of other communist parties in Eastern Europe, which feared that the spark of reform would spread. In the course of the spring and summer of 1968, they tried to at least slow down the development in talks with the Czechoslovak communist leadership. After talks at the Czechoslovak-Soviet frontier railway station of Čierna nad Tisou, representatives of the communist parties of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Poland,



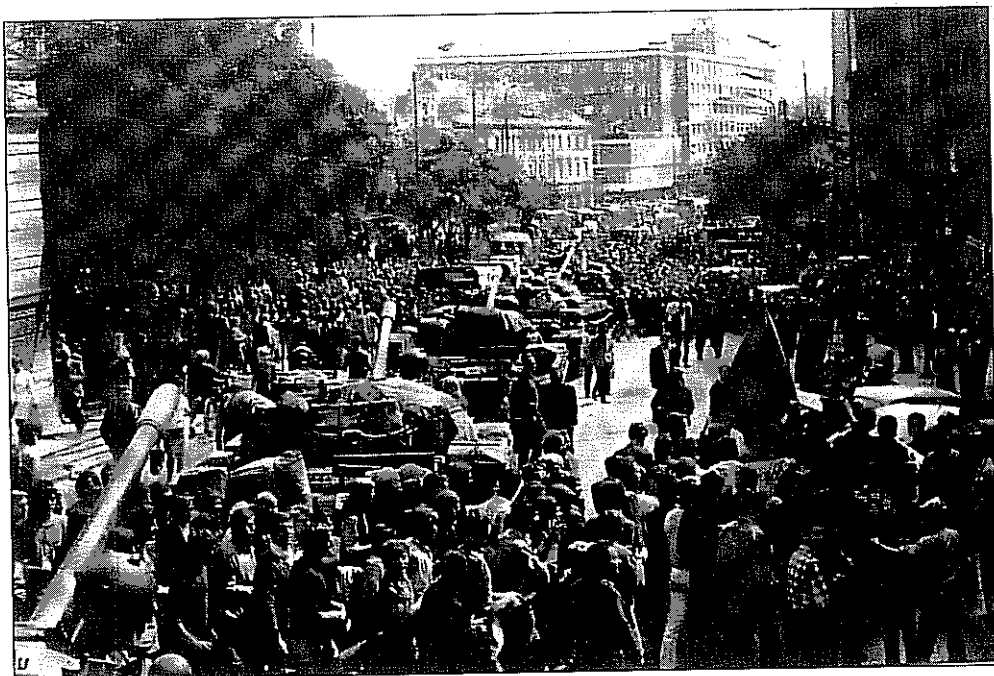
*Alexander Dubček*

Hungary and the German Democratic Republic, signed a declaration on 3rd August in Bratislava. It declared that defence of the socialist system is the duty of all socialist countries. This "Brezhnev doctrine" became the ideological justification for the intervention in Czechoslovakia on 21st August 1968.

In the night of 20th-21st August, the armies of the Warsaw Pact, with the exception of the Rumanian Army, carried out their only military action during the whole history of the alliance (1955-1990), and against a member state. In a combined parachutist and ground operation, the Soviet, Polish, Hungarian and Bulgarian armies occupied the territory of Czechoslovakia, while the East German army blocked the frontier in the north-west. About half a million men participated in the operation. From the military point of view, the operation was successful. On orders from its commanders, the Czechoslovak Army did not resist. The army of occupation rapidly took control of communications and military stores, and took control of the frontiers. The action was less successful politically.

According to the original Soviet plan, a "workers' and peasants' government" of Soviet agents should have taken power in Prague. However, at the decisive moment they did not succeed, and the presidium of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia issued a declaration against the occupation. There were turbulent demonstrations against the intervening armies, with clashes costing the lives of dozens of citizens. The Soviets arrested Alexander Dubček, the chairman of the National Assembly Jozef Smrkovský and the prime minister Oldřich Černík, and took them to Moscow. After several days of talks





1968. The Soviet occupation forces in Bratislava

in Moscow, in which President Ludvík Svoboda also participated, the Czechoslovak representatives capitulated under pressure. The Moscow protocol of 27th August 1968 was actually the beginning of a process, which continued for several years and received the name "Normalization".

Soviet hegemony was imposed step by step. The army was again entirely subordinated to Soviet command, in the framework of the Warsaw Pact, substantial changes were made in the leadership of the Communist Party and state, an agreement on the "temporary stay" of Soviet troops in the territory of Czechoslovakia was signed. In April 1969, Dubček was replaced as leader of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia by Gustáv Husák, who had gained a certain prestige among the reformists before the occupation, but gradually became an obedient Soviet instrument.

After several months, it seemed that the reformist course would continue, although in more moderate form. On 27th October 1968, the National Assembly approved one of the main demands of the reform movement in Slovakia: federalization. On 1st January 1969, the Slovak Socialist Republic and the Czech Socialist Republic were formed, with their own national councils and governments. Together they formed the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic with a common president, federal government and Federal National Assembly, composed of two chambers, the House of the People and the House of the Nations. The complex construction of voting aimed to prevent the outvoting of the representatives of Slovakia, which had only one third of the population of the state.

The population continued to protest against the occupation for a long time, with especially turbulent protests during the first anniversary in August 1969. In reality,

however, nothing could change the reality of the renewal of Soviet hegemony. The whole state and Slovakia passed from the euphoria of the "Dubček era" to the resignation of Husák's "normalization".

#### 4.4. The "Normalization" of Dictatorship

The period from 1969 to the 1989 revolution is the only epoch of the communist dictatorship, which has an unambiguous name in historiography and social consciousness. The term "fifties" is associated with the years of the installation of the dictatorship and the most dramatic phase of the terror, the "sixties" with a certain "liberalization" of the regime, culminating in 1968. The term "normalization" was derived from the clearly proclaimed efforts of the new leadership of the communist party to distance itself from the reformist efforts, officially designated "rightist opportunism", to return to "normal", that is to the Czechoslovak version of the Soviet dictatorship.

In 1970, the programme and ideology of "normalization" were summarized in a document: "Lessons from the crisis development in the party and society after the thirteenth congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia". After criticism of the development in the second half of the sixties, the document defined, for the first time so openly, the "permanent and unchanged values", rejection of which is an anti-socialist and counter-revolutionary act. These pillars are: 1. The leading role of the working class and its avant-garde the Communist Party in society. 2. The socialist state as the instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat. 3. The Marxist-Leninist ideology and its application by all means of mass activity. 4. Communal ownership of the means of production and planned direction of the national economy. 5. The principles of proletarian internationalism and their consistent application in foreign policy, especially in relation to the Soviet Union. According to the document, precisely the questioning of these principles in 1968-1969 led to disintegration and an "acute danger of counter-revolution". The "international assistance" from allies created for the communists a "firm basis" for the struggle against anti-socialist, counter-revolutionary and rightist forces.

Normalization began with mass purges. In the party organizations, they formed so-called "healthy cores", which from top to bottom, from the party leadership to the basic organizations, screened the party members and divided them into three categories: screened, expelled for inactivity and finally excluded "rightist opportunists". 21.7% of party members were excluded. They automatically lost management positions in enterprises, they usually had to leave employment in education, the army, security, state offices, editorial offices, publishers and culture. Some areas of employment were entirely forbidden to them, their children were discriminated against in education, their passports were taken away, as were military ranks. In offices, scientific and cultural institutions, non-party members were also screened. Disagreement with the "fraternal assistance" of August 1968 resulted in the same penalties as in the case of the excluded communists. However, the normalization persecution was not as brutal as the terror after February 1948, political trials were rare and the sentences more moderate even for opposition activity after 1968. However, the screening and purges had a sufficiently intimidating effect.

A return to the tested methods of isolation and intimidation also helped to strengthen the regime. The Iron Curtain again functioned like before 1968: travel to the West was

limited, as was the importing of the foreign press, books and films. The jamming of "seditious broadcasts" was renewed. The mass media, which played such an important role in 1968, were normalized with special care. Preliminary censorship was not renewed, but a system of personal responsibility of editors and subsequent harsh penalties were enough. Some reformist magazines, especially *Kultúrny život* were closed.

Federalization was also restricted very rapidly. The "leading role" of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was preserved, and it was not federalized. The powers of the Slovak National Council and government were gradually limited, exactly according to the pattern of the period after 1945, and some Slovak ministries were abolished. The regime was returned to the centralist form from before 1968, by a series of laws on responsibilities from 1970, although preserving the federal form. The Slovak question remained unsolved, as an important problem in the functioning and existence of the Czech-Slovak state.

The triumph of normalization was outwardly complete. The dissident Milan Šimečka accurately named the following period, the "age of immobility", in contrast to the searching and experimentation of the sixties. However, the occupation of August 1968 was such a shock that nothing, neither society nor the communist party could really return to communist "normality". In contrast to neighbouring Hungary or Poland, there were no Soviet forces on Czechoslovak territory up to August 1968. Soviet hegemony was less obvious, although equally effective. August changed this: Soviet hegemony became visible. The attitude of the West to events in Czechoslovakia, which did not go beyond platonic sympathy, confirmed that the state was an internationally accepted part of the Soviet Bloc, and substantial changes in Czechoslovakia were not possible without changes in the centre. This was more so because the periodic crises of regimes in the Soviet Bloc were asynchronous. At the time of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the repeated Polish events and in 1968, the Soviets and their agents in the satellite countries succeeded in preventing the spread of sparks to neighbouring countries. This knowledge supported resignation, with an orientation more to survival than to active resistance.

Outwardly, the Communist Party overcame the crisis, but its viability and claim to monopoly control of society were already permanently undermined. It was much more clearly and to a larger extent perceived as the servant of a foreign power, and doubly so in Slovakia – firstly of the Soviet patron and secondly of the Prague client. If the pathos and elan of the anti-fascist fighters and revolutionaries still had a certain function in the party up to 1968, it was now changed into an association, whose legitimation was an entry ticket to the political, economic, executive and even cultural elites. The purges supported the positions of the communist dogmatists and people without qualifications, who now took revenge for their fear of losing their positions. The *nomenklatura* system was consistently applied. For every more important position in the administration, economy, army, science and culture, an appropriate party organ was determined, which approved candidates. The higher positions in the party, state, army and security were subject to approval by Moscow. The *nomenklatura* system supported cynics, or at best pragmatists. In either case, the illusion of a revolutionary party came to an end.

The ideological problems of the communists in the period of normalization were insurmountable. They already retreated from the original idea of world revolution after the war, at least outwardly. In 1960, they declared Czechoslovakia a socialist state. According to the doctrines, the building of a communist society had to follow. In 1961,

President Novotný actually declared from the platform of a congress in Moscow, that the present generation would live in communism. The opening of windows to the world uncompromisingly pushed the idea of a communist society to the place of its birth: the region of utopias. After 1968, communism was no longer considered, written or spoken of. The programme documents of Communist Party congresses spoke only of "building a socialist society", a "developed socialist society" or "real socialism". When formulating aims and the means to achieve them, there was also the problem that after 1968 the normalization regime rejected the concept of "reform" in itself, and allowed only "further perfecting" of the already existing more or less perfect state. This suppressed any substantial movement, or the solution of old problems and the new ones brought by the rapidly changing economic and international situation of the seventies and eighties.

The closed Soviet Bloc with its own system of prices and commercial relations protected Czechoslovakia against the oil shock of the seventies, but also continued the wasting of energy, raw materials and human labour. The most modern areas – electronics, bio-technology and information technology – were neglected as well as being hindered by the Western embargo on the export of the latest technology to the countries of the Soviet Bloc. The industrialization of Slovakia still continued, but mostly by the development of metal production, heavy chemicals, and as in the preceding decades consumer goods with a range and quality intended mainly for the Eastern market. The specialization of production in the framework of the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (COMECON) progressed relatively successfully. Mass production of hydraulic equipment, anti-friction bearings, construction machinery, lorries, some types of weapon, especially cannons, munitions, tanks, armoured vehicles and some chemicals was developed.

#### 4.5. *The Crisis and Fall of the Communist Dictatorship*

In the mid eighties, the number employed in industry in Slovakia exceeded 800,000. By the end of the eighties, international agreements about arms limitation already signaled the weakening of the boom. However, the dynamic of the economy was still sufficient to maintain a satisfactory standard of living by eastern standards, with drawing on reserves and limitation of investment in modernization. In fact the gap in productivity and consumption, compared with Western Europe, was constantly widening. The basis of the ideology and propaganda of the regime was no longer the social utopia of communism, but "social security": secure employment, free health care and education, cheap housing and subsidized basic foods. The rising new middle class added to this a car, recreation cottage or garden and holidays by the sea in "socialist countries". Apart from the satisfactions of power, the higher *nomenklatura* had their own recreation and health facilities, the right to buy imported goods in special shops and other privileges. A regime structured like this was not capable of more dynamic development, and in the historical conditions of the time, this meant an ever greater backwardness compared to Western Europe, but it was not unbearable enough to stimulate any radical disturbances, such as occurred periodically at this time in the factories and cities of neighbouring Poland.

If we can use the terminology used for the years of the Second World War, disagreement with the regime took the form of distancing or non-identification. This did not exclude formal participation in the "ceremonies" of the regime, such as May Day processions, formal membership of mass organizations or even of the Communist Party.

The regime understood that this attitude did not threaten it. It already did not need enthusiastic support, after the renewal of all the legal power and ideological instruments. However, the camp of "distance", probably including the majority of society, was important at the moment, when the regime lost its stability, and space opened for groups, which unambiguously rejected the regime for various reasons.

In 1968, some of the limitations on the activities of the churches were moderated, and deported members of religious orders returned to Slovakia from the Czech Republic. However, the regime still suppressed free activity of the churches. In the years 1968-1988, more than 70 priests and lay people were imprisoned for violation of the restrictions or distributing religious literature. By preventing the appointment of bishops, the state attempted to paralyze the functioning of the Catholic Church, the largest in Slovakia. Pilgrimages, in which hundreds of thousands of people participated each year, helped the mobilization of the faithful. The structures of the "secret Church" were connected to each other and to foreign countries. Catholic dissent had the best constructed structure for the publication and distribution of an illegal press. On 25th March 1988, it also organized the most important act of resistance of the whole twenty year period: the so-called "candle demonstration" by believers in Bratislava, in support of freedom of the Church.

Civil dissent had the form of circles and groups of like thinking, without a hierarchical form or permanent organization. Discussions and criticism of the regime were reflected in illegal periodicals, such as *Kontakt* and *Fragment K*, in samizdat analyses of the regime, such as the works of Milan Šimečka and Miroslav Kusý, in contributions to publications abroad by exiles, or to Radio Free Europe. In the period of Soviet "perestrojka", leftist groups also became active, but there was no substantial movement within the party, similar to the initiatives of 1968. Communism was ideologically dead. A great number and variety of informal groups of young people, artists or "islands of positive deviation" existed. The regime rejected or at least ignored them. Organizations and groups of defenders of nature were active. Their illegal publication *Bratislava nahlas* (Bratislava Aloud), revealing the catastrophic state of the environment kept secret by the regime, had a great response, not only for its content, but as an appeal for the end of inactivity. Events in neighbouring Poland had great importance for all these movements, including Catholic dissent. The Solidarity movement aroused sympathy, but its suppression by a military dictatorship again confirmed the limits of reform in the communist power bloc.

Actions against the regime were isolated, unpleasant for the state power, but not dangerous. Until 1988, dissent in Czechoslovakia was mainly of moral importance. The situation began to change in 1988. Large demonstrations in Prague on the twentieth anniversary of the 1968 occupation, then in October on the anniversary of the origin of Czechoslovakia, were followed in January 1989 by the so-called Palach Week, a series of demonstrations for the twentieth anniversary of the student Jan Palach burning himself, in protest against the occupation. Especially young people with no experience of the communist regime of the fifties, were not frightened by arrest and intimidation. The fall of the communist dictatorships in neighbouring Poland and Hungary, and the mass flight of citizens of the German Democratic Republic to the West through Czechoslovakia and Hungary, accelerated development. Every week brought new events. A group of Slovak dissidents informed the authorities of their intention to lay wreathes in Bratislava, in the places where civilians were shot by Soviet troops in August 1968. They were

immediately arrested. In November Ján Čarnogurský was put on trial, but demonstrations outside the court building were soon replaced by even larger actions.

On 16th November, the eve of International Students' Day, students peacefully demonstrated in Bratislava. On the next day, 17th November, a procession of students in Prague was brutally broken up by police. On the next day, students and actors agreed on a week long protest strike. Students and theatres throughout the state gradually joined it. On 19th November, Civic Forum was formed in Prague, to coordinate activities for a change of regime. A similar centre *Verejnosť proti násiliu* (Public Against Violence) was formed in Bratislava at the Artists' Club. Public Against Violence closely co-operated with the Hungarian Independent Initiative. Regular evening assemblies of tens of thousands of people began on squares. They formulated the basic demands: the end of the Communist Party's monopoly of power, free elections.

Weak attempts by the government to paralyse the movement were unsuccessful. Without Soviet support, the communists were puzzled and confused. The successful general strike throughout Czechoslovakia on 27th November was a decisive factor. The government had to begin dialogue with Civic Forum and Public Against Violence and gradually give up positions. Alexander Dubček was coopted as a member of the National Assembly in Prague and elected its chairman. A federal government of "national understanding" was formed, with a division of power between communists and revolutionaries. Similar changes were also carried out in Bratislava. The compromised Soviet agent Viliam Šalgovič was replaced at the head of the Slovak National Council by the more acceptable pragmatic communist Rudolf Schuster, while Milan Čič the communist minister of justice became prime minister. The new Slovak government included 6 communists and 9 non party members. President Gustáv Husák, who had lived in powerless isolation after losing the position of first secretary of the party in 1987, resigned, and on 30th December the Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic elected the most significant and internationally known Czechoslovak dissident, the dramatist Václav Havel as president.

In six weeks the whole structure of the dictatorship, built up and maintained over 41 years, collapsed. It fell without shedding of blood, as a result of peaceful but intensive pressure. Therefore this event received the name "velvet" or "gentle" revolution. The regime gave up the instruments of power it still held. By enabling a transition to new political and economic structures, the communist elites gave up resistance, especially since the main guarantor of their government, the Soviet Union was not willing to help them effectively. November revealed their true character, as governors for a foreign power. That is, the peaceful change of regime was enabled above all by the defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War, and its loss of the position of a super-power.

As a result of the overthrowing of Soviet hegemony, the Czechoslovak Republic and within it Slovakia were on the side of the victors, but as part of the Soviet Bloc, with its deformed economy, social structure and political culture, they were also among the defeated. November 1989 opened a space for overcoming this historical dilemma.



*General strike, 27th November 1989*

## 5. From Czecho-Slovakia to the Slovak Republic

### 5.1. *The Three Strategic Transformations after 1989*

After 1989, society had to solve three great and urgent tasks: firstly to create a pluralist democratic system in place of the communist dictatorship, secondly to reconstruct the directly planned economy on a market basis, and thirdly to solve the constitutional position of Slovakia in the republic and its place in Europe. In modified form they also continued after the formation of the Slovak Republic in 1993. Since the first post-revolutionary days, various views, conceptions and interests have been applied to the method and speed of solving these problems. In the conditions of an emerging democracy, they already received institutionalized form, becoming the basis for new political parties. After decades of political immobility, the confrontation of views became part of everyday life.

The international conditions of the nineties were favourable. The defeat of the Soviet Union in the Cold War crippled its possibilities to intervene in developments in Central Europe. The Warsaw Pact disappeared, and in June 1991 the last Soviet units left the territory of Czecho-Slovakia. On 24th August 1991, Ukraine became independent. Instead of the Soviet Union, with its global geopolitical interests, Slovakia gained a neighbour which is endeavouring to become part of the Central European and European context.

"Return to Europe" was one of the most wide-spread post-revolutionary slogans. Not only the renewal of traditional values, but also inclusion in the integration processes,

which had been developed in Western Europe since the end of the Second World War, was understood by this. Entry to the European Community, after 1992 the European Union, was officially established as the aim of the post-revolutionary Czecho-Slovak or Slovak government, although it was clear that it would require many years of preparation. A second priority aim of foreign policy was entry to the North Atlantic Pact, which was clearly the most reliable guarantee against an attempt to renew Soviet hegemony or other threats to political stability in the region.

After the revolution, great hopes were also placed in the so-called Visegrád Three, named after the place of signing of a co-operation agreement between the presidents of Czecho-Slovakia, Poland and Hungary. However, this group of three, or after the independence of Slovakia, four, fell victim to the lack of interest of its signatories, which gave priority to an individual race into the already established Western European integration structures.

The economic situation was very complicated and unpleasant for the majority of the population. From 1990 to 1993, Slovakia like other post-communist countries, underwent a severe economic crisis. At 1990 prices, industrial production fell from 276.1 billion crowns in 1989 to 186.9 billion crowns in 1993. The output of the construction industry declined from 46.9 billion crowns to 22 billion, agricultural production fell by a third, road transport to 1/3 and rail transport to 1/2 of the pre-crisis levels. The gross domestic product fell to 74% of its previous level, household consumption was reduced by a third, and real wages in 1993 reached only 72.8% of their level in 1989. Rapid inflation devalued savings, changes in the structure of prices to the disadvantage of basic foods had an especially bad effect on pensioners, families with children and socially weak groups.

A new and shocking phenomenon, already unknown for several generations, was mass unemployment. In 1990, 39,603 people were registered as unemployed, and in 1993 already ten times as many: 368,095. High unemployment continued, by the end of the nineties approaching 500,000 or 20% of the workforce.

The main cause of the crisis was the disintegration of traditional markets, changes of ownership relations and the transition to the market mechanism, for which conditions were only gradually created. The countries of the former Soviet Union were much more deeply affected by the crisis than Czecho-Slovakia and for longer, so many engineering, metallurgical and electro-technical enterprises, and especially producers of textiles, clothes, furniture, glass and food products lost their market. It was possible to partially replace the disintegrating and unreliable post-Soviet markets, by reorientation to markets in countries with developed market economies, but only at the price of great sacrifices. However, this was done relatively quickly, and the income from Western markets made it possible to pay for Russian raw materials and energy.

The opening of the market to foreign imports affected many enterprises. It led to the decline and liquidation of various electro-technical and engineering enterprises. The decline of domestic consumption was reflected in the production of meat, milk, clothes and shoes. The catastrophic fall in construction of flats from 33,437 in 1989 to 3,093 in 1995 was reflected in the production of building materials, machinery, fittings, furniture, building textiles and a halving in the number of construction workers.

The decline of the armaments industry, which employed about a tenth of the industrial work force at the end of the eighties, was an important and for many regions fateful factor in the crisis. The decline in international tension already led to marketing difficulties in the eighties. After the signing of international arms control agreements, production

of weapons already halved by 1989, and in the following years it fell to only a fraction of its level during the Cold War. The crisis of the armaments enterprises was further deepened by the disintegration of the market for their non-military products: construction and agricultural machines, transport equipment, hydraulic equipment, cast and forged products, for which it was difficult to find a market in the West.

At the same time as the reorientation of foreign trade, it was necessary to build up a network of modern banks, insurance companies, a stock exchange, to work out dozens of economic laws, liquidate the state monopoly on foreign trade, introduce a new tax system and a convertible currency. However, the most important post-revolutionary reform of all was the renewal of private ownership.

The first step was the restitution of property confiscated or nationalized after February 1948. Houses, companies, businesses, fields and woods were returned to the original owners or their heirs, if they were Czechoslovak citizens. Restitution effected large factories and estates only to a small extent, since these were mostly taken from their original owners in 1945.

The privatization of property, which could not be returned to its original owners, started from the assumption that a private entrepreneur is more able to administer property than an anonymous "state". Property destined for privatization was concentrated in the National Property Fund. In the so-called first wave of privatization, shops, small businesses, pubs and workshops were sold by auction. In this way, most of the retail trade was already in private hands by 1991-1992. In 1992-1994, the so-called second wave of privatization dealt with property worth several hundred billion crowns, including factories, estates, wholesale and transport companies and hotels. The majority of property in this wave was privatized by the so-called coupon method, first applied in Czecho-Slovakia and later used in modified form in other post-communist countries. Every adult citizen could buy a coupon book for 1000 Kčs. This entitled him to 20 applications to participate in the privatization of particular companies, or the right to use his coupons by means of privatization investment funds established by banks and private entrepreneurs. The investment funds did not always prove to be responsible administrators of the property they acquired, as the creators of coupon privatization had assumed. They used a considerable amount of the resources entrusted to them in speculation, and much was simply stolen. Elements of corruption and mafia practices already appeared during the auctions of smaller businesses, and increased as the amount of privatized property grew. After the independence of Slovakia, precisely the obviously unclean speculation of the investment funds made it easier for the government to stop the already started second round of coupon privatization and replace it with a different method.

For more than half a year, up to the elections of 8th-9th June 1990, governments of "national understanding" governed in Czecho-Slovakia and Slovakia. The federal government was headed by a Slovak former communist Marián Čalfa, while the premier of the Slovak government was also a representative of the previous regime Milan Čič. The strongest political grouping in the Czech Republic was the broad anti-communist coalition Civic Forum, and in Slovakia, Public Against Violence. New political parties with various views on overcoming the past, on the extent, depth and speed of change, soon began to form within and outside these movements. Traditions, national and confessional interests were also important, as were also purely personal ambitions, which have greater influence on the political scene in transitional periods, than in peaceful times.

In the 1990 elections, seven from the several dozen Slovak parties received the number of votes necessary to win seats in parliament. Public Against Violence (VPN) received 29.3%, the Christian Democrat Movement (KDH) 19.2%, the Slovak National Party (SNS) 13.9%, the coalition of Hungarian parties Coexistence and the Magyar Christian Democrat Movement 8.7%, the Democratic Party (DS) 4.4% and the Green Party 3.5%. These elections were really a sort of plebiscite for or against the preceding regime. The Communist Party of Slovakia received only 13.3% of the votes, in spite of the first steps towards internal changes into a party of social democratic type. Its position was also weakened by the screening act of 1991, which excluded the top rank of the nomenclature of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and registered agents of the State Security Service from important functions for five years.

A true image of the new political structure of Slovakia came only with the parliamentary elections of June 1992, when the citizens already had more experience of the democratic system, and the political parties had better constructed structures and a longer time to propagate their views and conceptions, as well as more striking political personalities.

Public Against Violence, the leadership of which was mostly liberally oriented and which did not behave very vigorously over constitutional questions, was not able to transform itself into a full-blooded political party. As the Civic Democratic Union, it received only 4% of the votes, while the similarly oriented Democratic Party got 3.3%. While these parties represented the right, on the left of the political spectrum the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL), the transformed Communist Party of Slovakia, kept its position with 14.7% of the votes. The Christian Democrat Movement (KDH) declined to 8.9% and the Slovak National Party (SNS) to 7.9%. The coalition of Hungarian parties maintained its position, while the Slovak Christian Democrat Movement, which had broken away from KDH failed to get into parliament. The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), led by Vladimír Mečiar, became the unambiguous winner of the elections with 37.3% of the votes. Mečiar became premier in the Slovak government.

As a member of VPN, Vladimír Mečiar had already been premier of the coalition government after the elections in June 1990. After the break up of VPN in March 1991, the leader of KDH Ján Čarnogurský became prime minister. HZDS went into opposition, but with tenacious agitation and the support of most of the press, it was able to win the elections in June 1992. The personality of its leader Vladimír Mečiar undoubtedly contributed to the victory of HZDS, but the fact that it was not a profiled party with a clearly defined ideology and conception, but a broad movement with space for the most varied and contradictory conceptions, was also important. It addressed a wide range of citizens, who sought a simple, direct and quick way out of the economic and social crisis. The positions on the constitutional position of Slovakia, which gradually became the key problem of political life were equally varied.

The problem of the organization of the state already appeared at the beginning of 1990, in the controversy about the name and symbol of the state. The Slovak and Czech sides agreed on the need to remove communist symbolism. The word "socialist", introduced to the name of the state in 1960, disappeared. The Slovak demand to restore the traditional symbol of the cross with two arms on three hills, was also accepted. The Slovak demand for equal depiction of the Czech and Slovak symbols on the state shield and writing of the name of the state with a hyphen - Czecho-Slovakia instead of Czechoslovakia - met with opposition from the Czech side. The controversy was solved



by compromise, but the course of the discussion and the emotions it evoked showed that the Czech and Slovak political elites and societies had different approaches to the organization of the state, and attached different importance to it. While dissatisfaction with the normalization form of federation prevailed in Slovakia and a "broad" federation, confederation of two states or full independence were demanded, in the Czech Republic the federation tended to be rejected as a product of occupation and views varied from a unitary centralized state to a very limited federation. A conception formulated by some Czech politicians avoided the national principle entirely.

In the course of 1990-1992, numerous talks were held between representatives of the Czech and Slovak national councils, the national governments and the federal authorities, about the organization of the state. President Václav Havel also intervened in these talks. The talks to some extent showed a repetition of the situation in 1968, when the Czech side regarded efforts to achieve greater autonomy for Slovakia as a brake on more important tasks or as provincialism, while the Slovak side regarded it as an essential part of the real democratization of the state. The liberally oriented forces in Slovakia also underestimated the strength and unstopability of the emancipation process, so that in the end, the problem entirely escaped from their influence. The situation in inter-war Czechoslovakia was repeated to some extent. While KDH and SDL attempted to widen Slovak autonomy as far as possible in the framework of the common state, in HZDS views shifted from the original federalism to confederation and finally to an independent state, which was originally supported only by SNS and some Christian Democrat politicians. Attempts at agreement on the basis of a confederation of two states similar to Austria-Hungary were unambiguously rejected by the Czech right. Part of the Czech political elite decided on separation. The results of the elections in June 1992 strengthened the tendency towards separation. The right wing Civic Democratic Party won in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia HZDS, perceived in the Czech environment as a leftist populist movement.

Long-term tendencies and short-term interests overlapped in the positions of the Czech and Slovak elites. On the Slovak side, there was the undoubted progress of Slovak society since the moment of the origin of the common state in 1918, but which was not sufficiently expressed in the organization of the state. Czech society did not perceive this, and if it did, it underestimated or rejected it. The short-term factors were different ideas about the method and pace of transformation, formulated by the strong and well organized Czech right, headed by the federal minister of finance Václav Klaus. After the 1992 elections, he became prime minister of the Czech Republic. Since, up to this time the Czech political elite had regarded the existence of Czech national organs only as an inconvenient concession to the federation required by the Slovaks, this was a signal of approaching separation.

The Czech right expected from the separation easier and faster transformation of the economy, without the burden of the Slovak armaments factories and excessively eastward oriented industry. It regarded the creation of a barrier against the disturbed Balkans and the disintegrating Soviet Union as an advantage. The problems with the Hungarian minority and the international dispute with Hungary about the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros water works on the Danube, were also inconvenient. The main Czech geopolitical aim: quick accession to the European Union and NATO, would be easier without Slovakia.

Although the majority of the public in both republics expressed support for preserving the common state, the endless and untransparent disputes, proposals and counter-



*Voting for the break up of Czecho-Slovakia in the Federal Assembly*

proposals evoked weariness and recognition that the positions of the two sides were difficult to reconcile. On 17th July 1992, the Slovak National Council proclaimed the Declaration on the Sovereignty of Slovakia. Work was accelerated on the preparation of a Slovak constitution, which was conceived so that it could become the basic law of an independent state. The constitution was adopted by the Slovak National Council on 1st September 1992 and ceremonially signed in Bratislava Castle. The break up of the Czecho-Slovak Federal Republic was already only a technical matter. On 29th October, the prime ministers Mečiar and Klaus signed an agreement on the future relations between the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic, the method of division of property was agreed, and finally on 25th November, the Federal Assembly declared the dissolution of the federation with a small majority. This opened the way to the peaceful origin of two independent republics. On 31st December 1992, the 74 year existence of the Czecho-Slovak Republic ended. Both states became its legal successors, the political and ideological heirs of the whole of its history, its successes and failures.

## 5.2. The Slovak Republic

After the origin of the Slovak Republic, it was necessary to rapidly construct the complete structure of the state administration. The Slovak National Council became a full blooded parliament and was renamed the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The government headed by Vladimír Mečiar, formed as a result of the June 1992 elections, continued its work. The ministries were supplemented, and several new ones established, for example the Ministry of Defence. In February 1993, Michal Kováč was elected president.

The division of the property of Czecho-Slovakia was agreed on the basis of the proportions of the population 2:1, and occurred rapidly, although it was quite complicated in some areas, for example in the division of the property of the army, embassies abroad and the main transport systems. The Czech side had the advantage that it already





*The acceptance of the Slovak Republic as a member of the United Nations, 19th January 1993*

controlled the economic centre in Prague, and had prepared for the separation in advance. Some controversial questions, especially bank debts and the problem of Slovak gold deposited in Prague, were solved only in 2000, but they did not create insurmountable barriers for relations between the two states. Separate Slovak and Czech currencies were created, but a customs union facilitated the preservation of a high level of mutual trade.

In comparison with the situation in the territories of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the method and course of the origin of the two independent republics and their mutual relations, was so very different, that it was accepted without problems by the international community. After the "velvet" revolution, the "velvet" separation provided Slovakia, which was little known abroad, with valuable political capital.

The Slovak Republic was immediately recognized by all the neighbouring countries, and the decisive, most influential states. As the successor of Czecho-Slovakia, the Slovak Republic became without problems a member of many international organizations, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. On 19th January 1993, the Slovak Republic was already accepted as the 180th state in the UN, and in July 1993, it became a member of the Council of Europe. In October 1993, an agreement was signed on the association of the Slovak Republic with the European Union, starting from February 1995, and in 1995, Slovakia became a participant in the project Partnership for Peace, which to some extent replaced the still distant accession of some post-communist countries to NATO. Relations with Hungary, burdened by the disputes about the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros water works, which had to be solved by the International Court in the Hague, received a new framework, by the signing of an agreement between the two states in March 1995 in Paris. The international recognition of Slovakia is also illustrated by the participation of a Slovak engineering battalion in peace keeping in the territory of former Yugoslavia, already in 1993.

The economic situation was still complicated. The crisis reached its lowest point in 1993. In 1994, gross domestic product grew by 4.9%, and in the following years growth

exceeded 6%, inflation fell from the catastrophic level of 61.2% in 1991, to 21.2% in 1993, and by 1997 it stabilized at around 6% each year. However, unemployment continued to increase. By 1998, gross domestic product approached the level of 1989, but real wages were still far below this level. The bad state of the economy also had a continual influence on the state of the health service, education, culture and science. The results of the transitional period emerged here. The old mechanisms of direction and support of a centralized economy no longer functioned, and the new mechanisms appropriate to a market economy were only beginning to form. Mass unemployment and the liquidation of enterprises, which could not adapt to the changed conditions, supported uncertainty in political thinking and culture. The search for a strong personality, simple solutions, alternative answers to problems in the form of nationalism and invented internal or external enemies, marked public thinking much more strongly than immediately after the defeat of the communist dictatorship.

At first, Vladimír Mečiar's government was supported only by HZDS, and later by SNS. When groups of members of parliament left both parties, Mečiar's government lost its majority in parliament and fell in March 1994. The splinter groups from HZDS and SNS formed a new party, the Democratic Union (DÚ), which proclaimed liberal ideas.

Jozef Moravčík from the DÚ became premier in the new coalition government, formed by representatives of the DÚ, KDH and SDL, and with the support of the Hungarian parties. The government declared itself temporary, and although the mandate of parliament ended only in 1996, early elections were held in September 1994. The HZDS used its brief period in opposition for regeneration, and it was helped by the fact that the new government left the decisive media in its hands. In the 1994 elections, the HZDS gained 35% of the votes, the KDH 10.1%, DÚ 8.6%, the Hungarian Coalition 10.2%, while SNS fell to 5.4%. The Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS) also got into parliament with 7.3% of the votes. It originated as a reaction of leftist radicals to the social democrat policy of the SDL. The SDL in coalition with three other parties got 10.4% of the votes.

After long talks, Mečiar succeeded in forming a government with a parliamentary majority only in December 1994. Mečiar's third government was a coalition of the HZDS, SNS and ZRS, but the last party had little influence on the government. The influence of the Slovak-Hungarian treaty for a year. After the origin of the independent state, the SNS directed its national edge against the Hungarian minority, and cast doubt on the Slovak Republic's effort to join the EU and NATO, although this was part of the government's programme. However, the forceful method of government, by which Vladimír Mečiar decided to consolidate his position, after twice being dismissed from the position of premier in the middle of the electoral period, was suited to both partners of the HZDS. During the assignment of parliamentary posts in November 1994, the representatives of the opposition were placed in unimportant committees, while the coalition kept important positions and supervision of the security services exclusively in its own hands. Extensive personnel changes were made in state organs in favour of adherents of the coalition. The new administrative division of the state into 8 regions and 79 districts, introduced in 1996, was also used to strengthen the position of the government. Privatization was also put exclusively in the hands of the coalition, without any possibility of checks from outside.

The new government rejected coupon privatization, and everybody had to be compensated with bonds worth 10,000 Sk, payable after 31. 12. 2000. Most property was privatized by direct sales to selected people, who usually hid behind specially created companies. In the case of the privatization of the most lucrative factories, estates or spas, the decisive factor was connection with the government and the banks, which provided credits for the first payments. The majority of companies were sold for much less than their value. This formed a close connection between political and economic power. In the course of several years, a class holding property worth hundreds of millions or even billions of crowns was formed, mostly from the ranks of the management of enterprises and the political elite. The origin of this "class with capital" was part of the proclaimed programme of the HZDS. However, only some of these owners, created artificially on a political basis, were able to appropriately use their property, especially in the complex period of the formation of a new economic system and reorientation towards new markets. In comparison with the surrounding post-communist countries, the chosen method of privatization resulted in a very small influx of foreign capital, which could have brought resources for investment and the know-how necessary to penetrate onto the world market. Some exceptions, for example Volkswagen or Siemens, showed what a developmental element Slovakia lost in this way.

The unfavourable political climate strengthened the reluctance of foreign investors. The position of the state in international relations worsened and the Slovak Republic came into a certain degree of isolation. The hope of an early solution to the questions of security and long-term economic prosperity with the help of accession to the EU and NATO, was gradually lost. From the end of 1994, the European Union repeatedly criticized Slovakia as an associate member, for short-comings in the application of the democratic principles of the control of state power, especially in parliamentary committees and the Slovak Information Service. Attempts to limit the rights of the Hungarian minority, and non-standard relations with the head of state, when the ruling coalition made systematic efforts, using undignified methods, to achieve the early removal from office of President Michal Kováč, were also criticized. Non-transparent privatization also aroused fears, when even strategic companies, such as Nafta Gbely, came into unknown hands, for a fraction of their real value. The appointment of supporters of SNS to key posts connected with European integration, also cast doubt on the sincerity of the effort to achieve Slovakia's accession to the European structures. Some statements and activities of government representatives built up a suspicion that it had a second "Russian" card in reserve. As a result, in the years 1995-1997, the Slovak Republic, in contrast to neighbouring Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, was gradually excluded from the first group of candidates for accession to NATO and the European Union.

Apart from non-transparent privatization, corruption and political clientelism, the opposition also criticized the government for lack of a properly thought out economic policy, when living on borrowed money was hidden behind favourable macro-economic figures. Slovakia's foreign debt increased from 4.3 billion USD in 1994 to 11.9 billion in September 1998. Only part of the borrowed resources was used productively, mostly for investments with a long period of return, for example motorways. The foreign trade deficit grew rapidly, and the crisis in sensitive areas, such as health and education, deepened.

The political crisis of 1998 was manifested in the repeated failure of parliament to elect a new president, after the mandate of Michal Kováč came to an end. The coalition attempted to improve its position for the elections, by changing the law on elections to

parliament and local councils, in a way which significantly disadvantaged electoral coalitions. The opposition responded by creating the party of the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) and the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK). The new Party of Civil Understanding (SOP), led by Rudolf Schuster, arose as a reaction to the sharpened situation on the political scene.

Six parties won more than the 5% limit in the parliamentary elections of September 1998. The HZDS remained the largest party with 27% of the votes, the SDK got 26.3%, SDL 14.6%, SMK 9.1%, SNS 9% and SOP 8%. Vladimír Mečiar did not succeed in forming a government, and in December 1998, Mikuláš Dzurinda's government was formed. It was formed by a coalition of four parties: the SDK, SMK, SDL and SOP. The SDK associated the KDH, DÚ and DS, and the small Social Democrat and Green parties, while the SMK originated from the union of three parties. This really broad coalition had 93 seats in parliament, in contrast to the previous government, this was a large enough majority to change the constitution. This gave it more room for manoeuvre in making decisions. The dominance of the new coalition was also shown in the local government elections in December 1998. In May 1999, Rudolf Schuster was elected president of the republic directly by the citizens.