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The Nationalist Perspective within Slovak Communist Intellectual Thinking (1921–1968)

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Abstract

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This study deals with the idea of nationalism in the thinking of Slovak communist intellectuals from the early 1920s until the end of the 1960s. The variety of roles that national communism took during these decades are detailed, including an “intellectual exercise” in the 1930s, an ideological deviation in the 1950s, a program of national emancipation in 1960s and finally, the narrative of legitimizing the normalization orthodoxy after the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion into Czechoslovakia. The aim of this paper is to explore the variety of ways Slovak communist intellectuals connected the Marxist-Leninist worldview with their own nationalist discourse in different periods, describing how encountered ideological dilemmas were solved and then integrated into the program of Slovak national communism. The opening pages discuss the first generation of Slovak Marxist intellectuals in the interwar period, who defined the essential points of the Slovak national communist program. Next, following the example of historian Ľubomír Lipták, the second part documents the “intellectual de-Stalinization” of the 1960s, which included profound criticism of the Slovak position in the republic. The final piece of this study analyzes the culmination of discussions regarding Czech-Slovak relations in 1968 and 1969.

Throughout the last decade, questions of “socialist patriotism” and “national communism” maintained a constant presence in any analysis of the socialist states of Central Eastern Europe (CEE). Questioning traditional interpretations of communism as a foreign, forcefully implemented “anti-national revolution” reshaped discussions on the historical development of the Soviet bloc. Current research reveals that communist party ideologists and Marxist intellectuals did not understand nationalist discourse solely as an instrument of communist legitimization but rather, for a significant part of the communist intellectual elite, nationalism was an essential part of their ideological self-identification. Communism was viewed not as a program of one political group, but as an ideology of the whole nation. Paraphrasing a statement from Bradley F. Abrams, the struggle for the socialist project was, to a great extent, a “struggle for the soul of the nation.”¹

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1 ABRAMS, Bradley F. *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation. Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism*. Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

Since the end of the Second World War at the very latest, communist parties in CEE have presented themselves as heirs of national traditions and guardians of national interests. Resonating ideas of “national unity,” “national rebirth” and “social and national revolution” were based on a mix of socialist and pre-communist nationalist traditions. However, the latter point had to be reinterpreted in a way that supported communist mobilization of the population.

In scholarly works, the phrase “national communism” is employed to describe a process of “positive reevaluation of the patriotic legacy” as well as “the use of the concept of national sovereignty as a legitimizing device.”² In general, “national communism” can be understood as applying universal Marxist–Leninist ideology to individual national political, economic, social and cultural conditions. However, since late 1970, nationalist principles tended to overshadow the communist utopia in most CEE communist dictatorships, and since the 1980s, the national communists were inclined to speak more about national issues and less about Marxism–Leninism.³ In the end, connecting national traditions with “proletarian internationalism” was contradictory and generally unsuccessful. The problem of nationalism and its relationship to the socialist project remained one of the most obvious dilemmas of the communist ideologists, especially Marxist intellectuals.

The dispute between modern nationalism and communist ideology can be clearly seen in the works of Marx and Engels. As Walter A. Kemp noted, “the classics” left their followers with many unanswered—or very ambiguously answered—questions.⁴ Even Lenin’s interpretation of Marxism did not address such issues. He approached nationalism very pragmatically and viewed it exclusively in terms of achieving the goals of the Bolsheviks. Communist International (Comintern) founded in 1919, utilized and supported ethnic cleavages and conflicts to destabilize European “bourgeois” states, and the Leninist recognition of the right of all nations to self-determination until secession needed to be perceived accordingly. The right to national freedom was only one step toward eliminating national conflicts, which Lenin saw as an obstacle on the way to proletarian internationalism.⁵ However, after the Russian Civil War, it became clear that with the victory of Bolshevism, the concept of the “nation” would not go away, even later becoming self-evident in the conditions of building communism in one state.⁶

2 TRENCSÉNYI, Balázs et al. *A History of Modern Political Thought in East Central Europe. Negotiating Modernity in the ‘Short Twentieth Century’ and Beyond. Part II: 1968–2018.* Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 13.

3 KOLLÁŘ, Pavel. *Soudruzi a jejich svět. Sociálně myšlenková tvárnost komunismu.* Praha : NLN, 2019, pp. 104–107.

4 KEMP, Walter A. *Nationalism and Communism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. A Basic Contradiction?* London : Macmillan Press, 1999, p. 31.

5 KEMP 1999, pp. 47–48.

6 KEMP 1999, p. 54.

Discussions on nation-building concepts could not be avoided in a multi-ethnic Central Europe full of national conflicts.⁷ There was no possibility for communists of CEE to ignore this topic, and most did not even try. For communist intellectuals in particular, nationalist discourse sooner or later became a crucial part of their narrative. In Czechoslovakia, the relationship between Marxism and the national question came to the fore immediately after 1918, remaining an integral part of the ideological development of—not only—Slovak communists since the establishment of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) in 1921.

The founding Congress of the Slovak Communist Party that took place in January 1921, immediately and without any reservations approved the conditions for admission to the Comintern, which required the existence of only one centralized, hierarchical Communist party per state and explicitly rejected any other separate ethnic groups. However, this rule resulted in perpetual tension as, despite strict directives from Moscow, leading Slovak communists again and again sought an arrangement that would allow them to address “specific problems of Slovak development” with a certain independence from the center in Prague.

This study deals primarily with nationalism in the thinking of Slovak communist intellectuals, covering the period from the early 1920s to the Prague Spring in 1968, and starting with the first generation of Slovak Marxist intellectuals in the interwar period. Despite their initial critique of Slovak nationalism in the 1930s, the so-called Davists⁸ defined the essential points of the Slovak national communism program for the following decades, which eventually led to an accusation of “bourgeois nationalism” and subsequent silencing in the early 1950s. Based on historian Lubomír Lipták, the second part of this study documents the “intellectual de-Stalinization” process of the 1960s, which led to renewed interest in the problem of Czech-Slovak relations. The final part analyzes the culmination of this process during the liberalization era of the Prague Spring (1968). The main aim is to explore how Slovak communist intellectuals in various periods connected the Marxist-Leninist worldview with their nationalist discourse; how they solved the ideological dilemmas encountered and integrated them into the ever-evolving program of Slovak national communism.

7 KOPEČEK, Michal. Historical studies of nation-building and the concept of socialist patriotism in East Central Europe 1956–1970. In KOLÁŘ, Pavel – ŘEZNÍK, Miloš (eds.) *Historische Nationsforschung im geteilten Europa 1945–1989*. Köln : SH-Verlag, 2012, p. 123.

8 A group of authors named after the journal *DAV*, which was established as a platform of the left-wing, Marxist literary avant-garde. Its founders and main contributors were often called “Davists,” even among themselves. The Slovak word “Dav” means “crowd” and refers to the worker masses and collectivism of the radical left. See NOVOMESKÝ, Ladislav. Slovensko – DAV – Komunizmus. In ROZENBAUM, Karol. *Splátka veľkého dlhu. Publicistika 1963–1970. I. zväzok*. Bratislava : Nadácia Vladimíra Clementisa, 1992, pp. 282–316; ROSENBAUM, Karol (ed.) *DAV. Spomienky a štúdie*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo SAV, 1965; DRUG, Štefan. *DAV a davisti*. Bratislava : Obzor, 1965.

Intellectuals of the Interwar Slovak Communist Movement

The history of the communist movement in Czechoslovakia suggests that communists could never complain about the lack of sympathy from intellectuals. Support for Marxism in this milieu was already considerable during the interwar republic, significantly more so in the Czech part, though in post-war Czechoslovakia, the phenomenon grew to mass proportions. However, initial intellectual support for the communist movement in the Slovak territory was far from straightforward. There were several reasons for this.

At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, most Slovak intellectuals still associated the socialist movement with the lowest strata of society. It was thought of as imported from the German, Hungarian, Jewish or Czech environment, and seen as contrary to the alleged Slovak national traditions that most Slovak intellectuals sought to protect. As historian Juraj Benko explains, the Slovak intelligentsia “was politically exhausted by the national question” and saw in the workers’ movement only “mass potential for supporting the national movement.”⁹

Before the First World War, no one from the small group of Slovak intellectual and political elite anticipated any possibility of the Marxist left entering the struggle for the Slovak “village and factory.” Leaders of the Slovak labor movement reacted critically to such disinterest,¹⁰ and the result was bitterness and distrust towards intellectuals, which made its way into the Slovak communist movement.¹¹ Unlike the situation in neighboring Hungary, Austria, Germany, or even to a lesser extent, the Czech lands where intellectuals played an essential role in the communist movement, no relevant intellectual in Slovakia joined the radical left in the turbulent times after the end of the First World War.¹²

There was some anticipation by the Slovak radical left that after resolving the Slovak national issue in the form of the Czechoslovak Republic, the interest of intellectuals will focus on solving Slovakia’s social and economic problems. On the contrary, a brief episode in the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919 had a significantly negative impact on the image of the communist movement in Slovakia. The invasion of Hungarian communists into eastern Slovakia enabled a connection between the “Bolshevik threat” and Hungarian irredentism. In this way, Soviet-style Bolshevism threatened simultaneously the traditional social and economic order and the newly acquired national freedom of Slovaks. From the Marxist point of view, the events of 1919 were considered a wasted opportunity to start a socialist revolution, an opinion that appeared during the 1920s and in the post-war period, became a permanent

9 BENKO, Juraj. Miesto a funkcia inteligencie v slovenskom komunistickom hnutí v medzivojnovom období. In MICHÁLEK, Slavomír et al. *Gustáv Husák: moc politiky – politik moci*. Bratislava : Veda/Historický ústav SAV, 2013, p. 58.

10 RUTTKAY, Fraňo. Storočnica prvého slovenského robotníckeho časopisu. In *Otázky žurnalistiky*, 1997, no. 3, pp. 233–240.

11 CONNELLY, John. *Zotročaná univerzita*. Praha : Karolinum, 2008, p. 425.

12 CHORVÁTH, Michal. Čo je to Dav? In CHORVÁTH, Michal. *Z prielomu. Štúdie, články, recenzie*. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, 1970, pp. 256–266.

part of the Slovak Marxist national story. The narrative also included a judgement about the failure of the Slovak intelligentsia, which did not support “progressive development.”

In a retrospective, the foremost member of the first generation of Slovak communist intellectuals, poet Ladislav Novomeský, wrote that “fear about nationality made the older intelligentsia shut away from new and different ideas unregistered in the national vocabulary.”¹³ According to Novomeský, the central role of “nationality” in the minds of the old and new generations of the Slovak intelligentsia caused a rejection of communist ideas. As the journal DAV wrote in the editorial of its first issue, “Slovak intelligentsia is like a docile maiden, entering the service of the capital.”¹⁴ This belief shaped the intellectual development of the first generation of Slovak Marxist intellectuals in the 1920s, feeling that if the Slovak national tradition moved Slovaks towards direct conflict with the secular, progressive left ideas, it must be abandoned as soon as possible.

Representatives of the DAV group (Davists) formed in 1924, considered themselves the only part of the Slovak intelligentsia that successfully resisted the encumbering pressure of Slovak national traditions. They believed it was because some of them were brought up in the Hungarian environment (Ladislav Szántó, Ladislav Novomeský) with a solid revolutionary tradition. The “internationalist” contribution of Jewish Davists (Eduard Klinger) was also viewed positively. The Czech element, in turn, mediated contacts with the most influential left-wing intellectuals (Zdeněk Nejedlý, Vítězslav Nezval, František Xaver Šalda, Jaroslav Seifert, Stanislav Kostka Neumann) and Prague based communist student organizations (Proletkult and Kostufra).¹⁵

Davists found only one useful current in Slovak politics—the Czechoslovakists. Czechoslovakism, or the idea of the Czechoslovak nation, was a belief that had existed in various forms since the early 19th century. During the First World War, it was used as the crucial legitimizing argument for the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic. After its establishment in 1918, the Czechoslovakist idea that Czechs and Slovaks are two branches of one nation became the official state doctrine, though during the second half of the 1920s this view became strongly contested in Slovakia, where it was seen as a tool for Czech dominance in the common state. As a result, an emancipating credo stressing that Slovaks are an independent nation with a right to self-determination and at the least, political autonomy, gained popularity among Slovak voters.¹⁶ The problem of Czechoslovakism was very much present also among the Czech and Slovak communists.

13 NOVOMESKÝ, Ladislav. O DAVe. In ROZENBAUM, Karol. *Splátka veľkého dlhu. Publicistika 1963–1970. I. zväzok*. Bratislava : Nadácia Vladimíra Clementisa, 1992, p. 91.

14 DAV. In *DAV*, 1924, vol. 1, no. 1, without page number.

15 CHORVÁTH 1970, p. 261.

16 See HUDEK, Adam – KOPEČEK, Michal – MERVART, Jan. *Czechoslovakism*. Abingdon, New York : Routledge, 2022.

However in the early 1920s, leading Slovak communist intellectual Vladimír Clementis continued to argue that the right solution to the Czechoslovak question was to establish the closest possible connection of Slovaks with the more advanced Czech environment,¹⁷ aiming to eliminate an alleged Slovak cultural and intellectual backwardness. Despite statements about genuine internationalism coming from the Marxist–Leninist doctrine, the Davists presented themselves as convinced Czechoslovak patriots. In other words, the young Davist generation was moving towards “national communism” from the beginning, though until the mid-1930s, it was Czechoslovak national communism. The Slovak version was created elsewhere and met with the disapproval of the Davists.

In the mid-1920s, Július Verčík, leading Slovak communist personality, became the most vocal proponent of Slovak national communism. In many aspects, Verčík was a typical representative of the first generation of the Slovak Marxist left; young, he was 31 in 1925, a former social democratic trade unionist, Marxist autodidact radical and politically inexperienced. In 1921, he stated openly that Slovak communists firmly supported the unified Czechoslovak Republic and rejected any form of “autonomist separation.”¹⁸ His support of Czechoslovakia was based on the hope that it could be transformed into a communist country.¹⁹ However, Verčík made it clear that if the Slovak communists were to lose that hope, their opinion would change on the “Slovak question” in Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia was far from becoming a communist state in the mid-1920s and Verčík lost his patience. In Slovakia, communists were dwarfed by their archenemy; the autonomist, clerical-populist Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party (Ludáks).²⁰

Verčík came to the conclusion that if the Communists were to be successful in Slovakia, they must defeat the Ludáks on the issue of Czech–Slovak relations. He argued that the communists needed a straightforward, feasible national program, stating that the national question is as important as the social one and that solving social problems does not mean automatically solving national issues. Thus, the Communist Party needs both an attractive social and national program. Verčík declared that autonomism is a specific manifestation of the Slovak working-class struggle against the Czech bourgeoisie and

17 CLEMETIS, Vladimír. Kapitoly o nás. In *Mladé Slovensko*, 1923, vol. 5, no. 3, p. 68.

18 ŠUCHOVÁ, Xénia. “Heslo autonómie alebo právo na odtrhnutie?” (Komunistické ponímanie národnostnej a “slovenskej” otázky do polovice 20. rokov). In ŠUCHOVÁ, Xénia (ed.) *Ludáci a komunisti: Súperi? Spojenci? Protivníci?* Prešov : UNIVERSUM, 2006, p. 36.

19 ŠUCHOVÁ 2006, p. 36.

20 Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, colloquially called the Ludaks, was the strongest party in interwar Slovakia, gaining about a third of the votes. It formed at the beginning of the twentieth century as a Catholic wing of the Slovak national and political movement under the leadership of charismatic Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka. As a clerical and ethno-populist party, the Ludaks strongly opposed the state idea of the Czechoslovak nation as well as the concept of a unitary, centralized state. The party demanded recognition of Slovak national particularity and the associated right to self-government in the form of political autonomy. During the 1930s, the party gradually moved to an anti-democratic, authoritarian platform. See LORMAN, Thomas. *The Making of the Slovak People’s Party: Religion, Nationalism and the Culture War in Early 20th-Century Europe*. London : Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

its Slovak allies.²¹ It was only because of mistakes by the CPC that the Ludáks were able to misuse this authentic movement.²²

His arguments caused strong disagreement among the Davists. In an article *K národnostnej otázke* (On the National Question),²³ Clementis argued that the solution to the Slovak question has no national but only a social dimension, which must be the only focus of the communists. According to Clementis, creating a national program means accepting the demands of the Slovak bourgeoisie. Moreover, Slovak political autonomy would only help the Hungarian irredenta as Slovakia is not sufficiently prepared for greater independence, and the Slovak people do not even demand autonomy.²⁴ However, there was one specific manifestation of nationalism among the Davists that was not mentioned by Verčík; a warning against the excessive influence of communist functionaries of Hungarian origin who allegedly supported Hungarian chauvinism.²⁵ A certain degree of anti-Hungarian resentment remained typical for several Davists, and also became a trait of Slovak national communism.

In the 1920s, the foremost figures of the Davist group considered Czechoslovakism, or at least the close connection between Czechs and Slovaks, to be a useful concept in serving the goals of the communist movement. In the Davist view, Slovak autonomy would only complicate the influence of the progressive Czech cultural environment in Slovakia. For them, the impact of Prague's left-wing circles, which fundamentally shaped their worldview, was irreplaceable. Until the late 1920s, the sporadically issued journal DAV and its circle of editors, who also worked for other communist periodicals, barely mentioned the varied views on the Slovak question within the communist movement.

The continuous existence of the Czechoslovak state remained an indisputable axiom of the Slovak Marxist intellectuals' political activities. However, from the Great Depression in 1930, their understanding of Czechoslovakism, the Czechoslovak nation and the problem of Czech-Slovak relations in general gradually began to change. The desperate economic situation in Slovakia led the Davists to the conclusion that Slovakia needed a different approach regarding its problems than the Czech lands; therefore, in their view, Slovakia had had to acquire some form of autonomy. In the 1930s, the topic of Czech-Slovak relations, the rejection of Czech hegemony and Prague centralism became fundamental issues for the entire Slovak political and intellectual spectrum. Davists, and especially the younger generation of radical left-wing intelligence around Gustáv Husák, vehemently joined the discussions. Ideological

21 KRAMER, Juraj – MLYNÁRIK, Ján. Revolučné hnutie a národnostná otázka na Slovensku v 20. rokoch. In *Historický časopis*, 1965, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 423–443.

22 PLEVZA, Viliam. *KSČ a revolučné hnutie na Slovensku 1929–1938*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo SAV, 1965, p. 20.

23 CLEMENTIS, Vladimír. K národnej otázke. In *DAV*, 1924, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 2–4.

24 Pamflet. Zápas o davy na Slovensku. In *DAV*, 1924, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 41–49.

25 ROZNER, Ján. Dav a problematika jeho doby. In ROSENBAUM, Karol (ed.) *DAV. Spomienky a štúdie*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo SAV, 1965, p. 49; BENKO, Juraj. The Hungarian communist exiles and their activities in the years 1919–1921. In *Historický časopis*, 2016, vol. 64, no. 5, pp. 873–897.

changes in the Soviet Union also played a significant role as Stalin's turn to "national Bolshevism"²⁶ in the early 1930s was noticed by the Slovak communist intellectuals. This turn resulted in a departure from materialist proletarian internationalism and a focus on state-oriented patriotic ideology and ethnocentric traditions in order to support state-building and the legitimization of Party leadership.²⁷

Influenced by the new Soviet cultural policy, Davists decided to reconsider their radically pessimistic view of the "heritage of the past" and national traditions.²⁸ It meant that the ideas of the Slovak national emancipation and Marxism–Leninism could be complementary, and the idea of national emancipation could also be part of the Slovak communist movement. The speed and radicalness of this process ultimately manifested at the 1932 Congress of Young Slovak Intelligentsia in Trenčianske Teplice. Here, Clementis openly spoke in favor of cooperation with young Ludáks as long as it was directed "against exploitation and social as well as national oppression caused by the Czech–German bourgeoisie in Slovakia."²⁹ Clementis did not question the idea that Slovaks are an independent nation with the right to self-determination, and thus, also autonomous status in Czechoslovakia.

At the Congress, Clementis suggested a nationwide program that would put national and social exploitation on the same level. He was not seeking a fight against the weak domestic opposition, but primarily the ruling Czech–German bourgeoisie, offering cooperation on development of the "national culture" to his ideological enemies.³⁰ His understanding of this phrase is hard to define. Most likely, it was a general appeal for collaboration on further modernization of Slovakia, which was not limited only to the sphere of culture. What is probably more important, all this happened during the most sectarian period in the development of the Communist Party, when an uncompromising struggle was announced against the Czech bourgeoisie's imperialism and the chauvinism of the Ludáks.³¹

The fact that CPC leadership did not criticize the Slovak communist intellectuals may seem strange, but it had its logic. Davists did precisely what the Party expected from them—their activities resonated in the intellectual milieu and offered a more attractive, less sectarian face of the communist movement. They also effectively linked the national issue with the communist protest against Czechoslovakia's current social and economic situation. In addition, although Clementis' national program was radical at first glance, contrary to

26 BRANDENBERGER, D. L. – DUBROVSKY, A. M. "The People Need a Tsar": The Emergence of National Bolshevism as Stalinist Ideology, 1931–1941. In *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1998, vol. 50, no. 5, pp. 873–892.

27 BRANDENBERGER – DUBROVSKY 1998, pp. 873–874.

28 DRUG 1965, p. 61.

29 CLEMENTIS, Vladimír. Trenčianskoteplické rozcestie: K socializmu či k fašizmu. In *DAV*, 1932, vol. 5, no. 6, p. 76.

30 CLEMENTIS 1932.

31 SOMMER, Vítězslav. Revoluce nebo spolupráce? KSC a otázka sjednocení levice před VII. kongresem Kominterny. In KÁRNÍK, Zdeněk – KOCIAN, Jiří – PAŽOUT, Jaroslav – RÁKOSNÍK, Jakub (eds.) *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu. Zv. VI*. Praha: Dokořán, 2011, p. 25.

Verčík's proposals, it did not include any plan for implementation. Clementis stayed loyal to the traditional Marxist–Leninist axiom that the question of nationality can and will be resolved only after the definitive victory of the proletariat, a position that degraded the Davist national program to a mere ephemeral manifesto.

The destruction of Czechoslovakia, the establishment of the Slovak state in March 1939 and subsequent start of the Second World War led to a radical new approach from the Slovak communist movement on the issue of Czech–Slovak relations. Firstly, the Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS) was established by order of the Comintern. In August 1939, top members of the illegal leadership of the CPS refused to use the slogan, “For a new Czechoslovakia!”³² and introduced the Soviet Slovakia program. However, after the German invasion of the USSR in 1941, Stalin ordered the Czech and Slovak communists³³ to return to restoring Czechoslovak statehood and start collaboration with non-communist elements in the anti-fascist resistance.

Due to prior massive arrests of high ranked communists in Slovakia, this mission fell on improbable candidates: communist intellectuals Ladislav Novomeský and Gustáv Husák. Led by the CPC emissary from Moscow, Karol Šmidke, their ascent to the illegal Party leadership provided an unexpected opportunity to infuse their federalist ideas into not only the CPS program, but also the unified Slovak resistance. The program of unified resistance from December 1943 was clear in this regard, “We desire that the Slovak nation and the Czech nation, as the closest related Slavic peoples, form their further fates in a new Czechoslovakia, a common state of Slovaks and Czechs, and on the basis of the equal peers principle.”³⁴ The agenda of Slovak national communism, formulated into a political program, was built strictly on the demand for federal organization of a renewed Czechoslovakia.³⁵ The federalisation of Czechoslovakia thus became one of the main imperatives of the anti-fascist insurrection, later named the Slovak National Uprising (SNU), which broke out at the end of August 1944.

Slovak communist intellectuals generally perceived the SNU as the beginning of a new era, when the communist program became the program of the entire Slovak nation. Direct participation in the Uprising, the status of heroes, acknowledgment from the Party leadership and non-communist politicians gave them confidence that they would play a major role in building a new (Czecho) Slovakia. In 1946, L. Novomeský elaborated on this vision in a lecture entitled *Komunizmus v slovenskej národnej idei* (*Communism in the Slovak National Idea*), in which he defined the Slovak communists as “an assembly of the best,

32 ŠUCHOVÁ, Xénia. *Idea československého štátu na Slovensku 1918–1939*. Bratislava : Prodama, 2011, p. 270.

33 The CPC leadership was exiled in Moscow from 1939.

34 The Christmas Agreement is available online. See https://sk.wikisource.org/wiki/Vianočná_dohoda (last viewed on 13 March 2022).

35 BENKO, Juraj – HUDEK, Adam. Slovak communists and the ideology of Czechoslovakism. In HUDEK – KOPEČEK – MERVART 2022, pp. 313–342.

most self-sacrificing and to Slovak affairs, most devoted sons of this nation.”³⁶ For him, the communist program was the essence of decades-long Slovak emancipatory efforts: “In this sense, the ideology of Slovak communism is not an ideology of one party, but an ideology of the Slovak nation.”³⁷ Novomeský promised that Slovak communists would consistently fight against the Czech hegemonic demands. “It is indisputable that our cultural venture will be Slovak in all respects. We will no longer have to argue with anyone about the national character of cultural life in Slovakia.”³⁸

However, Novomeský, Husák and their supporters did not realize that the leadership of the Czechoslovak Communist Party did not support these visions for resolving Czech–Slovak relations. In the highest echelons of the CPC, it was known that Stalin did not consider the Soviet type of federalization to be a suitable solution for Central Europe.³⁹ Slovak national communists did not realize that in postwar Czechoslovakia, the existence of the CPS as an independent actor lost its justification. It was not disbanded but downgraded to a mere territorial organization fully under the control of the Central Committee of the Central Committee of CPC (CC CPC). This means it could not function as a powerbase for the Slovak national communists.

Instead of federalization, removing Slovakia’s economic and social backwardness⁴⁰ became the preferred course of CPC leadership. Paradoxically, in this, the communist official policy was very similar to the DAV program from the mid-twenties, long forgotten by its original creators. The Tito–Stalin Split in mid-1948 put “federalists” in the CPS into a dangerous situation. Subsequently, in the early 1950s, the Stalinist concept of an escalating class struggle, which included a campaign against “bourgeois nationalists” among the Slovak communists, silenced an entire generation of communist intellectuals who had been formed in the inter-war period.⁴¹ The following decade in Czechoslovakia was dominated by state ideology celebrating the fraternal unity of Czech and Slovak working classes.

36 NOVOMESKÝ, Ladislav. *Komunizmus v slovenskej národnej ideji*. Bratislava : Sekretariát ÚV KSS, 1946, p. 19.

37 NOVOMESKÝ 1946, p. 18.

38 NOVOMESKÝ, Ladislav. Na okraj našej kultúrnej politiky (article in the journal *Nové slovo*, 15 June 1945). In PAVLÍK, Ondrej (ed.) *Slovenská kultúra a osveta na prahu socializmu*. Bratislava : Obzor, 1979, p. 26.

39 FARALDO, Jose M. Die Hüterin der europäischen Zivilisation Kommunistische Europa-Konzeptionen am Vorabend des Kalten Krieges (1944–1948). In FARALDO, Jose M. – GULINSKA-JURGIEL, Paulina – DOMNITZ, Christian (eds.) *Europa in Ostblock. Vorstellungen und Diskurse (1945–1991)*. Köln; Weimar; Wien : Bohlau, 2008, pp. 97–98.

40 ŠIROKÝ, Viliam. Pomer Čechov a Slovákov v novej Československej republike. Lecture in Slovakian house in Prague, 8 October 1945. In ŠIROKÝ, Viliam. *Za šťastné Slovensko v socialistickom Československu*. Bratislava : Pravda, 1952, p. 101.

41 See KINČOK, Branislav. Takzvaný buržoázny nacionalizmus a vnútrostranícky boj v KSS 1948–1951. In KALOUS, Jan – KOCIAN, Jiří (eds.) *Český a slovenský komunizmus (1921–2011)*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR/ ÚSTR, 2012, pp. 106–116; DOSKOČIL, Zdeněk. *V žaláři a vyhnanství. Ladislav Novomeský v éře stalinismu a poststalinismu*. Praha : NLN, 2020.

The Communist Intellectual of the New Type

The new political reality required a new type of intelligentsia. After 1948, the Communist Party grew suspicious of independent thinkers, even if they were Party members. It was no longer necessary to create and cultivate any discourse for the movement, to stimulate heated debates or attract politically indifferent people. After seizing power, the Communist Party was more interested in “soldiers” obediently performing tasks decided by Party ideologists,⁴² and as such, the Party decided to create a new intelligentsia better suited for the tasks at hand. On IX Congress of the CPC in May 1949, Party leader Klement Gottwald introduced the general line of building socialism in Czechoslovakia. He drew attention to the necessity to educate a new intelligence which was class conscious, ideologically connected with the working people and who were brought up in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism and dialectical as well as historical materialism.⁴³

Young Slovak student Ľubomír Lipták became an enthusiastic supporter of the project. He had just turned eighteen at the time of the communist takeover in 1948 and was thus a member of the first generation of students who were no longer exposed to the “ideological heritage of the past” during their university studies. As he wrote in the late 1960s, he belonged to a generation that, considering the prevalent spirit in society at the time, had a very intense feeling for laying the foundations of something completely new; the self-confidence of pioneers, the zeal of missionaries and the blind faith of sectarians. Marx’s claim that it is not the job of intellectuals to explain the world but to change it was extremely appealing to many young, ambitious students,⁴⁴ especially when the communist regime provided some of them the means to make such changes.

Lipták did not come from an ideal class background, but he was enchanted with the new reality after 1948. Choosing the University of Political and Economic Sciences (UPES), a Communist Party college, he studied journalism and economics. Established in the second half of 1949, its curriculum and staff were directly controlled by the Department of Culture and Propaganda at the Central Committee of the Communist Party.⁴⁵ According to Lipták’s memoir, “with only a few exceptions, the chairs of the University professed a vulgarized substrate of the new faith.”⁴⁶

After a wave of arrests and subsequent political trials in the early 1950s, Party officials openly expressed their trust in the young generation who had been indoctrinated by the communist school system. The two most prominent rep-

42 KOPEČEK, Michal. *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce*. Praha : Argo, 2009, p. 65.

43 Spoločná česko-slovenská parlamentná knižnica, NR ČSR – stenoprotokoly, schôdza 15. 6. 1949, <http://www.snemovna.cz/eknih/1948ns/stenprot/030schuz/s030002.htm> (last viewed 10. 2. 2013).

44 RUPNIK, Jacques. Intelektuálové a moc v Československu. In *Soudobé dějiny*, 1993–1994, vol. 1, no. 4–5, p. 542.

45 DEVÁTÁ, Markéta. Vysoká škola politických a hospodářských věd jako nástroj indoktrinace marxisticko-leninského vědeckého světového názoru. In JIROUŠEK, Bohumil (ed.) *Proměny diskursu české marxistické historiografie*. České Budějovice : Jihočeská univerzita, 2008, p. 193.

46 LIPTÁK, Ľubomír: *Storočie dlhšie ako 100 rokov*. Bratislava : Kalligram 2012, p. 41.

representatives of Slovak Marxist historiography from the 1950s and 1960s came from the UPES, Lubomír Holotík and Lubomír Lipták. They were colleagues at the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (SAS) for almost 20 years. At the time of their admission to the Institute, both were considered promising scholars. It was also no coincidence that the leadership of the Slovak Academy and the relevant party bodies turned their attention to Prague graduates in the search for young scholars as there remained an assumption that during studies in the capital, they did not come into contact with Slovak bourgeois nationalism or the ideas of “Slovak separatism.” Working or studying at a school directly managed by the CC CPC was seen as a guarantee of ideological purity.⁴⁷

Initially, their work was significant in shaping the Stalinist construction of the national narrative, though ultimately, the men played quite opposing roles in Slovak historiography. While Ludovít Holotík, a former assistant at UPES, became the leading creator of a Stalinist conception of the Slovak modern history in the 1950s, his seven years younger student, Lubomír Lipták, became one of its foremost critics in the 1960s.

The admission process at the Academy was very thorough. The institute, the SAS presidium, and the communist party apparatus assessed the prospects of future employees. However, the inspection did not always end with an acceptance. In 1952, party authorities emphasized to scientific institutions that young assistants and aspirants “cannot be burdened with bourgeois prejudices. They must be constantly monitored through departments, the party and trade unions, and those deemed unfit have to be dismissed.”⁴⁸

Communist ideologists stated clearly that historical science is useful only if it provides material for the current political practice, emphasizing to historians, “Historical questions must be asked and answered from a Party point of view, according to the goals of the Party.”⁴⁹ In the early 1950s, the Party prescribed the following task to Slovak historiography: A theoretical elaboration of the fraternal coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks with special attention paid to the struggle against hostile ideologies—bourgeois nationalism and Ľudák ideology, which represented both clericalism and separatism.⁵⁰

Similarly to all his colleagues at the Institute, Lipták accepted Party directives without question, stating later that the scientific process of writing history was replaced by several formulas of the Stalinist conception of historical development. Especially in the Slovak environment, Stalinism easily connected with some pre-existing ideas regarding Slovak history. As Lipták noted: “In Slovak

47 Although in the early 1950s, there were also ideological purges at the UPES, though, not connected to the bourgeois nationalism.

48 Archív Univerzity Komenského, fond (f.) Zápisnice zo zasadnutia Rady UK 1951–1952, II. riadne zasadnutie Rady Slovenskej Univerzity.

49 SIPOS, Peter. Hungarian Historical Scholarship and Marxism-Leninism. In GLATZ, Ferenc (ed.) *The Soviet System and Historiography 1917 – 1989*. Budapešť: Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1995, p. 97.

50 Slovenský národný archív, f. Predsedníctvo ÚV KSS, box (b.) 910, Perspektívny plán rozvoja vedeckých pracovísk SAV v rokoch 1956 – 1960.

conditions, the Stalinist historical concept, which had many nationalistic versions, in its distinct and absolutist class nature, had a magical appeal.”⁵¹ The main reason was its strong plebeian character. In the Slovak case, without traditions of independent statehood and until 1918, with foreign ruling classes, only “ordinary working people” were considered the “permanent subjects of Slovak history.” In Lipták’s view “if our [Slovak] history without the [own] state, the rulers, the nobility used to feel like something deficient, exceptional, in this new conception, it became ‘normal’ or even surprisingly, exemplary.”⁵²

Careful and slow de-Stalinization in Czechoslovakia initially had little effect on Slovak historians’ work and efforts to change the plebeian conception of the national story were unnoticeable among the historical community. However, some changes did occur. In the early 1960s, Lipták emphasized that the immediate contributions to socialist (re)education and the ideological struggles of the Party are not the only tasks of a historian’s work. In the future, historians should determine scholarly objectives that will not be directly linked to the demands of “current political needs.”⁵³

The demand for de-ideologization of the humanities was a typical feature of intellectual development in the 1960s. The intellectual should be no longer an obedient soldier but a strictly analytical Marxist scientist. In the case of Lipták, there was a clear transformation by the Party-serving historian into a critically thinking communist intellectual. On the other hand, the leaders and representatives of the Communist Party began to realize that in their efforts to raise their own “philosophical cadres,” they unknowingly created qualified critics.⁵⁴

Lipták was well aware of the paradoxes of the Czechoslovak liberalization:

One of the specifics of Stalinism... is that it clears the ground of other alternatives and their bearers so thoroughly that there is actually no other chance to overcome it, only gradual development, beginning first with the struggle of Stalinists among themselves, a battle clique which often, for tactical reasons alone, creates a freer space used then for formulating other ideas about socialist development of society and their gradual transformation into an effective political force.⁵⁵

A more open discussion on the “Slovak question” was made possible precisely by such struggles between the cliques of party officials. Without the benevolence of certain members of the CC CPC who pursued their own goals, Slovak intellectuals would not be able to express themselves as openly on the issue of Czech-Slovak relations as they did in the second half of the 1960s. For Lipták, the importance of history and especially historians for the reform process in Slovakia was not in doubt: “History has received an urgent order, not from the rulers but the opposition forces, to help revive what was seemingly buried forever in 1960, namely the Slovak politics.”⁵⁶

51 LIPTÁK 2012, p. 43.

52 LIPTÁK 2012, p. 45.

53 LIPTÁK, Lubomír. Problémy spracovania dejín Slovenska v rokoch 1918–1938. In HOLOTÍK, Ludovít (ed.) *Úlohy slovenskej historickej vedy v období socialistickej výstavby*. Bratislava : SAV, 1961, p. 134.

54 KOPEČEK 2009, p. 97.

55 LIPTÁK 2012, p. 46.

56 LIPTÁK 2012, p. 51.

The “revival” of Slovak politics through the activities of intellectual elites included strong support for the federalization of Czechoslovakia. It was, in fact, a return to the communist program of the Slovak National Uprising, combining socialism and federation as the ideal outcome. From the Slovak point of view, only the socialist part of the program was fulfilled, while the Stalinist deviations, especially the persecution of alleged “bourgeois nationalists,” prevented a just solution for Czech–Slovak relations. According to the majority of Slovak communist intellectuals, this should have been righted as soon as possible. Lipták himself was a diligent and sharp critic of centralism and the overall state of Czech–Slovak relations. While acting as a “public intellectual,” he published several essays dealing with the Slovak question arguing that the call for federalization is not a manifestation of Slovak nationalism or provincialism, but a legitimate and logical requirement of Slovak society. “To become a herald, promoter, or implementer of broad concepts without a clearly formulated and institutionally secured own national interest means to be seemingly a preacher of higher principles, but in reality, a facilitator of selfish foreign interests.”⁵⁷

From Lipták’s point of view, Slovakia had to rule itself first, only then it could influence state politics; only a suitable solution to the Czech-Slovak problem could persuade Slovaks for the further democratization process in Czechoslovakia. Lipták remained a convinced communist for whom the events of 1948 meant a decisive step towards a better, fairer society, in which the Communist Party naturally played a crucial role. As such, he considered dealing with the legacy of Stalinism critical to the successful development of socialism in Czechoslovakia. Unlike many other Slovak politicians and intellectuals, Lipták did not consider the achievement of Slovak political emancipation to be a universal solution to the Czechoslovak problems. He saw plenty of new challenges, namely coping with the economic, cultural, and social backwardness of Slovakia and the legacy of Stalinism. In 1968, he demanded Slovak elites overcome the “narrow national-defensive character” of the Slovak interpretation of history, which tended to slip into “uncritical apologetics.”⁵⁸ With this criticism, he was undoubtedly referring to the speeches he had heard from fellow Slovak communist intellectuals.

National Communism and Czech-Slovak Relations

Samo Falťan, a member of the young generation of Slovak national communists, declared in 1968: “It turned out that even with the transformation of the national democratic revolution into a proletarian revolution, the national moment does not even play a minor role.”⁵⁹ He also reminded all that the interwar Communist Party did not have a reasonable national program regarding the Slovak question, something repeated and frequently pointed out in Slovak discussions regarding the history of the CPC. For the first time,

57 LIPTÁK, Lubomír. *Nepre(tr)žitě dejiny*. Bratislava : Q111, 2008, p. 51.

58 LIPTÁK 2012, p. 57.

59 FALŤAN, Samo. *Slovenská otázka v Československu*. Bratislava : Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, 1968, p. 54.

such hitherto unheard-of criticism appeared in the writing of historian Miloš Gosiorovský. In 1963, this former campaigner against bourgeois nationalism sent a study entitled *K niektorým otázkam vzťahu Čechov a Slovákov v politike Komunistickej strany Československa* (On Some Questions of the Relation of Czechs and Slovaks in the Policy of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) to *Nová mysl*, the magazine of the CC CPC. It was rejected but distributed unofficially among Slovak intellectual, scholarly and political circles.⁶⁰ Gosiorovský criticized the CPC's lack of interest in the national equality of the Czechs and Slovaks, describing the policy of the Party as a continual chain of injustices towards Slovaks conditioned by Czech nationalism, emphasizing that Slovaks are the only Slavic nation without adequate "national authorities of socialist state power."⁶¹

How much the understanding of the relationship between national and economic aspects of building socialism has changed since the 1950s can be seen in the suggestive reaction of Ladislav Novomeský to the critique of Husák's interpretation of the Slovak National Uprising. "Since when does one question contradict the second one? Since when is it possible to repress the national issue in solving another social issue? Since when is it possible to put one question above the other, social over national, nota bene in the conditions in which the Uprising took place?"⁶² Concepts such as nation, self-determination and sovereignty appeared more and more frequently in contemporary journalism. Moreover, the "nation" was understood in a "bourgeois" meaning; it did not refer only to the "Slovak working people" as in the 1950s but to all social classes. There were repeated allegations from Slovak intellectuals that Czechoslovakism is still alive in the Czech environment and that it is thriving within the CPC.

Publicly very active Novomeský wrote, "various shallow conceptions of 'two branches of one nation' which need to be 'not divided but united' have lived in the consciousness of the 'little Czech man' for a very long time. This erroneous idea has effectively survived even the twenty years of the socialist era in our social life."⁶³ In the Slovak environment, the motive of democratization during the Prague Spring was inextricably linked to federalization of the state. Slovak intellectuals generally perceived centralism and the idea of a united Czechoslovak working class as part of the Stalinist deformations of the 1950s. Thus, de-Stalinization meant removing factors that hindered a just solution to the "Slovak question." As the national communists emphasized, the liberalization process cannot be successful without a fair resolution of the national question.⁶⁴ In 1968, the well-known communist intellectual Pavol Števíček

60 It was eventually published in 1968.

61 GOSIOROVSKÝ, Miloš. K niektorým otázkam vzťahu Čechov a Slovákov v politike Komunistickej strany Československa. In *Historický časopis*, 1968, vol. 16, no. 3, p. 369.

62 NOVOMESKÝ, Ladislav. Kráľovo svedectvo, o ktorom nemožno inakšie. In *Odboj a revoluce*, 1966, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 166–168.

63 NOVOMESKÝ, Ladislav. Zmysel federácie. In Karol ROZENBAUM (ed.) *Splátka veľkého dlhu. Publicistika 1963–1970. II. zväzok*. Bratislava: Nadácia Vladimíra Clementisa, 1993, pp. 197–198.

64 See BROWN, Scott. Socialism with a Slovak Face: Federalization, Democratization, and the Prague Spring. In *East European Politics and Societies*, 2008, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 467–495.

wrote in the magazine *Kultúrny život*, the central tribune of the Slovak reformists: “Whether yes or no to the federation can no longer be discussed. We are talking here about the will of the nation, manifested by the history as well as the direct voice.”⁶⁵

The Slovak national communism program quickly assumed a place at the center of intellectual, and gradually, political discussions, becoming vital part of the Slovak reform plans. Thanks to the aura of martyrs, the national communists, especially Husák and Novomeský who survived the 1950s purges against “Slovak bourgeois nationalism,” gained enormous social and political credit, enabling them to assume leading positions in the Slovak reform movement. Unequivocal support from the public, especially its intellectual, artistic and scientific elites, gave the Slovak national emancipation program an unquestionable legitimacy, which was subsequently acknowledged—albeit grudgingly—by Alexander Dubček’s leadership of the Communist Party.

Slovak reformists, regardless of whether they belonged to the “democratic” camp around the *Kultúrny život* magazine or the more conservative wing led by Husák and Novomeský, were very concerned that, according to them, no one was preparing the Czech public for the federation and this alleged Czech indifference, benevolence and lack of enthusiasm caused considerable resentment on the Slovak side. According to Samo Falťan, the Czech rejection of federalization was “a misunderstanding of the principles of democracy in national relations, a testimony to the survival of old ideological and hegemonic views.”⁶⁶

On 1 August 1968, the journal *Nové slovo* published a petition on the title page, *Slovo Čechom aj Slovákom súcim na slovo* (A word to the Czechs and Slovaks worthy to be spoken to). Its author, historian Viliam Plevza,⁶⁷ claimed that in the Czech lands, the Czechoslovak centralist spirit is still haunting in many minds. It is taking on newer and newer forms and now focuses on the preparation of federalization. His statement rejected curtailment of the principle of national equality and attempts to delay the constitutional law “on a just, federal organization of our socialist republic.”⁶⁸

Discussions about the form of federation continued even after the Warsaw Pact invasion on 21 August 1968, though, it did not change the resolution that Czechoslovakia would be federalized and the corresponding constitutional law would be approved by the end of 1968. The details were no longer a subject of public debate but rather of the meetings of Czech and Slovak expert teams due to both the nature of the issues discussed and the fact that after the invasion, press freedom was the first victim of the normalization process.

65 ŠTEVČEK, Pavol. Po prvé, po druhé. In *Kultúrny život*, 1968, vol. 23, no. 15, p. 1.

66 FALŤAN, Samo. Akú federáciu? In *Nové slovo*, 1968, vol. 10, no. 4, p. 1.

67 During the normalisation era, V. Plevza became the personal historian of G. Husák. See MACHÁČEK, Michal. *Gustáv Husák*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2017.

68 PLEVZA, Viliam. Slovo Čechom aj Slovákom súcim na slovo. In *Nové Slovo*, 1968, vol. 10, no. 11, pp. 1, 3.

Conclusion

Discussions on the problem of Czech–Slovak relations show a significant split between Slovak communist intellectuals in the form of growing opposition between those who considered the national issue only part of a broader process of democratizing the Czechoslovak socialist dictatorship and a faction that regarded the Slovak national emancipation and the solution of the Czech–Slovak relation as a matter of primary and unparalleled importance.

The discussion around the priority of democratization or federalization was solved after the Warsaw Pact invasion. “Democrats” were ousted by the new, “normalized” leadership of the CPC under Gustáv Husák, approved by the Soviets. The display of Slovak communist nationalism was tolerated only if it was not linked with political reformism. In the case of Lipták, the fact that his writings went beyond the Czech–Slovak settlement and fostered democratization determined his fate. Slovak “normalizers” used his texts as an example of “conscious negation of the gains of the previous [pre-1968] period,” where “negation turned into negativism of everything that was created during socialism, and finally to the negation of socialism itself.”⁶⁹ This resulted in a ban on any publishing activity, scholarly or popular, and relocation to a minor position in the Slovak National Museum.

In analyzing the development and basic configuration of the nationalist perspective in the thinking of the Slovak communist intellectuals, one finds both continuities and discontinuities. During the interwar period, emerging national communism movement positioned itself on the struggle against alleged imperialistic ideological domination by the Czech bourgeoisie and the ideology of Czechoslovakism. Although Slovak Marxist intellectuals were late to embrace Slovak national communism, in the 1930s, they became the fiercest representatives in their demands for federalization of Czechoslovakia, relying on the pragmatic benevolence of Communist Party leadership.

The period of the Second World War saw a transformation of the ephemeral ideas of socialism and federation into a coherent political agenda for the united program of the Slovak antifascist resistance. At the same time, Slovak national communist intellectuals suddenly became politically influential figures in the Czechoslovak communist movement. Because of this new position, after the war and communist takeover in Czechoslovakia in 1948, the Slovak national communists became part of a long-term internal party struggle, no longer competing with external enemies, but with fellow party members.

Due to changes in the entire Soviet Bloc, the 1960s brought a massive revival of national communism. In the Slovak case, national communism played a key role in the reform era of the late 1960s as the bearer of emancipation and democratization efforts. As the national communists stressed, the liberalization process could not be successful without a fair solution to Czech–Slovak relations in the common state.

69 Ústredný archív SAV, f. RO SAV, b. 83, 296, Zasadnutie Predsedníctva SAV (25. 9. 1972), Rozbor situácie v spoločenskovednej oblasti SAV.

In the 1970s and 1980s, national communism became the dominant legitimizing narrative of normalization orthodoxy in Slovakia. The combination of Marxism–Leninism and Slovak nationalism thus became part of the official communist doctrine, though, the price was that Slovak national communism had to give up any reform potential and defend the status quo in the form of real socialism. In this respect, Slovak national communists of the normalization era were in a similar situation as the Davists in the 1930s. The radical nationalist statements barely masked the lack of any real impact on political development.