

YESHAYAHU JELINEK

## Nationalism in Slovakia and the Communists, 1918–1929

“The attitude toward the national question always constituted in Czechoslovakia the touchstone for political understanding of the defense of revolutionary positions,” the Czech-German-Jewish historian of communism in Czechoslovakia, Paul Reimann, wrote in 1931.<sup>1</sup> In these few words Reimann expressed the dilemma of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia. And to this dilemma my study is also devoted.

The peace treaties concluded after the First World War buried the multinational empire and created in its place a multinational republic. The Communists in Czechoslovakia labored hard to define their stand in relation to the national question. The purpose of this paper is to describe closely the policies of Communists toward Slovakia. We shall argue that confusion, inconsistency, ideological perplexities, and opportunism characterized the party’s dealings with problems of nationalism and nationalities in that country.

Slovakia in 1918 was inhabited by several peoples: Slovaks, Magyars, Germans, Ruthenians (Russians, Ukrainians), Jews, and Gypsies.<sup>2</sup> There should be added an ever-increasing number of Czechs taking jobs in Slovakia and replacing the Magyars who were leaving. The Slovaks formed the main part of the territory’s inhabitants, yet the Czechoslovak constitution did not recognize them as an independent national entity. The constitution’s preamble mentioned only a “Czechoslovak nation” speaking a “Czechoslovak language.”<sup>3</sup> Although the doctrine of the racial, ethnic, historic, and linguistic unity of the Czechs and the Slovaks had a long history, it was received in Slovakia with

1. Pavel Reimann, *Dějiny Komunistické strany Československa* (Prague, 1931), p. 89.

2. According to the first Czechoslovak census of 1921, of the 3,000,870 inhabitants of Slovakia, 650,547 were Magyars, 145,844 were Germans, 88,970 were Ruthenians, and 73,628 were Jews. Method Bella, “The Minorities in Slovakia,” in R. W. Seton-Watson, ed., *Slovakia Then and Now* (London, 1931), p. 337. The ethnic identity of the Slavic population of Subcarpathian Ukraine and parts of Eastern Slovakia was often disputed, and variously described.

3. See text of the law in Samo Falt’an, *Slovenská otázka v Československu* (Bratislava, 1968), appendix 8, p. 285.

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mixed feelings and often with open resistance.<sup>4</sup> The Communists had to form their own viewpoint on the "Czechoslovak question." They also faced the problems of Magyar and German adjustment to the new republic, the ethnic identity and territorial affiliation of the Ruthenians, and anti-Semitism. In this maze of quarrels, demands, and clashes the Communists in Slovakia frequently lost their way, or were misled by outside influences.

### *Slovak Social Democracy in Austria-Hungary*

Before the First World War the socialists in Slovakia belonged to the Social Democratic Party of Hungary. This party did not pay enough attention to the deep emotions which moved the national consciousness of the minorities in the kingdom. Taking an orthodox stand, the Magyar leaders believed that there existed no national problem, only the problem of exploiters and exploited. Only under pressure did the party in 1906 resign itself to the creation of national committees in the territories populated by minorities.<sup>5</sup> Even before this concession by the Budapest leaders, the Slovak Social Democrats gathered in the city of Bratislava in June 1905 for what later came to be known as the First Convention of the Slovak Social Democrats. Others followed in subsequent years. The First Convention expressed several Slovak national demands and also demonstrated Slovak-Czech fellowship.<sup>6</sup> The local newspaper *Slovenské robotnícké noviny* constantly voiced the particular desires of Slovakia. Thus Slovak Social Democrats joined the more veteran bourgeois parties in the struggle for some sort of free and unhindered national existence for their people.

The Social Democratic Party demonstrated its support for separation of Slovakia from Hungary and creation of a common state with the Czechs on May 1, 1918, in the city of Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš. In a resolution adopted at a public meeting initiated by the Social Democrats the participants called for the right of self-determination for the "Hungarian branch of the Czecho-

4. The dispute around this topic covers countless pages. For older views see Jozef L'udovit Holúbý, "Slováci a Češi," and Karel Kálal, "Čechové a Slováci," in Jan Kabelík, ed., *Slovenská čítanka* (Prague, 1925), pp. 331-42; Josef Jirásek, "Československá otázka na Slovensku," *Delnická osvěta*, 12, no. 1 (January 1926): 31-34, and 13, no. 2 (February 1927): 264-66; L'udovit Novák, *Jazykovedné glosy k československej otázke* (Turčianský Sv. Martin, 1935). For a doctrinaire Marxist study see Vladimír Kulíšek, "Úloha čechoslovakizmu ve vztazích Čechů a Slováků (1918-1938)," *Historický časopis* (hereafter *HČ*), 12, no. 1 (1964): 50-74. For a contemporary analysis see Falt'an, *Slovenská otázka*. This sample by no means represents the whole gamut of opinions.

5. Tibor Süle, *Socialdemokratie in Ungarn* (Cologne and Graz, 1967), pp. 171, 172. Cf. *Istoriia vengerskogo revoliutsionnogo rabocheho dvizheniia* (Moscow, 1970), p. 64; *Prehľad dejín KSC na Slovensku* (Bratislava, 1971), p. 60; Miloš Gosiorovský, *Dejiny slovenského robotníckeho hnutia (1848-1918)* (Bratislava, 1956), pp. 185, 186.

6. *Prehľad dejín*, pp. 63, 64; Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 177-80.

slovak tribe.”<sup>7</sup> Later, in a session of Slovak political leaders on October 30, 1918, dubbed a meeting of the “Slovak National Council,” the Social Democrats supported establishment of a new state with the Czechs.<sup>8</sup> From then on Social Democracy in Slovakia remained a faithful adherent of the “Czechoslovak idea.” However, the party did not escape the fate of sister parties elsewhere: separation into right and left wings, and eventual development of a Communist movement.

### *Magyar Communists and Slovakia*

The new socialist school made its first appearance in Slovakia during the Magyar Soviet Republic. Because of conflicting statements and sources it is hard to ascertain to what extent, if at all, the Communists planned the creation of an independent soviet state in Slovakia.<sup>9</sup> It seems that the emphasis on international worker solidarity by the Budapest Revolutionary Governing Council, the invasion of Slovakia, and the subsequent proclamation of the Slovak Soviet Republic on May 16, 1919, all were aimed at preserving the prewar territorial unity of Hungary. Declarations and statements published during the short-lived republic offer three variant approaches: (1) The Slovak Soviet Republic was to constitute a common state with the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The relations between Russia and the Ukraine were to serve as a model. Moreover, the Communists would thus save Slovakia from occupation by the Czech bourgeoisie.<sup>10</sup> (2) This republic was to serve as a nucleus for the socialization of all of Czechoslovakia. The Czech representatives among the leaders of the Slovak Soviet Republic aimed at this end.<sup>11</sup> (3) At least a part of the Slovak Communist activists hoped for genuine self-determination, and separation both from the Czechs and the Magyars. (A future Central Euro-

7. See the text of the resolution in Gosiorovský, *Dejiny*, pp. 347–48. For a perceptive evaluation see Ján Mlynárik, “První krize slovenského Slovanství,” *L* (Prague), no. 2(13), Nov. 14, 1968.

8. “Vzpomínky dr. Ivana Déreera,” *L*, no. 2(13), Nov. 14, 1968.

9. The major work on the Slovak Soviet Republic is Martin Vietor, *Slovenská sovietská republika r. 1919* (Bratislava, 1955). See also Peter A. Toma, “The Slovak Soviet Republic of 1919,” *American Slavic and East European Review*, 17, no. 2 (April 1958): 203–15; Eva S. Balogh, “Nationality Problems of the Hungarian Soviet Republic,” in Ivan Volgyes, ed., *Hungary in Revolution, 1918–1919* (Lincoln, 1971), pp. 112–20; Martin Vietor, “K tridsiatemu piatemu výročiu Slovenskej republiky rád,” *HČ*, 2, no. 2 (1954): 161–90.

10. *Rudé právo* (Prague), May 31, 1935; Rudolf L. Tokes, *Bela Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic* (New York, 1967), p. 191; Balogh, “Nationality Problems,” p. 116; Vietor, “K tridsiatemu piatemu,” p. 189; L’ubomír Lipták, *Slovensko v 20. storočí* (Bratislava, 1968), pp. 85–91.

11. Balogh, “Nationality Problems,” p. 95; Vietor, “K tridsiatemu piatemu,” pp. 161, 170, 172; *Dejiny KSC: Študijná príručka* (Bratislava, 1967), p. 142.

pean Soviet Federative Republic loomed behind each of the approaches.) The last approach in particular seizes our attention, because it suggests that dreams of national independence were in the minds of some Slovak Communists. Indeed, contemporary writers in Slovakia and abroad were quick to point this out.<sup>12</sup>

Slovaks were not the only left-wing socialists in Slovakia. Actually, they were probably fewer than the Magyars. Magyars constituted only about one-sixth of the population of postwar Slovakia, but a considerable part of them were city-dwellers and industrial workers.<sup>13</sup> They sympathized with Hungary, and many workers pledged their allegiance to the soviet republics, whether Magyar or Slovak. The Magyar workers, who were active in the struggle against Slovakia's joining the Czechoslovak Republic, or at least against annexations of certain regions as stipulated by the Treaty of Trianon, found themselves defeated and frustrated.<sup>14</sup> True, they later learned to appreciate the democratic regime of Czechoslovakia. The White Terror of Admiral Miklós Horthy charmed no one. Magyar Communist activists crossed the borders and joined their comrades in Slovakia.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the number of Magyar revolutionaries increased, and they made themselves felt in the Slovak left. The Magyar revolutionary leadership had little sympathy for the bourgeois Czechoslovak Republic. Supported by the solid vote of their conationals, the Magyars were the pioneers of "internationalism" among the workers and impoverished peasants. Social ills, national discrimination, and the frustration of being forced to live under Slovaks were the reasons for this protest vote.<sup>16</sup> The Magyar labor leaders, experienced, intelligent, educated, and bitter, brought to the extreme left a certain coolness and doctrinaire attitude toward the national grievances of the dominant people in Slovakia. Years later, Communist historians accused the idols of yesterday of national nihilism, ultraleft

12. For Communist historians see Falt'an, *Slovenská otázka*, pp. 43, 53, and Lipták, *Slovensko*, pp. 88, 89. For right-wing nationalists see František Vnuk, *Kapitoly z dejín Komunistickej strany Slovenska* (Middletown, Pa., 1968), pp. 11–15, and Ctibor Pokorný, "Der Kommunismus und die Slowaken," in *Die Slowakei als mitteleuropäisches Problem in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Munich, 1965), pp. 181–83. See also Reimann, *Dějiny*, pp. 97–100.

13. Wolfgang Jankovec, "Nové Slovensko," *Delnická osvěta*, 24, no. 9–10 (1938): 323.

14. L'udovít Holotík, "Ohlas Vel'kej októbrovej socialistickej revolúcie na Slovensku od konca roku 1917 do vzniku ČSR," *HČ*, 5, no. 4 (1957): 438, and "Októbrová revolúcia a revolučné hnutie na Slovensku koncom roku 1918," *HČ*, 15, no. 4 (1967): 425–50.

15. Ján Mlynárik, "Robotnicke hnutie na Slovensku roku 1920 (Od parlamentných volieb do decembrového generálneho štrajku)," *HČ*, 8, no. 1 (1960): 42, 46; Reimann, *Dějiny*, p. 103.

16. *Rudé právo*, Aug. 19, 1920; parliamentary sessions no. 6 of Dec. 12, 1925, and no. 5 of Nov. 30, 1927 (*Stenographische Protokolle des Abgeordnetenhauses*, Prague).

deviations, sectarianism, and lack of ability to understand the Slovak masses.<sup>17</sup> The Czechoslovak Communist movement displayed much understanding for the pain of the Magyar minority. The outstanding Czech Communist, Dr. Bohumir Šmeral (1880–1941), favored border revisions with Hungary at least as early as June 14, 1921.<sup>18</sup> The Fifth Congress of the Communist International (1924) adopted a similar stand.<sup>19</sup> Some twenty years later Communists in Slovakia tried to expel Magyars, and to settle Slovaks in their stead.

### *Slovakia in the New Republic*

The Magyars were not the main concern of the left socialists in Slovakia. Czech-Slovak relations, and above all the increasing national consciousness of the Slovaks and their demands, were more important. The new republic liberated the Slovaks from the political and cultural oppression they had suffered in the defunct monarchy. The leaders of the nation, and a good many of its people, appreciated the new conditions. Nevertheless, the threat from Hungary and her partisans in Slovakia was still acute. The majority of the population regarded the Hungarian Red Army as merely another Magyar attempt to subjugate the Slovaks.<sup>20</sup> The sentiments on the Czech side were no less intense.<sup>21</sup> Czechs, including the working class, were overwhelmed by the creation of their own state, which was regarded by many as a continuation of the medieval Bohemian kingdom. This patriotic fervor served as the background for the discussion in the leftist camp about the position of Slovakia in the republic. Workers in Bohemia and Moravia shared with other sectors of the population the concept of a single, indivisible Czechoslovak nation. Socialist

17. Zdenka Holotíková, "Niektoré problémy slovenskej politiky v rokoch 1921–1925," *HČ*, 14, no. 3 (1966): 446; Zdenka Holotíková, "The Slovak Question and Czechoslovak Communist Party in the Pre-Munich Czechoslovakia," *Studia Historica Slovaca*, 4 (1966): 149; Ján Mlynárik, "O hlavním nebezpečí," *Reportér*, 4, no. 8 (Feb. 27, 1969): 12; Viliam Plevza, "K niektorým otázkam vývinu komunistického hnutia za predmníchovskej ČSR," *HČ*, 13, no. 4 (1965): 496. Cf. the nationalist Vnuk (*Kapitoly*, pp. 43–50), who accused the Communist Party of being Magyar-ridden. In order to prove it was "un-Slovak" he mentioned also the Jewish and Czech leaders.

18. *Rudé právo*, June 14, 1921.

19. *Thesen und Resolutionen des V. Weltkongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale, Moskau, von 17 Juni bis 8 Juli 1924* (Hamburg, 1924), p. 133 (hereafter *V. Weltkongress*).

20. During the Convention of the CPCS on May 16, 1921, the leading Slovak leftist Julius Verčík proclaimed: "The opinion of several Magyar comrades, that Slovakia is the Ukraine of Hungary, is false. The Slovak proletariat will never accept serfdom and the yoke from the hands of other people. (Stormy applause.)" *Rudé právo večerník* (Prague), May 18, 1921.

21. Czech worker military units participated in the defense of Slovakia against the Magyar Communists (*Dejiny KSČ*, p. 49).

thinkers also remembered the Austro-Marxian concepts of nations as cultural entities.<sup>22</sup> Others, including a great number of Germans and Magyars, were arguing in the spirit of Rosa Luxemburg that the first and main task of a revolutionary party is the overthrow of capitalism.<sup>23</sup> The Leninist approach to the national question was little known or used in those early days.<sup>24</sup> Those who referred to the right of self-determination had the Wilsonian formula in mind. In addition to ideas germinating in their own camp, the left-wing socialists had to cope with the plans of other political powers.

From the very beginning the Czechoslovak establishment preferred to keep the reins of power in the capital, Prague.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, some Slovak Catholic nationalists, headed by Father Andrej Hlinka, began thinking of territorial autonomy for Slovakia as early as 1919 and continued to promote it.<sup>26</sup> For part of the population, religion constituted an unseparable element of the national consciousness. Eventually many a Catholic stood in opposition to the centralistic line of Prague's authorities, while Protestants tended to accept it. Catholics made up a prevailing majority of Slovakia's population. In the past the Catholic Church had acted as a willing agent of Magyarization, and had subsequently contributed to the Slovak particularism. But, above all, the often liberal-minded and freethinking Czechs alarmed the Slovak clergy and pious believers. Some of the local priests and laymen participated actively in the Slovak struggle for self-determination and against Magyar supremacy. They were disappointed when the Czechs preferred to choose Protestants for positions of power, influence, and income. Some sort of political separation for Slovakia—perhaps autonomy—was believed to be the solution. Hlinka began to object to centralism even before details of the so-called Pittsburgh Agreement of May 30, 1918, signed by Czech and Slovak émigré groups, reached the country. This agreement, which stipulated separate administration, parliament, and courts for Slovakia, came to the attention of the public in 1919 and encouraged the autonomists.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time Slovakia turned restless. The population became dissatisfied with the manner in which the military authorities governed the region. Social and economic problems plagued large sections of the popula-

22. Ferdinand Peroutka, *Budování státu*, 4 vols. (Prague, 1933–36), 1:304.

23. Václav Král, ed., *Cesta k Leninismu: Prameny k dějinám KSC v letech 1921–1929* (Prague, 1971), p. 17; Miroslav Klír, "Úloha B. Šmerala při vypracování strategicko-taktické orientace KSC," *Příspěvky k dějinám KSC* (hereafter *PDKSC*), 5, no. 1 (1965): p. 17.

24. Klír, "Úloha Šmerala," pp. 32, 33.

25. Ladislav Lipscher, *K vývoju politickej správy na Slovensku v rokoch 1918–1938* (Bratislava, 1966).

26. Konštantín Čuleň, *Boj Slovákov o slobodu* (Bratislava, 1944), p. 157.

27. For the full text see Falt'an, *Slovenská otázka*, appendix 1, p. 275.

tion. The influx of Czechs was a special cause of discontent.<sup>28</sup> The left-wing socialists had to pay close attention to the status of Slovakia and the Slovaks. This was an uncomfortable problem for the Czech left-wingers, because in addition to the Czech-Slovak-Magyar riddle they had their own sizable German minority. Czech socialists well understood that the ideology of the "Czechoslovak nation" tended among other things to inflate the number of the Slavs in proportion to the Germans in the republic. Most of the Czech leftist leaders indeed accepted this ideology and acted in agreement with it at least until 1924 and, with some modifications, even later.<sup>29</sup> Only then did the ideology gain the doubtful distinction of "Czech chauvinism."

The Slovaks were confused as well. When polarization in the Social Democracy began to take place, the experienced and educated leaders turned to the right. Slovakia's leftists looked up with awe at their sophisticated and broadly educated Czech counterparts, whom they met in Prague's Parliament.<sup>30</sup> As it happened, Magyars, Germans, and incoming Czech socialists gave the Slovak left a sense of direction. Small wonder, then, that in Slovakia the internationalist spirit was rooted deeply from the outset. Also, the Slovak socialists were less accessible to the ideology of a "Czechoslovak nation," though they did not dismiss it entirely. Nevertheless, its impact was not as deep as among the Czechs, and the Slovaks eliminated it in less time.<sup>31</sup>

### *First Leftist Attempts to Solve the "Slovak Question"*

Theoreticians and ideologists were lacking in Slovakia. The leftists there failed to give proper attention to the national problem at the beginning. Šmeral was among the first left-wing socialists to take a close look at the Slovak question. Though not entirely free of the "Czechoslovak nation" ideology, Šmeral was well aware of the looming dangers. He warned the Czech proletariat of emotional nationalism. He recognized the individuality of the Slovaks. Šmeral hoped for an early solution to the Slovak question. He wished to strengthen the bourgeois republic and to facilitate its becoming socialist at the proper time. Šmeral objected to small political state units. He did not think they were viable in the modern world. He preferred a socialist federation, but until the ideal solution materialized, he supported Czechoslovakia. He considered

28. Peroutka, *Budování státu*, vol. 2, pt. 2, pp. 1218-40, gives a fine picture of the mood in Slovakia in 1919.

29. Viliam Plevza, *KSČ a revolučné hnutie na Slovensku, 1929-1938* (Bratislava, 1965), p. 19; Juraj Purgat, *Od Trianonu po Košice* (Bratislava, 1970), p. 73; *Rudé právo večerník*, Aug. 1, 1920, May 10, 1921.

30. Mlynárik, "Robotnicke hnutie," p. 30, and "Vývoj robotníckeho hnutia na strednom Slovensku v rokoch 1918-1920," *HČ*, 4, no. 3 (1956): 325.

31. Deputies from Slovakia attacked cultural and political discrimination against Slovaks. See parliamentary sessions no. 150 of June 21, 1922, and no. 156 of June 26, 1922.



a cantonal system the best form for the multinational republic. For Slovakia Šmeral proposed autonomous status. But the party held to a centralist line at least until 1924.<sup>32</sup>

Šmeral developed his views during the years 1920–21, before the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS) was founded. The CPCS, a late-comer to the Communist International (Comintern, CI), nevertheless turned out to be one of the most valuable additions.<sup>33</sup> In the process of shaping the party the Czech section was the last to act. The German leftists, together with those of other nationalities in Slovakia, urged early formation of the party and joining of the International. In Slovakia Magyars and Germans pioneered the unification of the various leftist cells into one group. In the “unification meeting” of the left in Slovakia and Transcarpathian Ukraine (“Subcarpathian Russia”), which took place on January 16, 1921, in the spa of Lubochňa, the national question was a secondary topic. After a plenary session the meeting split into sections determined by the nationality of the delegates.<sup>34</sup> Only the proceedings of the plenary session and the Slovak section are available. In these proceedings the right of self-determination recalls the Wilsonian formula. The speakers used the expressions “Slovak proletariat” and “Czechoslovak proletariat” interchangeably, and occasionally recalled the patriotism of the working class.<sup>35</sup> Karel Kreibich (1883–1966), who addressed the meeting in the name of the German-Bohemian left, spoke already of Slo-

32. For Šmeral’s views on the national question in Slovakia see Reimann, *Dějiny*, p. 72; *Rudé právo*, Aug. 1, 1920, July 14, 1921; Miroslav Klír, “Dr. Bohumír Šmeral,” *PDKSČ*, 5, no. 6 (1965): 930–39; Klír, “Úloha Šmerala,” pp. 28–33; Ján Mlynárik, “Dr. Bohumír Šmeral a slovenská národnostná otázka v počiatkoch komunistického hnutia,” *Československý časopis historický* (hereafter *ČCH*), 15 (1967): 653–66. The last essay particularly is important for understanding Šmeral’s views during the early years of the republic. Mlynárik argues forcefully that neglect of Šmeral’s views was detrimental to the further development of the party. See also Ján Mlynárik, “Kdo má tedy pravdu,” *LL* (Prague), no. 25, Aug. 15, 1968; Vladimír Dubský, “Utvaření politické linie KSČ v období Šmeralova vedení,” *PDKSČ*, 7, nos. 3 and 4 (1967): 645–68, 803–38.

33. For an English description of the foundation of the CPCS see H. Gordon Skilling, “The Formation of a Communist Party in Czechoslovakia,” *American Slavic and East European Review*, 14, no. 3 (October 1955): 346–58. See also Josef Korbel, *The Communist Subversion of Czechoslovakia, 1938–1948* (Princeton, 1959), pp. 17–26.

34. There participated 149 delegates, including 88 Slovaks, 36 Magyars, 15 Germans, 6 Ruthenians, and 4 Jews (although there were many more delegates of Jewish origin, only four members of the Poale Zion Party identified themselves as Jews by nationality). Jozef Husár, ed., *Zjazd v L’ubochni 1921, Dokumenty* (Bratislava, 1969), p. 57. See also L’udovít Holotík, “Sjazd sociálnodemokratickej strany (Pavice) na Slovensku v januári 1921,” *HČ*, 11, no. 3 (1963): 337–65; Heinrich Kuhn, *Der Kommunismus in der Tschechoslowakei* (Cologne, 1965), pp. 24–25.

35. Husár, *Zjazd*, pp. 34, 40, 57, 60, 61, 122.



vakia as a "colony," a designation which was to reappear frequently.<sup>36</sup> The national question had low priority. Significantly, the delegates discussed it only in connection with the tiny Jewish faction.<sup>37</sup>

Shortly after the meeting the organ of the Slovak left, *Pravda chudoby*, published the Action Program of the "Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party in Slovakia," a misleading name at best. The ninth and last point asked for the creation of national sections in the whole territory of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Russia, in order to advance the indoctrination of the members. Although the sections were subordinated to the Territorial Executive Committee, they were entirely free in the cultural sphere. All nationalities were to be represented in the proposed Territorial Executive Committee, and each nationality was to have its own Executive Committee.<sup>38</sup> This was hardly a Bolshevik solution. Recalling the tenets of Austro-Marxism, the Action Program testified to the full national consciousness of its authors. The meeting at Lubochňa accepted the twenty-one conditions of the Comintern, leaving the name of the party (condition no. 17) open.<sup>39</sup>

Communists of Slovakia met with Czechs and Transcarpathians in Prague on May 14–16, 1921, and formally founded the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. At this convention the Slovak delegates expressed their loyalty to the united Czechoslovak Republic and professed their faith in one inseparable Czechoslovak nation.<sup>40</sup> On October 30–November 4, 1921, German, Polish, and Jewish Communists united with the CPCS. This convention did not discuss Slovakia at all. It listened to Šmeral's exhortation against nationalistic exhibitionism.<sup>41</sup> Confusion on the national question remained after the convention ended. Neither was there clarity in the thinking of the Comintern, which spoke routinely about the *Czechoslovak*, Hungarian, German, Carpathorussian, and Polish proletariat in Czechoslovakia (emphasis is mine).<sup>42</sup>

36. *Ibid.*, p. 38. Cf. *Rudé právo večerník*, Dec. 2, 1920.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 125. We have few details on this debate. The police dispersed the meeting, and the participants did not finish the agenda.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 158, 160.

39. *Prehľad dejín*, p. 116.

40. Reimann, *Dějiny*, p. 93; *Rudé právo večerník*, May 18, 1921. In an editorial of May 10, 1921, the paper admitted the existence of the Czechoslovak language.

41. Mlynárik, "Šmeral," pp. 658, 659. For secret details on the founding of the CPCS see Karel Gorovský, "O založení KSČ—dražd'anská konference v dubnu 1921," *Revue dejín socialismu*, 3 (1968): 600–620. See also H. Gordon Skilling, "The Comintern and Czechoslovak Communism: 1921–1929," *American Slavic and East European Review*, 19, no. 2 (April 1960): 234–47.

42. *Die Tätigkeit der Exekutive des Präsidiums des EK der Kommunistischen Internationale vom 13 Juli 1921 bis 7 Februar 1922* (Petrograd, 1922), p. 40; Král, *Cesta*, document no. 6, p. 68, and no. 8, p. 71.

### Early Nationalism of the Slovak Communists

In any case, the Slovak Communists as early as 1921 disputed the issue of centralism versus autonomy. The debates notwithstanding, centralism prevailed not only in the state but also in the party. The November convention abolished independent Slovak party institutions and trade unions. Instead, the convention established the office of Party Instructor for Slovakia. The trade unions turned into branches of centers located in Prague. The official explanations for the reorganization were the necessity of centralization in a party of the Bolshevik type and the shortage of qualified functionaries; but Czech—and Magyar—suspicions of Slovak particularism played an important role in this arrangement.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the nationalism of Slovak and Czech workers was soon to clash inside the Communist Party.<sup>44</sup> Communists followed the trend in the republic, where nationalism was on the increase, with Slovakia no exception. In the first election of 1920, out of 1,341,100 votes the Social Democratic Party polled 510,300 votes in Slovakia. The nationalistic Hlinka's People Party (HP, also nicknamed Ludaks) collected only 235,300 votes. Three years later, in the municipal elections of 1923 (1,177,400 voters), HP polled 430,000, CPCS 241,000, and SDP 56,100 votes. This may be compared with 1925, when the Ludaks received 489,000 votes, the Communists 198,000 votes, and the Social Democrats 60,600 votes of 1,425,200 votes cast.<sup>45</sup> The increase of the nationalist, and decrease of the socialist, vote is clear.

In Slovakia, as social problems and administrative oppression were plaguing the lower classes, Communists inclined toward nationalism. In their propaganda they attacked what was termed the "robbing of Slovakia" by Czech capital. Party speakers described the territory as a colony of the Czech lands, and the entire state they characterized as a colony of French imperialism.<sup>46</sup> Only a socialist republic—or better still, a federation of soviet republics—and the dictatorship of the proletariat could improve the situation of the various nationalities in Czechoslovakia.<sup>47</sup> In this analysis of the nation's position the Czechoslovak Bolsheviks copied the Comintern in its hostility to the various peace treaties. The Communists criticized the government for not

43. Plevza, "K niektorým," p. 496; Kuhn, *Der Kommunismus*, p. 21; Holotíková, "Niektoré problémy," p. 448; Mlynárik, "Šmeral," p. 665.

44. Juraj Kramer and Ján Mlynárik, "Revolučné hnutie a národnostná otázka na Slovensku v dvadsiatych rokoch," *HČ*, 13, no. 3 (1965): 430. An outstanding leader of Slovak Communists, Jozef Schiffl, emigrated in disappointment to the United States.

45. Lipták, *Slovensko*, p. 104. *Pravda chudoby*, Oct. 4, 1923.

46. Král, *Cesta*, document no. 22, p. 101; *Rudé právo*, May 9, 1922, Nov. 23, 1922; *Pravda chudoby*, Jan. 2 and 9, 1923.

47. *Die Tätigkeit*, p. 43; *Rudé právo*, Oct. 8, 1921; Miloš Hájek, *Jednotná fronta: K politické orientaci Komunistické internacionaly v letech 1921–1935* (Prague, 1969), p. 51.

fulfilling promises, such as autonomy for Slovakia and Transcarpathian Ukraine.<sup>48</sup> Yet such argumentation proved problematic when the Communists faced a powerful, if no less demagogic, adversary: the Hlinka Party. The struggle of this party for territorial autonomy put the Slovak Communists into an awkward position. Support of autonomy would make them seem to agree with the leading local bourgeois nationalists, who were violently anti-Communist! Still, not a few Slovak Communists sensed the strong appeal of the idea of autonomy. Unfortunately for them, the official party program recognized the unified nation and state, and objected to autonomistic goals. Hence the speeches and publications of the various spokesmen disclosed confusion and embarrassment.<sup>49</sup>

The first regular congress of the CPCS, on February 2-5, 1923, re-emphasized the old line. The Slovak delegates expressed unequivocal support. The congress denounced government policies for weakening the ties which were keeping the Czechoslovak nation unified, and thus exposing the state to external dangers. Also denounced were the Ludak slogans of autonomy. The congress described them as intended to prevent influence of Western culture on Slovakia, and to stop the national unification of the two kindred peoples. The congress proposed broad self-government in all existing municipal, administrative, and educational institutions, and objected to national and linguistic discrimination.<sup>50</sup> The decisions were a far cry from the right of self-determination, including creation of independent states, which were put forth explicitly by the Comintern at that time.<sup>51</sup> Historians argue that Šmeral and the party were not fully aware of the Leninist principle of self-determination to the point of separation. Šmeral discovered Lenin's prewar writings on nationalism only in 1924, and started then to publish them in the party's press.<sup>52</sup> But the "Czechoslovak nation" ideology remained apparently comfortable for many Czech Communists.

But the Slovaks were not happy. They objected, for example, to the liquidation of territorial party and trade-union institutions in Slovakia. The year 1923, in particular, saw attempts to set up a Slovak (National) Commu-

48. Parliamentary session no. 150 of June 21, 1922; *Pravda chudoby*, Jan. 2, 1923.

49. *Rudé právo*, May 30, 1922, Nov. 23, 1922; parliamentary session no. 151 of June 22, 1922; *Pravda chudoby*, Jan. 2, 1923. Of particular interest is the article "Cesta Hlinková" ("Hlinka's Way") in *Pravda chudoby*, Jan. 16, 1923. The anonymous writer explains that one cannot oppose a demand for national autonomy, since every nation has the right to self-government. But Slovakia is not self-sufficient enough to stay on her own feet. Economic crises strike not only Slovakia but the entire world, and only doing away with capitalism will solve the country's problems.

50. *Rudé právo*, July 18, 1924, Feb. 12, 1929.

51. Cf. *Bericht über den IV. Kongress der Kommunistischen Internationale: Petrograd-Moskau vom 5 November bis 5 Dezember 1922* (Hamburg, 1923), p. 60.

52. Klír, "Úloha Šmerala," p. 33; Plevza, "K niektorým," p. 506.

nist Party. Some trade unions declined to submit to Prague's leadership. Entire branches rebelled and followed the dissidents. Although neither of these attempts succeeded, they bear witness to the restless national spirit of the rank and file.<sup>53</sup> Another sign of the true feelings was the almost open cooperation with the Ludaks. Already in 1922 deputies of the Hlinka and Communist Parties had joined in attacking the government's deeds and misdeeds in Slovakia.<sup>54</sup> During 1923 *Pravda chudoby*, the Communist Slovak-language paper, repeatedly described the Hlinka Party as a representative of the genuine feelings of the people, though not forgetting to mention what was termed Ludak intentions to mislead the plain folk.<sup>55</sup> During 1923, and also later, there were hints of negotiations between the two parties.<sup>56</sup> The ambivalent attitude of the two parties toward one another was noticeable several times in the coming years. A contemporary historian suggested that the existence and appeal of Communist propaganda forced the Hlinka Party to pay attention to social questions. *Mutatis mutandis*, the Communists became more aware of the awakening of local nationalism.<sup>57</sup>

After the congress, as before, the CPCS continued to attack the "robbing" and the "colonial status" of Slovakia. An interesting sidelight was the campaign against local capitalists of non-Slovak origin, such as Magyars, Germans, and Jews. Perhaps this was yet another sign of the feelings of the Slovak party members. The anti-Jewish expressions often displayed an anti-Semitic tinge. From time to time, writers denounced "Jews" rather than "Jewish capitalists."<sup>58</sup> One should remember that the party did not recognize the existence of a "Jewish nation."<sup>59</sup> One is also forced to ponder over the extremely harsh anti-Jewish pronouncements by the leading party members of Jewish origin.<sup>60</sup> Jewish Communists, whether among the Magyars, the Germans, or the Slovaks, excelled in orthodox radicalism.

53. *Pravda chudoby*, May 29 and 31, July 31, Dec. 8, 13, and 18, 1923; Zdenka Holotíková, "Bol'shevizačný proces KSC v rokoch 1924-1929," *HČ*, 5, no. 2 (1957): 208; Plevza, "K niektorým," p. 497; Miloš Gosiorovský, "Slovensko a V. Sjazd KSČ," *ČČH*, 2, no. 1 (1954): 9; *Protokoll der Konferenz der erweiterten Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale, Moskau, 12-23 Juni 1923* (Hamburg, 1923), p. 199.

54. Parliamentary sessions nos. 150 and 151 of June 22, 1922, and no. 156 of June 26, 1922.

55. *Pravda chudoby*, Jan. 16 and 23, Feb. 2, Mar. 10 and 22, Sept. 18, and Oct. 9, 1923.

56. *Rudé právo*, Jan. 14, 1926; Mlynárik, "Šmeral," p. 662; Gosiorovský, "Slovensko," pp. 8-11.

57. Holotíková, "Niektoré problémy," p. 433.

58. *Pravda chudoby*, Mar. 10, Apr. 14 and 29, May 12, Aug. 12, Sept. 4, 1923.

59. The Lubochňa meeting disbanded the Jewish faction (Husár, *Zjazd*, pp. 67, 68, 125). Cf. *Protokol VII. sjezdu KSČ 11-14 dubna 1936* (Prague, 1967), 137, 138; Holotík, "Sjazd," p. 355.

60. Parliamentary session no. 172 of Nov. 23, 1922.

The German Communists were a special case. Less influential than the Magyars, less conspicuous than the Jews, the German Communists relied on their fellow conationals, who were strongly represented in industry and mining, and had the support of their fellow nationals in Bohemia and Moravia. The Germans in Slovakia had undergone extensive Magyarization and traditionally cooperated with the Hungarians. Bohemian Germans had no moderating influence either. Radicalism was not unusual among the Germans. In other words, the various components of Slovakia's national spectrum stood to the left of their Czech comrades. Even without an elaboration of the social, economic, and political causes of extremism, the excitement of nationalism made many Slovaks and Transcarpathian Ukrainians faithful supporters of the extremists in the CPCS.

The decisions of the first party congress did not pacify either the "internationalists" or the "nationalists" in the country. Magyars and Germans on the one hand, Slovaks on the other, continued to press for clarifications and changes in the guidelines. They disagreed with the Czechs, who were satisfied by and large with the accepted national platform. Notable exceptions were several Czechs politically active in Slovakia, such as Klement Gottwald (1896–1953), Eduard Urx (1902–42), Karol Bacílek (1896–), and others. Some of them were destined to hold important positions in Czechoslovak Stalinism after the war. Did the Slovak experience influence these men? When the established leaders of the party, well versed in the feelings of the Czech workers, stood immovable, Communists from Slovakia addressed their grievances to the Communist International.

### *The Fifth Comintern Congress and Slovakia*

Just then the Comintern was in the middle of the Stalin-Trotsky conflict. Under the guise of "bolshevization," the Executive Committee was purging the affiliated parties of elements considered unreliable by the victors, and was increasing its control over the national sections.<sup>61</sup> The importance of national and colonial problems proved to be extremely sensitive and acute, particularly in the "successor states." The Comintern was hostile to the series of peace treaties, which it regarded as a new imperialist division of the world and of Europe. The new states, natural hotbeds of nationalist feelings, were regarded as roadblocks to the victorious march of socialism. The Fifth Comintern Congress (June–July 1924) gave time and attention to the national problems of Central and Southeastern Europe, and censured the centralistic and chauvinistic policies of the governments of those regions. The Comintern commanded

61. Hájek, *Jednotná fronta*, p. 98.

the Communist parties to adopt a "Leninist line in national problems."<sup>62</sup> With special reference to Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, but no less to Rumania, Poland, and Greece, the Comintern emphasized the "right of self-determination to the point of separation" of nations. In its resolution addressed directly to the CPCS the congress counted the various nationalities living in Czechoslovakia, including Czechs and Slovaks, *separately*. The party was requested to support "Slovakia's struggle for independence." The Comintern qualified the proclamation by adding that all nationalities of the republic must cooperate in the common effort to overthrow the rule of capital and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>63</sup> The Comintern failed to differentiate between nationalities and nations in Czechoslovakia (the situation of Czechs and Slovaks was different from that of Germans, Magyars, or Poles). However, the CPCS was forced to modify its views on the "Czechoslovak nation" and, at least verbally, admit Slovakia's "right of self-determination to the point of separation." Later Communist writers complained that the party did not put this new line into practice.<sup>64</sup> Significantly, the International's interference constituted part and parcel of the effort to "bolshevize" the CPCS. In practice, bolshevization meant an attack on the veteran and experienced leadership of Šmeral, Kreibich, and Antonín Zápotocký (1884–1957), and conversely an endorsement of the left opposition. In the ensuing discussion the Slovak question ranked high.

The bourgeois press charged that the Communist International, by demanding Slovakia's independence, was encouraging the destruction of Czechoslovakia.<sup>65</sup> The Communists now gave much thought to analyzing Slovakia's place in the state. Kreibich, the party's specialist on questions of nationality, had long proposed the slogan of territorial autonomy. He hoped that democratic forces in the Slovak nation would increase in power, while at the same time the slogan would undermine the position of the Hlinka Party.<sup>66</sup> The important fellow traveler, Professor Zdenek Nejedlý (1878–1962), denied the existence of a separate Slovak nation.<sup>67</sup> The leading Slovak Communist Julius Verčík (1894–1959) accused Šmeral and "Šmeralism" of willful discrimination against the former's fatherland.<sup>68</sup> Gottwald proposed complete separation of Slovakia from the republic, whereupon the Comintern's emissary Dmitrii

62. Král, *Cesta*, p. 31, and document no. 25, p. 108. Cf. *V. Weltkongress*, pp. 124–31.

63. *V. Weltkongress*, p. 131.

64. Reimann, *Dějiny*, p. 151; Plevza, "K niektorým," p. 506.

65. *Rudé právo*, Sept. 23, 1924.

66. Karol Kreibich, "Národnostná otázka v Československu," *Kommunističeskii International*, no. 3–4 (May–June 1924), pp. 96–103, quoted by Plevza, "K niektorým," p. 498; *Rudé právo*, July 5 and Aug. 18, 1924; parliamentary session no. 295 of Aug. 30, 1924.

67. *Pondelní noviny* (Prague), Sept. 13 and 22, 1924.

68. Král, *Cesta*, document no. 32, p. 124; *Rudé právo*, Sept. 3 and 4, 1924.

Z. Manuilsky (1883–1959) cautioned that the right of separation did not mean an obligation to do so.<sup>69</sup> The Second Congress of the CPCS (October 31–November 4, 1924) adopted the International's decisions.<sup>70</sup>

The Moravian Communist Edmund Burian (1878–1935), who reported on the national question in the congress, listed nine tasks for the party. Of particular interest were the third and fourth points.<sup>71</sup> Burian denounced what he called “national bolshevism” and asked for more involvement in real national problems.<sup>72</sup> He warned of too extensive an interest in national rights, which might lead to supporting one's “own” bourgeoisie. Burian demanded attention to what he described as “real problems.” He probably aimed at avoiding “national nihilism,” a term used by later Communist writers for coolness toward national emotions. Here were the Scylla and Charybdis of communism in Slovakia. Communists of Slovak nationality, radical in their political views, inclined toward “national bolshevism.” Their comrades of Magyar, German, and Jewish origin had a bent toward “national nihilism.” The Second Congress turned down Kreibich's (and Šmeral's) model of “territorial autonomy,” and denounced it as borrowed from the Ludaks.<sup>73</sup> Verčík saw in autonomy a “division of spoils among thieves.” By saying so, Verčík meant that the national bourgeoisie wanted to gain a monopoly of exploitation in the autonomous region by ridding itself of rivals. Verčík's views were identical with the general notion in the CPCS.<sup>74</sup> A recent historian, Ján Mlynárik, regretted the acceptance by the congress of the “right of self-determination to the point of separation,” which he called the “frozen right of self-determination.”<sup>75</sup> The resolution of the congress also envisaged the creation of a federal republic, which would eventually turn into a soviet union of republics in Czechoslovakia.<sup>76</sup>

The resolution of the congress did not reflect the pressures of the Comin-

69. *Pravda chudoby*, July 30, 1924. *Rudé právo*, Aug. 22, 1924.

70. Miloš Gosiorovský, “K niektorým otázkam vzťahu Čechov a Slovákov v politike Komunistickej strany Československa,” *HČ*, 16, no. 3 (1968): 362; Vojtěch Mencl, “K historii II. sjezdu KSČ,” *ČČH*, 3, no. 4 (1955): 586; Purgat, *Od Trianonu*, pp. 76, 77; Plevza, “K niektorým,” pp. 506, 507.

71. *Rudé právo*, Nov. 7, 1924.

72. The “national bolsheviks” later came to be called “bourgeois nationalists.” Cf. Kulíšek, “Úloha,” p. 69.

73. The address by Manuilsky is in *Rudé právo*, Nov. 5, 1924.

74. *Rudé právo*, Sept. 4, 1924. It should be noted that Verčík himself deserted the line and requested the breakup of Czechoslovakia and independence for Slovakia. Mencl, “K historii,” p. 586.

75. Mlynárik, “Šmeral,” p. 665. The party's inconsistency in dealing with Slovakia was criticized not only by the men of the Czechoslovak Spring but also by the orthodox, such as Miloš Gosiorovský and Bohuslav Graca, and by opportunists such as Viliam Plevza, and Zdenek and L'udovít Holotík. The historiography of the history of nationalism in Slovakia and the Communists is an amusing story, worthy of an essay by itself.

76. Holotíková, “The Slovak Question,” p. 154.



tern only. The national set-up of the CPCS, especially in Slovakia, forced a compromise. Postponement of the solution perhaps increased the immediate tensions in the party, but prevented a major explosion. Everyone, whether Czech patriots, Slovak nationalists, or radicals of the splinter nationalities, could draw some satisfaction from the resolution. Unfortunately for the party, its unsteady policies on the agrarian question and on the national problem compelled the Communists in Slovakia voluntarily to give up participation in the search for valid solutions to the territory's problems. The dogmatic solutions satisfied few, and the dissatisfied sought remedies in Slovak, Magyar, and German nationalistic parties. Evidently the CPCS failed to appreciate the delicacies and dangers of Slovak nationalism. The Communists saw in the exploitation of national tensions merely a convenient lever for outweighing capitalism and introducing a socialist revolution. The solution of the national problem was for them secondary; the social problem was the dominant one. In analyzing nationalism with the assistance of the Marxist vocabulary of base and superstructure, the Communists were unable to sense the irrational and emotional drives of the recently awakened Slovaks. There is little doubt that the radicalism of the Slovak Communists originated in a variety of objective causes, such as increased exploitation, rising unemployment, extreme poverty in some parts of the country, and the mistakes and failures of Prague. We must also include the impact of foreign developments and rising radicalism abroad. Yet the subjective elements should be remembered as well—the thirst for self-expression and self-rule, national pride, and the hatred of all capitalist systems. Decisions of the Second Congress contributed to the theoretical but not to the practical solution of the Slovak question.<sup>77</sup>

The year 1924 saw the appearance of a new kind of Communist in Slovakia: young intellectuals educated and raised in the republic. Among them, Vladimír (Vlado) Clementis (1902–52) and Ladislav (Laco) Novomeský (1904–) should be mentioned. They were members of that young Slovak generation which was then taking the lead in other parties as well, and excelling in original approaches to the problems of their nation. Among others, this generation included the Ludak Karol Sidor (1901–53) and the Agrarian Dr. Imrich Karvaš (1903–). The young Communists published a journal of their own, named *Dav* (the masses, the multitude), which strove to develop original solutions for Slovakia. National pride and a warm love for Slovakdom and Slovakia characterized *Dav*. It wished to import humanistic and socialist values in order to enrich the home culture. Several of the young people displayed considerable talent as writers, poets, and scholars. The ambition to

77. For an interpretation of the party's weakness among the Slovaks see *ibid.*, pp. 148–51.

create Slovak socialist culture contained their future way: a desire to combine nationalism with Marxism-Leninism.<sup>78</sup>

### “Communist Separation”

Achievements of the Second Congress satisfied neither the Comintern nor local leftists. Struggle between various factions continued within the party. Slovak Communists spearheaded the struggle against what was nicknamed “Šmeralism,” that is, the balanced and self-confident line of Šmeral, Kreibich, and their friends. The Executive Committee of the Comintern intervened when Verčik became a victim of the struggle. His reinstatement lent him enormous prestige, and for years he was the darling of the Slovak radicals.<sup>79</sup> Verčik and his allies attacked Šmeral furiously in a conference held on May 10, 1925.<sup>80</sup> Observers felt that the tensions among the nationalities poisoned the atmosphere within the party.<sup>81</sup> Despite the “Leninist stand,” Hlinka’s slogan of autonomy continued to cause troubles. Such speakers as Verčik and Emanuel Šafránko (1890–) proclaimed the party’s willingness, under certain conditions, to support the slogan. More seriously, Šmeral and Kreibich returned and prepared an autonomistic plan for Slovakia. They recalled the wartime promises of Masaryk and others to grant Slovakia and Transcarpathian Ukraine autonomy and national diets. The party returned to the old charge: Slovakia was a mere colony.<sup>82</sup>

Typically, the Third Congress of the party (September 26–28, 1925) glossed over the right of separation and the national question.<sup>83</sup> The general election of November 1925, in which the Hlinka and Magyar parties achieved great victories, again demonstrated the key importance of nationalism in Slovakia. Results of the elections caused a political crisis in the republic. The strength of the various oppositionist groups, such as the German, Magyar, Hlinka, and Communist parties, forced the traditional political leadership to

78. For *Dav* and its contributors see Viliam Plevza, *Davisti v revolučnom hnutí* (Bratislava, 1965); *DAV: Spomienky a štúdie* (Bratislava, 1965); Štefan Drug, *DAV a davisti* (Bratislava, 1965).

79. Plevza, “K niektorým,” p. 508; Král, *Cesta*, document no. 49, p. 197; Holotíková, “Bolševizačný proces,” p. 213.

80. Plevza, “K niektorým,” p. 508; Král, *Cesta*, document no. 63, p. 249. Even Zinoviev branded the Slovaks as ultraleftist. See *Rudé právo*, June 18, 1925.

81. *Protokoll erweiterte Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale, Moskau, 21 Marz–6 April 1925* (Hamburg, 1925), p. 73; *Rudé právo*, Apr. 15, 1925. See also Stalin’s participation in the Czechoslovak committee of the Comintern, Král, *Cesta*, document no. 53, p. 202.

82. *Rudé právo*, Jan. 24, Sept. 19, and Oct. 29, 1925; parliamentary sessions no. 368 of Oct. 1, 1925, and no. 3 of Dec. 18, 1925. *Rudé právo večerník*, July 13, 1925.

83. *Protokol III. řádného sjezdu KSČ* (Prague, 1967), p. 262.

retreat; a new rightist coalition came into existence. The Hlinka Party participated in this coalition.<sup>84</sup>

A change in the political constellation and climate forced the Communists into new activity. They hoped to exploit the about-face of Hlinka's followers. In a communiqué the Central Committee accused the Hlinka Party of betraying Slovak autonomy, and demanded independence for the country. The Slovak people should decide for themselves the future of their political existence. The party members were told, as they had been before and would be again, that while the non-Slovaks should struggle for the right of Slovakia's self-determination, the local Communists and proletarians should insist on staying voluntarily in the republic.<sup>85</sup> Characteristically the Czech press charged the party with conspiring with Hungary to annex Slovakia. This notorious accusation, often thrown in the face of the Hlinka Party, did more harm than good. Despite the presence of pro-Magyar or Magyar leading members in both parties, there was little doubt that they preferred Masaryk to Horthy. The charges did not alter the party's line, and the Slovak functionaries very much appreciated the new tactics.<sup>86</sup>

The Communist speakers continued to attack the Ludaks, citing their hypocrisy and alleged national treachery. Conspicuous in this respect were the parliamentary debates on the "Law of the State Language," previously of overriding importance for the Ludaks, and the agreement to pay salaries to priests (*congrua*), one of the conditions for Hlinka's joining the coalition.<sup>87</sup> Consecutively the CPCS continued to call for a plebiscite in Slovakia and for independence for that country. Most important in the antigovernmental and anti-Ludak campaign was the proclamation "Remove from Slovakia the Oppressing Apparatus of the Czech Bourgeoisie!" published by a party conference in the city of Žilina on July 25, 1926.<sup>88</sup> The proclamation described the condition of the country in an aggressive and exaggerated manner, and repeated the demand for a plebiscite and independence. Independent Slovakia should become a part of the Union of Soviet Republics. The provocative proclamation, with its harsh call to the Czechs to leave immediately, caused much dispute.<sup>89</sup> Gottwald initiated this document and composed it with the approval

84. *Szakszervezeti Munkas* (Prague), 3, no. 11 (November 1925). For the crisis and the rightist coalition see Věra Olivová, *The Doomed Democracy* (London and Montreal, 1972), pp. 157–60.

85. *Rudé právo*, Jan. 10, 1926, carried the text of the communiqué (see also the editorial and the commentaries). *Rudé právo*, Jan. 13, 1926.

86. *Rudé právo večerník*, Jan. 12, 1926. *Rudé právo*, Jan. 14 and 20, 1926.

87. Parliamentary sessions no. 10 of Feb. 19, 1926, and no. 36 of June 19, 1926.

88. *Pravda chudoby* of July 29, 1926, carried the text of the proclamation.

89. Kramer and Mlynárik, "Revolučné hnutie," pp. 431, 437, 438, 439; Plevza, "K

of Verčík and the Central Committee. But Gottwald did not mind putting the blame for its publication on Verčík when authorship became uncomfortable.<sup>90</sup> Doctrinaire thinking, such as the proposal to establish “worker, farmer, and small craftsmen security units,” or subordination of the national liberation to the social one, spoiled this clever experiment to beat the Hlinka Party with its own weapons.

The proclamation, despite Gottwald’s authorship, reflected the confusion and radicalism of the Slovak Communists. Should Slovakia stay in the republic? What did “right of self-determination to the point of separation” mean? Should Slovakia demand autonomy or independence? Who are the allies, Czech Communists or Slovak nationalists? Was the solution to be reached before a socialist revolution or after it? There were no definitive and unequivocal answers, and there were no theoreticians of stature to provide the answers.

The Communists sensed that the Hlinka Party represented a real power and spoke for a great part of Slovakia’s population. But all the Communists were able to do was to blame their nationalistic adversaries for misleading the toiling people. The CPCS analyzed and described the Hlinka Party as a representative of the Slovak bourgeoisie competing bitterly with Czech big business.<sup>91</sup>

The new government presented the Parliament with a law reorganizing the state’s administration. The law was to increase self-rule in Slovakia, thus satisfying the Hlinka Party. In reality, however, the new organization was far from HP demands, as the Communist deputies recognized.<sup>92</sup> In presenting the party’s views, Šmeral and Kreibich criticized the governmental policies in Slovakia. They returned to the old proposals of self-determination, territorial autonomy, and local diet. In speeches free of the demagoguery of the proclamation of Žilina, the two protested against further curtailment of the municipal government’s freedom of action.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, two years of intensive activity ended in nothing.

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niektorým,” p. 510; Mlynárik, “Kdo má”; Mlynárik, “Šmeral,” p. 661; Holotíková, “The Slovak Question,” pp. 155, 156; Gosiorovský, “Slovensko,” pp. 8, 9.

90. Reimann, *Dějiny*, p. 172; Mlynárik, “Kdo má”; Kramer and Mlynárik, “Revolučné hnutie,” p. 439. See the harsh attack on Verčík in Gosiorovský, “Slovensko,” pp. 8, 9.

91. See examples in *Rudé právo*, Jan. 18, 1927; parliamentary session no. 93 of July 1, 1927. Cf. Viliam Plevza, *Československá štátnosť a slovenská otázka v politike KSC* (Bratislava, 1971), pp. 111, 112.

92. Lipscher, *K vývinu*, pp. 157–59; parliamentary session no. 93 of July 1, 1927.

93. Parliamentary sessions no. 61 of Jan. 15, 1927, and no. 90 of July 20, 1927; *Rudé právo*, July 20, 1927.

*The "Slovak Question" and Gottwald's Victory in the CPCS*

In 1927 the party interest in Slovakia decreased. The Fourth Congress of the CPCS (May 25–28, 1927) had little of relevance to say.<sup>94</sup> The main reason for the silence probably lay in the increased factional struggle and the interference of the Comintern in it. But the state's administrative reorganization brought to light misunderstanding between the Slovak and Transcarpathian Communists over several Ruthenian villages on the border of the two regions.<sup>95</sup> Again nationalism within the party got the better of the internationalism that was put on display.

The low priority given to the national question continued also the next year (1928) and after. This was a fateful period in the history of the party. Political failures, constant in-fighting, and dictates of the Comintern caused a major upheaval, which ended in replacement of the entire leadership. The new chiefs, an extremist coterie around Gottwald, nicknamed the "boys of Karlín" (*karlínští kluci*), were a group of young fanatics, whose greatest qualification was their willingness to accept unconditionally Moscow's orders.<sup>96</sup> The change of guard brought about the retirement of many members in Slovakia as well. Nevertheless, Slovakia remained radical. Quite a few young Magyars, Jews, *Dav* contributors, and others rallied around Gottwald.<sup>97</sup> The Sixth Congress of the Comintern (August 1928) discussed the changes, as the Fifth Congress of the CPCS had already done (February 18–23, 1929). The national question was on the agenda of both, and the latter congress adopted in fact the decisions of the first.<sup>98</sup> Gottwald reported to both congresses, addressing himself *inter*

94. *Rudé právo*, Mar. 24, 26, and 27, 1927. Cf. Gosiorovský, "K některým," p. 364, and *Za bolševickou orientaci KSČ. Sborník dokumentů k I. svazku spisů Klementa Gottwalda* (Prague, 1953), p. 68.

95. *Rudé právo*, Mar. 8, 11, and 12, and June 18, 1927.

96. Václav Kopecký, *ČSR a KSČ* (Prague, 1960), p. 227. Karlín is a section of Prague. Mlynárik, "O hlavním nebezpečí," pp. 12, 13; Mlynárik, "Kdo má"; Zdenek Hradilak, "Místo v dějinách: Čtyřicet let od V. sjezdu KSČ," *Reportér*, 4, no. 7 (Feb. 20, 1969): 14–16. During the Czechoslovak Spring historians argued that the Fifth Congress rerouted the CPCS away from the wise guidance of Šmeral and opened the door to the "cult of personality." For an attack on the "revisionist" historians and a defense of the Gottwald group see Michal Štefánek's introduction to *Protokol V. řádného sjezdu KSČ, 18–23 února 1929* (Prague, 1971), esp. p. 7 (hereafter *V. Sjezd*). Cf. Plevza, *Československá štátnost'*, pp. 116–22.

97. Viliam Plevza, "Príspevok o činnosti davistov v revolučnom hnutí za predmníchovskej ČSR," *HČ*, 12, no. 1 (1964): 7–9; Holotíková, "Bolševizačný proces," pp. 217, 218; Gosiorovský, "Slovensko," pp. 12–14; Bohuslav Graca, "O vzniku a boji KSČ za predmníchovskej ČSR," *HČ*, 9, no. 2 (1961): 197.

98. *Sechster Weltkongress der Kommunistischen Internationale, Moskau, 17 Juni–1 September, 1928* (Hamburg and Berlin, 1928), p. 341; Král, *Cesta*, document no. 80, pp. 302–9. Vladimír Dubský, "Historický význam V. sjezdu KSČ," *ČČH*, 7 (1959): 22.

*alia* to the national question.<sup>99</sup> In the debates, all thoughts of autonomy for Slovakia, including the proclamation of Žilina, were rejected and branded as bourgeois slogans. The participants denied the colonial status of the republic and Slovakia, defining Czechoslovakia as an imperialist country instead.<sup>100</sup> The Fifth Congress reinstated the right of self-determination to the point of separation.<sup>101</sup> Years later Ján Mlynárik maintained that the new leadership did not bother with ingenious and original thinking. Again copying formalistic prescriptions, it promised further divisions within the party in the future.<sup>102</sup>

### *Concluding Remarks*

One can hardly say that the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia displayed much consistency in dealing with nationalism in Slovakia. To describe the CPCS as lacking formulas would be out of place. Doctrines of a single Czechoslovak nation, Austro-Marxism, Bukharin-like proletarian nationalism, Luxemburgian internationalism, and Leninist self-determination to the point of separation were mingled with demands for autonomy and complete independence, for a cantonal system and federation, for a soviet republic and soviet union. Each of these formulas found adherents in the party almost for the entire period discussed here. Absence of theoretical thought and a lack of theoreticians in Slovakia, together with doctrinaire interventions from outside, resulted in unsatisfactory attention to the voices coming from the country. Slovakia's Communists did not present the population with valid and pertinent proposals on how to solve its national problems. They were, furthermore, hindered by the multinational and conflicting composition of the membership. One may conclude that the CPCS stayed on the periphery of Slovakia's national political life until 1929 and after.

99. *V. Sjezd*, pp. 50, 51; Klement Gottwald, *Výbor z díla* (Prague, 1971), pp. 59, 60, 70, 71.

100. *V. Sjezd*, pp. 76–79, 90–92, 121–23, 147–49, 197–99, etc. Cf. *Rudé právo*, Feb. 12, 1929; Miroslav Klír, "Karel Kreibich," *PDKSČ*, 7, no. 1 (1967): 85.

101. *V. Sjezd*, pp. 449–53.

102. Mlynárik, "Šmeral," p. 656; Kramer and Mlynárik, "Revolučné hnutie," p. 432.