• ŠTÚDIE A ANALÝZY •

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Social democracy and the Hungarian minority in Slovakia 1918 – 1921

The paper addresses the origins of the 'Hungarian minority question' in Slovakia, which emerged after the national revolutions in Central Europe in 1918-19 and which is still a hot issue today. Special attention is paid to the milieu of the multi-ethnic (Hungarian, Slovak, and German) social democratic movement, and to the question of how the different ethnic elements of this movement tried to come to terms with the new political challenges posed by the radical change in inter-ethnic power structure in Slovakia. The Hungarian social democrats were among the first to come forward with 'new' ideas, now understanding the need for them in their new situation.

Key words: Hungarian minority question; Czechoslovak state; multi-ethnic social democratic milieu

The paper addresses the origins and the nature of the 'Hungarian minority question' in Slovakia, which emerged after the national revolutions in Central Europe in 1918 – 1919 and which is still a hot issue today. Special attention is paid to the milieu of the multiethnic (Magyar/ethnic Hungarian, Slovak, and German) social democratic movement, and to the question of how the different ethnic elements of this movement, particularly the Magyars themselves, tried to come to terms with the new political challenges posed by the radical change in interethnic power structure in Slovakia.[1] Now that the Magyar social democrats had become part of a national minority in the Czechoslovak State, whereas before 1918 they had belonged to the ruling nation in the greater multinational Hungarian Kingdom which also included Slovakia, there could be no question any longer of their trying to ignore national problems or the 'national question'. Indeed, the Magyar social democrats in southern Slovakia began to put forward 'new' ideas on possible 'solutions' for the controversial question of Hungarian-minority status and peaceful interethnic coexistence. These ideas, proposals, and considerations had as yet a rather tentative character, relating to forms of cultural and administrative autonomy in Hungarian minority regions and to conditions for cooperation on a basis of equality between the different ethnic sections of the labour movement in Slovakia. Interestingly, a closer look at these ideas reveals that they were actually not very new at all, but rather similar to

[1] Táto práca je čiastkovým výsledkom projektu APVV-0628-11 *Štátne hranice a identity v moderných slovenských dejinách v stredoeurópskom kontexte*, riešeného v Historickom ústave SAV.

older pre-1918 ideas proposed by other groups of social democrats in Hungary and the Habsburg Monarchy including the Slovaks and the Czechs. The only novelty about them was the fact that it was now the ethnic Hungarians who were submitting them, whereas before the First World War it had been especially the Slovak social democrats in Upper Hungary who were looking for solutions for interethnic friction and inequality in terms of cultural autonomy and national recognition. The thing which had really changed was regional interethnic power structure, while a second important change was the fact that the Czechoslovak Republic was a democratic state unlike the old oligarchic and repressive Hungarian Kingdom. Although the Czechoslovak State had 'ethnocratic' features as well, its democratic institutions and relatively liberal national-minority policies opened up new opportunities for the Hungarians in Slovakia to help design models of interethnic coexistence and develop forms of democratic critique. The Magyar social democrats were among the first to come forward with ideas on this problem, now understanding the need for them in their new situation. The plans and demands made were related to both the problem of inter-group coexistence in the multiethnic labour movement and problems of cultural autonomy and national rights in the wider society of multinational Slovakia as a whole.

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In August 1919 a new start was made by various Magyar and German political movements in the new (now Czechoslovak) Slovakia after a period of sometimes open, sometimes more hidden resistance to Czechoslovak rule. In January 1919 Slovakia had been finally occupied by the Czechoslovak Army, but especially the Hungarian Soviet Republic, proclaimed in March 1919, had kept hope alive among the Magyar and to some extent the German social democrats in Slovakia that the new state-political reality was not yet irreversible. The definitive end of the Hungarian Soviet Republic at the beginning of August 1919, however, radically changed the whole situation. Although certain Hungarian illusions about a change in the fate of Slovakia, or at least southern Slovakia with its large Magyar population (some 20 per cent of the total population of Slovakia, and a majority in the south), by a favourable decision of the Paris Peace Conference continued to be cultivated by various political groups, it now became clear – especially to the Hungarian Left – that political life in the new Czechoslovak State was preferable to the situation in post-Bolshevist Hungary, where Horthy's 'White Terror' ruled supreme. Indeed, Czechoslovakia became a major destination for socialist and communist political exiles from counter-revolutionary Hungary, people who also began to play a part in the left-wing politics of Slovakia and its Magyar minority. The Magyar social democrats understood that under the post-August 1919 conditions their best option was to begin participating in the political life of Czechoslovakia and also to prepare for the imminent Czechoslovak general election scheduled for the first half of 1920.

At the end of August 1919 something happened which may be seen as both of symbolic and substantial significance as far as the new attitude (whether strategic or principled) of the Magyar social democrats in Slovakia was concerned. For the first time in the long history of the socialist movement in Hungary and Slovakia, the Magyar social democrats in Bratislava (Pressburg), now the capital of Slovakia, decided to begin publishing a local newspaper of their own. Until that moment, and unlike Bratislava's German and Slovak social democrats with their local newspapers *Volksstimme* and *Robotnícke noviny*, the Magyar social democrats had apparently been contented with reading the central social democratic newspaper from Budapest, *Népszava*. This reflected the fundamental reality that the local Magyar social democrats identified quite uncritically with the

policies of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP) and its Budapest centre and had no desire to develop an independent voice of their own. HSDP policies were characterised by tacit support for the Hungarian policy of Magyarisation of the non-Magyar nationalities in pre-1918 Hungary, exerting control over the activities of the non-Magyar social democrats in order to prevent national 'separatism' and political and trade union fragmentation, and trying to keep the Nationality Committees of the non-Magyars (since 1904 recognised by the Party) as impotent as possible by promoting organisational centralism in the trade unions and imposing the Magyar language on the non-Magyar working class.[2] But now the new political reality in Central Europe forced the Magyar social democrats in Slovakia to really develop a profile and policies of their own and also begin thinking about their new situation as a minority element within the broader Slovak labour movement. The old multiethnic social democratic movement in Slovakia and Bratislava was no more. The Slovaks had joined with the Czechs and were now part of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party (CSSDP) founded in December 1918. The Magyars and the Germans (the second largest national minority in Slovakia with about 5 per cent of the total population, but the largest population group in Bratislava) were still working together in the German-Magyar Social Democratic Party of Slovakia, but even this form of binational cooperation began to show serious fissures as the Germans developed new national-autonomist ambitions and ideas about their future in Czechoslovakia that were somewhat different from those of the Magyars.

Thus it was that on 24 August 1919 the first issue of the new Magyar social democratic weekly newspaper in Slovakia was published, named *Népszava* just like the old Budapest paper but to all appearances independent of Budapest. The paper showed it was prepared to do some forward thinking, because it critically analysed the record of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the lessons the working-class movement should learn from it. At this point the more moderate social democrats were still in control of the paper and of the majority Magyar social democratic element within the German-Magyar party. The Bratislava *Népszava* also began to discuss the issue of cooperation and even a possible future unification with the CSSDP. This issue was seen as linked to the broader problem of national-minority policy in the Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) and particularly in Slovakia. The question was raised if the Magyars should strive for an early merger of the different national working-class parties or first address the special problems of the national minorities in the CSR. Related to this was also the demand for autonomy of Slovakia within the CSR, an objective loudly proclaimed by the Catholic nationalist Slovak People's Party (SPP) of Andrej Hlinka. It would seem that in contrast to the Slovak and the German social democrats, the Magyar social democrats and *Népszava* were willing to seriously consider supporting the idea of Slovak autonomy if this project was based on 'full democracy' as the crucial precondition to equal rights and autonomy for all nationalities in Slovakia. The prospect of a dominant role of the SPP in Slovakia was something that all social democrats viewed with abhorrence, but some Magyar social democrats seemed nevertheless prepared to support to some extent, and under certain 'democratic' conditions, the SPP's autonomist programme.[3] Cultural autonomy for the Magyars in Slovakia was

[2] DUIN, Pieter C. van *Central European Crossroads: Social Democracy and National Revolution in Bratislava (Pressburg), 1867 – 1921* (New York and Oxford, 2009), Chapter 4; POLÁČKOVÁ, Zuzana: *Za oponou slovensko-rakúskych vzťahov v 20. storočí (Behind the Courtain of Slovak-Austrian Relations in the Twentieth Century)*. Bratislava : VEDA, vydavateľstvo SAV, 2013, Chapter 3.

[3] HRONSKÝ, Marián: Robotnícke hnutie na Slovensku do roku 1918; ZELENÁK, Peter: Maďarská sociálna demokracia na Slovensku; ŠUCHOVÁ, Xénia: Ivan Dérer, sociálna demokracia na Slovensku a slovenská otázka. In: Sikora,

probably seen by them as having a better chance of being implemented in a meaningful way if it happened in an autonomous Slovakia instead of a centralised Czechoslovak State. Within an autonomous Slovakia the Magyars might have more leverage with the powers that be, and in addition the Magyars were used to conceiving of national-political matters in terms of Slovakia as a region of the former Historical Hungary, whereas Czechoslovak statehood was something alien to them. But their understanding of 'full democracy' was also related to the institution of administrative and cultural autonomy in relatively small, purely Magyar districts. In this regard their and the Germans' proposals (sometimes referring to the example of the Swiss cantons) were unacceptable to the SPP with its ambition to make Slovakia autonomous as one administrative unit.[4]

It is interesting to compare the emerging Magyar attitude to that of the German social democrats in Slovakia. The Germans were far less enthusiastic about the idea of Slovak autonomy, which they feared would mainly benefit the 'clericalist' and 'reactionary' SPP but not the national minorities.[5] Like the Magyars, the Germans demanded national rights, cultural autonomy, and self-government (perhaps territorial autonomy) for the minorities in their own regions. But they preferred to implement this on the basis of ethnically delimited administrative districts in the framework of the Czechoslovak State as a whole, not in the framework of an autonomous Slovakia. Although the German social democrats always kept a rather unfriendly attitude to the 'chauvinistic' CSSDP, they developed a state perspective oriented towards the CSR and close cooperation with the German social democrats of Bohemia-Moravia. This was less traditionalist than the 'Hungarian' or regional-Slovak perspective of the Magyar social democrats. However, what united Magyars and Germans was the demand for small autonomous ethnic districts within which they could build a form of cultural and administrative autonomy that would have a maximum national-political significance and protective efficacy. In this regard they were to be disappointed. Not only was the demand for territorial autonomy in whatever form consistently rejected by the Czechoslovak government, but likewise the demand for small 'mono-ethnic' administrative or electoral districts. In Slovakia seven large electoral districts were created for the elections for the Czechoslovak National Assembly, which to some extent had the effect of swamping or diluting the Magyar and German vote, even though in some regions the minorities managed to elect a reasonably fair number of their own ethnic representatives. Furthermore the administrative organisation of the new Slovakia was a very complex affair indeed, and was accompanied by several successive steps of reorganisation during the first eight years or so of building the Czechoslovak structures. During these years the level of administrative autonomy and self-government in minority regions and indeed in all regions of Slovakia remained limited, and municipal and local elections in Slovakia were held for the first time only in 1923. It was especially on the municipal and local district level that the Magyar minority could hope to implement its aspiration of cultural as well as a degree of administrative autonomy. On the other hand it should be stressed that almost from the start in 1919 the national minorities had the right to form their own political parties and enjoy cultural autonomy in the field of education, the press, and other cultural and political activities.

Stanislav – HOTÁR, Viliam S. – LALUHA, Ivan and ZALA, Boris (eds.): *Kapitoly z dejín sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku* (Bratislava 1996), pp. 146-91, here pp. 168, 188 n. 63.

4 KOVÁČ, Dušan: Slovenskí Nemci, česko-slovenské vzťahy a česko-slovenský štát. In: *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka* (2002), pp. 127-36, here p. 132.

5 JAHN, Egbert K.: *Die Deutschen in der Slowakei in den Jahren 1918-1929. Ein Beitrag zur Nationalitätenproblematik* (Munich, 1971), p. 117.

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The question of cooperation between the different national elements of the labour movement was extremely complicated as well, especially in the years 1919 – 1920 with which this paper is mainly concerned. This question is important because it throws light on the ideas and attitudes that the Magyar social democrats and others had with regard to the key problems of national-minority status, interethnic coexistence, and the general relationship (including the demand of 'equality') between the different national groups. It also shows that what the Magyars and the Germans were demanding in this field was very similar to what the Slovaks had been demanding before 1914. On 14 March 1920 an extraordinary Magyar-German trade union congress was held in the Slovak city of Žilina where some representatives of the Czechoslovak and Bohemian-German social democratic labour organisations were present as well. One section of the delegates present, especially pro-communists from the Magyar and German organisations in East Slovakia, argued for immediate unification with the Czechoslovak labour movement, within which they hoped to find a broader field for communist propaganda. But the more practical-minded and moderate leaders of the German-Magyar labour movement in Bratislava and West Slovakia used the opportunity to present a number of concrete conditions that would have to be fulfilled if the trade union organisations of the national minorities in Slovakia were to unite with the Czechoslovak trade unions. It was demanded that in any future joint organisations under the umbrella of the Czechoslovak trade union federation (OSČ) the Magyar and German workers could keep control over their own membership fees; that national-minority workers be represented on the secretariats of the regional trade union councils of the OSČ; that their language rights be guaranteed and that Magyar- and German-language trade union journals be published by the OSČ in addition to Czech and Slovak ones; and that special committees dealing with the specific national-cultural problems of the Magyar and German workers be established.[6] It is remarkable how similar were these conditions to the demands made by the Slovak social democrats at the time of their cultural-autonomist struggles within the organisations of the HSDP and the Hungarian Trade Union Council (HTUC) before and during the First World War. There was obviously a basic pattern of ethnolinguistic demands and aspirations generally emerging in the context of multinational Central Europe's national-cultural conflicts. This happened in the region's societies as a whole as well as in the regional labour movements. This pattern could be defined as the 'quest for national-cultural recognition, autonomy, and equality.'

To illustrate this we shall return for a moment to the situation in multinational pre-1918 Hungary and the struggle of the Slovak social democrats and Slovak trade unionists for national-cultural recognition. The Slovaks in the HSDP had tried for years to get support from the Party leadership for their ambition to start a Slovak-language social democratic newspaper. On several occasions when the Slovaks were asking for financial and political support promises were made by the HSDP to do so, but in practice no such support was forthcoming. When the Slovaks finally managed to launch their own newspaper in 1904 this could happen thanks to Czech support, and in the same year they formed their special Nationality Committee to cater for Slovak-language propaganda and organisational needs. The HSDP tolerated the Slovak Committee and the Slovak paper but hardly gave active support, probably speculating that the matter would remain of marginal importance and that in the longer or even the short term the process of Magyarisation of the Slovak working class

[6] ZELENÁK, Peter: Maďarská sociálna demokracia na Slovensku, pp. 174-77, 190 n. 96 and n. 100.

would unstoppably take its course. There were Magyar social democrats who openly argued that the publication of Slovak journals was useless because after 'five years' or so no one would read them any more.[7] But the Slovaks continued to agitate for a degree of cultural recognition, more cultural autonomy within the framework of the Hungarian labour movement, and support by the HSDP for their Slovak-language needs and activities. An attempt by the Slovaks in 1905 to create their own independent social democratic party failed because they could not get hold of the membership fees of the Slovak trade union and party members, which were firmly controlled by the centralised trade union offices, the unofficial 'free organisations', and the party apparatus in Budapest. They would have to stay in the HSDP and the HTUC framework and to continue the struggle for widening the Slovak trade unionists' national-cultural space in the interethnic organisations. As a result of non-Magyar pressure the HSDP Congress in 1908 – party congresses were dominated by trade unionists and also discussed trade union matters – agreed to slightly enlarge the competencies of the Slovak, German, and other Nationality Committees and the scope for satisfying linguistic needs in the trade unions. The Congress decided that in 'mixed-language areas' (like Slovakia) some party and trade union organisations were allowed to form separate language groups within the same organisation for certain purposes; membership fees of national-minority (non-Magyar) workers could be written in the unions' membership books in their own language, a detail of considerable symbolic significance in the context of Central Europe's ethnolingual struggles; half of the minority workers' membership fees could be automatically set apart for the work of the Nationality Committees; and delegates of the Committees could attend meetings of the HSDP Executive Committee in Budapest, where they had the 'right of advice' on nationality issues. The question is how much of this was actually carried into effect in the day-to-day life of different labour organisations. The degree of autonomy of non-Magyar workers in the trade unions remained very limited, and the political framework of the Hungarian labour movement was hardly changed given the limited competencies and political leverage of the Slovak Committee. The power structure of the Hungarian labour movement was shaped by the (relative) Magyar majority and by the fact that the political and administrative language in the multiethnic trade unions and party organisations remained in most cases almost exclusively Magyar, while only trade unionists who knew Magyar were delegated to trade union and party congresses.[8]

After 1908 the HSDP became more unwilling again to make meaningful concessions to Slovak cultural demands. The Slovak social democrats would have liked to create their own trade union organisation as the Czechs were doing around 1910, but they were too weak to carry this into effect, even the demand of an autonomous Slovak secretariat in the HTUC. In October 1910 the Slovaks nevertheless made some further demands aimed at improving their position in the Hungarian trade unions. These included the establishment of Slovak sections in the Hungarian trade unions; a policy of providing them with Slovak or Czech social democratic literature; adequate Slovak representation in the trade union councils, sick funds, and other institutions of the labour movement; obligatory knowledge of the Slovak language on the part of trade union officials dealing with Slovak workers; and publication of trade union journals also in Slovak. In 1911, after long negotiations, the HSDP Executive Committee and the HTUC promised to give more financial assistance to help strengthen Slovak trade unionism, to support the renewed publication of Slovak trade union journals (espe-

[7] HANÁK, Jozef: *Slováci v Prešporku 1825 – 1918* (Bratislava 2005), p. 110.
[8] DUIN, Pieter C. van: *Central European Crossroads*, pp. 133–41.

cially among the building and leather workers), and indeed to encourage Slovak trade unionists to take out subscriptions to *Robotnícke noviny*.[9] But there is little evidence that even these meagre promises and 'national-cultural concessions' were taken very seriously by the Magyar leadership of the multinational Hungarian labour movement, or that the party leadership changed its earlier attitude of making promises on paper and not acting afterwards. What is interesting, however, is that the demands made by the Slovaks in 1910 and on earlier occasions, were very similar to what the Magyar and German trade unionists in Slovakia were asking for in 1920. It always boiled down to trying to create more space for ethnolinguistic and national-cultural autonomy, cultural recognition, and defence of national identity, and to looking for a degree of national equality (as far as possible in a situation of factual national inequality) or at least a consolidation or marginal strengthening of the cultural life of the non-dominant national community. In the specific context of a multinational labour movement this quest for multiethnic coexistence in one form or another was as significant as in society as a whole, the former in fact an indication of the latter.

However, as late as 1918 the Slovaks had not yet achieved anything substantial as far as their struggle for cultural recognition and national equality in multinational Hungary and the Hungarian labour movement was concerned. A leading Slovak social democrat warned the 'Magyar comrades' in January 1918 that the Slovaks had lost patience with their 'fanatical chauvinism', against which they would fight 'fanatically' themselves. But the Slovak social democrats continued to make practical demands as well. In February 1918 *Robotnícke noviny* demanded greater Slovak representation at HSDP congresses and party organs, a higher status for the Slovak language in the multinational labour movement, more competencies for the Slovak Nationality Committee, and greater Slovak influence on how Slovak party and trade union fees were used.[10] Not long after, the Slovaks ceased having any more illusions about the HSDP and the national attitude of the Magyar social democrats. After the national revolution of 1918-1919 the tables were turned in Slovakia, and the Magyars in the territory now became a national 'minority' politically dominated by the Slovaks and the Czechs. The Magyar social democrats began to discover what the Slovaks had been concerned with already ten, fifteen or twenty years ago. The difference with old Hungary was that Czechoslovakia was on its way to becoming a democratic state, even if it was also a state marked by an ethnocratic dimension of Czechoslovak 'rule' and national-minority 'subordination'.

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The change in interethnic power structure as a result of the national revolution deeply complicated the relations between the different social democratic parties and their negotiations about cooperation in the elections for the Czechoslovak National Assembly in April 1920. After several rounds of negotiations it proved impossible to come to an agreement on a common election programme and a joint political leadership of the Magyar-German and Czechoslovak social democratic movements in Slovakia. Perhaps most significant in practical but also in symbolic and nationalist terms was the two sides' inability to overcome their differences on the crucial issue of joint lists of candidates. The German and Magyar social democrats wanted unified lists in all seven (indeed rather large) electoral districts of Slovakia. The CSSDP wanted joint lists only in the districts of

[9] Ibid., p. 141.
[10] Ibid., pp. 149-50.

Nové Zámky in south-west Slovakia and Košice in south-east Slovakia, the two regions where the Magyar minority was concentrated. The party was afraid that in the other districts, with their overwhelmingly Slovak population, cooperation with the national-minority social democrats would expose it to Slovak nationalist attacks and reduce its popularity. It even demanded that in the Nové Zámky and Košice districts the joined lists should be led by Slovak candidates, while it offered only four National Assembly mandates to the Magyars and the Germans if common lists were agreed upon. This reticent and rather opportunistic attitude of the Slovak CSSDP, which wanted to play the role of a party loyal to the Czechoslovak Republic and share in the spoils of power, put off the Magyars and Germans. But the Magyar and German social democrats themselves were hardly less nationalistic and realised as well as the Slovaks did that defending the national-cultural interests of their ethnic communities was an important factor in attracting votes in addition to the attractions of the socialist programme.[11] The two 'binational camps' entered the election campaign as separate parties and what there was in terms of electoral cooperation remained of marginal significance. The crux of the matter was that the dominant national side did not want to deal with the minority side on the basis of (even symbolic) equality, because even in socialist circles national identity and differential national status mattered and had consequences for the distribution of political power. In the background there was always the spectre of national antagonism and mutual suspicion with its deep historical roots. All that had changed were relative positions of power and status in particular regions, including Slovakia.

Since the Magyar social democrats in Slovakia had come to understand that they were now representatives of a working-class national minority, their sensitivity to the implications of the 'national question' had markedly increased. This was the case all across the region of southern Slovakia with its predominantly Magyar population. A Magyar social democratic newspaper in the city of Komárno argued in March 1920 that national-minority rights and cultural autonomy had to be ensured by the principle of democratic self-government at the local level. Changes were proposed in the territorial-administrative structure of the CSR by creating single-language districts, something that the Bohemian Germans were advocating too.[12] The Bratislava *Népszava* had already come up with suggestions like this since it was launched in August 1919, and in December 1920 the Magyar social democrats presented a more consistent programme on the issue (see below). But the way the electoral districts had been formed and the consequences for Magyar political representation on the national level showed that the Czechoslovak government was keen to reduce as much as possible the influence of the Magyar and German vote and of course the minorities' political leverage on the local level as well. In April 1920 the Magyar and German social democrats won 35.7 per cent of the vote and four mandates in the Nové Zámky electoral district (in the Košice district only two mandates), but in the Nové Zámky district 32,714 votes were needed for one mandate whereas in the Prague electoral district only 21,986 votes were needed.[13] Outside the areas of concentrated Magyar settlement the Magyar vote could be swamped or diluted to some extent by the Czechoslovak parties (all political parties were ethnic parties), and the institution of representative municipal self-government was postponed until the moment local elections were held in Slovakia (only in 1923). Although on the purely cultural level, i.e. in the schools, cultural activities, and the linguistic side of local administration, cultural autonomy was ensured by law with all districts containing at least

[11] ZELENÁK, Peter: Maďarská sociálna demokracia na Slovensku, pp. 171-73, 177-78, 189 n.80.
[12] Ibid., pp. 177-78.
[13] DUIN, Pieter C. van: *Central European Crossroads*, pp. 368-9.

20 per cent of Magyar-speakers having the right to use the Magyar language in schools and public offices, the local political situation remained uncertain as far as political-administrative arrangements and the structure of local political power was concerned. It was therefore imperative for the Magyar political parties, including the social democrats and the communists, to develop ideas and proposals regarding the management of national-minority affairs and national-cultural problems.

In July 1920 *Népszava* was taken over by the communists as the split between social democrats and communists reached its climax and the majority of Magyar organised workers in Slovakia went over to the communist side. The month before, a Magyar-German pro-communist labour conference in Košice had called for interethnic unity but also for the building of separate 'national committees' within the communist movement in order 'to extend the socialist culture of each nationality in its own mother tongue.' It was clear that even the communists, with their theoretical 'internationalist' claims, were forced in practice to accommodate the harsh realities of linguistic and national barriers in order to make their version of the labour movement workable. This was also shown by the decisions of the historic communist conference in Ľubochňa in January 1921, which prepared the final formation of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia on the territory of Slovakia. The conference decided to create 'national sections' within the communist movement that would have to deal with specific national issues and the national-cultural needs of the different national groups of organised workers.[14] As far as solutions for national and national-minority problems in the wider society and the administration in Slovakia were concerned, the communists had not much to contribute beyond rhetoric, however. Unlike the communists, the social democrats did not seem to believe any longer that all national problems would more or less automatically disappear with the coming of socialism and that therefore it was hardly necessary to address them in the present situation. On the contrary it was necessary to work for the solution of such problems already under capitalism, if only to prevent them from distracting attention from the struggle for socialism. But beyond that it now was also understood that interethnic, linguistic, and national-cultural issues were an important part of social and political reality itself, and directly impinging on the lives of working-class people too. The Magyar social democrats felt the need to make a contribution to addressing the issue.

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On a 'fundamentalist' national-political level the Magyar and German social democrats could only repeat what they had said so often during the past eighteen months: that the right to self-determination of the Magyar and German population of Slovakia had been violated by their forcible incorporation in the Czechoslovak State and by the refusal to grant them a plebiscite to express their political will. This is what one of their leaders, Paul Wittich, said in June 1920 in one of his first speeches in the National Assembly in Prague, but Wittich was also a practical politician who refused to join the communists. On a pragmatic and strategic political level, indeed, it was necessary for the Magyar and German social democrats to make concrete proposals on how to satisfy the needs of the national minorities in the new situation that was likely to remain as it was for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately their influence was reduced by the growth of communism. At the end of 1920 both the Magyar and the German (and even the Slovak) social democrats had become minority groups within the broader labour movement after the majority of their leaders

[14] Ibid., pp. 371, 374.

and supporters joined the communists. In December 1920 the Magyars decided to establish a new Magyar Social Democratic Party in Slovakia independent of their German comrades, who were increasingly developing a more overt German orientation in conjunction with the German social democrats of Bohemia-Moravia. The small party of Magyar social democrats now stood alone but may have found some new strength in facing the challenge of thinking about practical solutions for the problems of interethnic coexistence, cultural autonomy, and national equality, issues that the communists preferred to ignore. A new party programme of the Magyar social democrats advocated national autonomy in the field of culture and education and the formation of single-language districts and local Magyar administrative councils. The Czechoslovak National Assembly should only deal with those questions that did not fall under the competence of these local councils. The programme built on propositions already suggested in 1919, but tried to be more clear, convincing, and comprehensive. It was one of the first programmes in the milieu of the Magyar population in Slovakia to have the ambition seriously to address national-minority and the related political-administrative problems. Its perspective was similar to that of the Bohemian Germans, but the Magyar social democrats also understood that their situation was not the same as that of the Germans in all respects and required some thinking of their own. But although their problematic was situated in the perhaps unique conditions of Slovakia, they also based their suggestions on older ideas of the classical 'Austro-Marxist' thinkers Otto Bauer and Karl Renner formulated shortly before 1900 and in a more systematic form not long thereafter.[15] The Austro-Marxist programme of cultural autonomy and national federalism had always been rejected by the HSDP as not fitting Hungarian conditions.[16] Now, in their new situation of representing a working-class national minority, the Magyar social democrats at last adopted it.

But did they really? In a sense they did, because the aim of cultural and local administrative autonomy was more or less what the Austro-Marxists had already proposed some twenty years before. But there was a snag, because there was a suggestion in the Magyar programme that what they really wanted was territorial autonomy in their own districts, a demand that was also made by the Bohemian Germans and that was rejected by the Czechoslovak government and by all Czechoslovak political parties including the CSSDP. The notions of 'single-language districts' and 'local Magyar administrative councils' smacked of ethnic separatism and territorial autonomy, at least in the eyes of Czechoslovak representatives. Bauer and Renner had wanted to preserve the multinational state in a democratic-federalist reconstituted form. The Hungarians and the HSDP had wanted to turn multinational Hungary into a greater Magyar national state. The Slovak social democrats had demanded before 1914 that the Hungarians follow the example of the Austrians. And what were the Magyars in Slovakia doing by 1920-1921? Perhaps some of them had become belated followers of Bauer; perhaps others had different things in mind. At a Congress of the Slovak social democrats in April 1914 their leader Emanuel Lehocký gave a speech on the national question and argued for the equality of all the nations of Hungary. He defined their struggle as one for democracy, national equality, and cultural autonomy, which implied according an official status to the Slovak language in Slovakia. He advocated a national-federalist reorganisation of the HSDP and of the entire Habsburg Monarchy and was clearly influenced by the ideas of Bauer and Renner. The Congress demanded the right to use the Slovak language in public life and in local administration in Slovak ar-

[15] ZELENÁK, Peter: Maďarská sociálna demokracia na Slovensku, p. 182.
[16] DUIN, Pieter C. van: *Central European Crossroads*, Chapter 4.

eas.[17] What the Magyar social democrats proposed in 1920 was about the same as what the Slovaks had wanted already years ago in different but comparable historical circumstances. The only question left was if the Magyars were sincere this time, or if they used the old autonomist programme to further new ends. The nightmare of the Slovaks was that this time they had to defend the integrity of Slovakia and Czechoslovakia against Hungarian irredentism. It was this kind of suspicion that made it difficult for them to take the Magyar programme seriously, even if the Magyar social democrats were in fact sincere and realistic. Perhaps the Magyar social democratic programme was one factor among many inducing the Czechoslovak government to postpone local elections and the institution of local administrative autonomy in Slovakia. This was just another expression of the tragedy of multinational Central Europe.

[17] GOSIOROVSKÝ, Miloš: *Dejiny slovenského robotníckeho hnutia (1848-1918)* (Bratislava, 1958), pp. 219-25.