

## **The situation of ethnic Magyars in Czechoslovakia, and later Slovakia**

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### **I. The Magyars of Slovakia 1920-1945**

According to the terms of the peace treaty signed in the Petit Trianon palace of Versailles on June 4, 1920, the territories annexed to Czechoslovakia comprised the former Northern Highlands of Hungary (today a part of Slovakia) and Sub-Carpathia (today a part of Ukraine). According to the census of 1910, the Northern Highlands had a Magyar population of 893,586 (30.55% of the total population), while Sub-Carpathia had 176,294 Magyars (29.6% of the total population). Thus, with a stroke of the pen, more than 1,000,000 Magyars were transferred to the north of the new northern boundary of a diminished Hungary. (The approximately 2,000,000 Slovaks made up 58% of the population, with the remainder made up of Rusyns, Germans and Poles.)

With the signing of the treaty of Saint Germaine in 1919, Czechoslovakia accepted to guarantee the individual and collective rights of the Magyars living on its territory. Under its terms, Sub-Carpathia was to receive wide-ranging autonomy and the Germans, who formed approx. 25% of the country's population, were to be assured a special status.

Although the first Czechoslovak constitution of 1920 stated that "all citizens are equal before the law, and enjoy the same civil and political rights irrespective of race, language or religion ... ethnic affiliation can not represent a handicap when filling public administrative posts," the reality was that the Magyars of the Highlands were discriminated against -- from the first moment -- by laws and regulations that were designed to 'urge' the resettlement of as many as possible to Hungary. Already by the end of 1920, 101,782 persons made their escape.<sup>1</sup> Systematic ethnic cleansing can also be achieved by making the situation untenable.

### **Language law, restricted use of language, taxation**

The use of an officially recognized language was first enshrined in bill 122 of 1920, which ensured the use of the mother tongue to those minorities

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<sup>1</sup> Popély, Gyula: *Ellenzélben. A felvidéki magyar kisebbség első évei a Csehszlovák Köztársaságban (1918-1925)* [In a headwind. The early years of the Magyar minority of the Highlands in the Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1925)]. Kalligram Press, Bratislava (Pozsony), 1995, p. 147.

whose numbers reached 20% in a given district. Furthermore, it stated that in districts composed of at least a 20% minority, government offices, courts and official announcements of the authorities had to be also published in the languages of the minorities, and offices had to have bilingual signs posted. (In plain language though, the language law quota was aimed not at the level of a city or town but at the district level where Magyar populated settlements could often not reach the quota in a Slovak populated district.) While Czechoslovakia was bound by international treaty to ease the interaction of its non-Czech citizens, so that they can communicate -- using their mother tongue -- with national bodies, offices and officialdom, Czechoslovakia tied this usage to the relatively high proportion of 20% of the population.

There existed in Czechoslovakia a few persons who were critical of the political aim behind these laws. One was Emanuel Radl, a professor at the University of Prague, who, in his study of the question, said that "the language law is not an attempt at a just settlement of the minority question, rather it is a weapon in the fight against the Germans and the Magyars."<sup>2</sup> Local authorities further sabotaged the law by special decrees.

Jozef Bellay, župan [appointed head of a county/district-*ed.*] of Trenčín (Trencsén) County urged all the reeves, mayors, police chiefs, gendarme and toll stations in his county to take the sternest possible measures against those who dare to speak Hungarian in public places and "...defend the prestige of our state against the blatant offensiveness of said persons ... After all, we live in Slovakia and a nation lives in its language," justified the county chief his action.

In the Revúca (Nagyróce) district of Gemer (Gömör) County, reeve Sousedik was a standard bearer in the battle against the Hungarian language. In one of his decrees of 1922, he forbids the singing of Magyar songs: "Under the terms of this decree, the singing of Magyar songs is henceforth forbidden, under the greatest possible punishment, in every pub and public place, on the streets and outings."

Igor Thurzo, municipal judge in Turčiansky svätý Martin (Túrócszentmárton), published a decree on July 31, 1922, in which we can read that "it is unnatural and astonishing that a portion of the population of our village still, in 1922, continues to talk in Hungarian, thus provoking our peaceful citizens."<sup>3</sup> Even into the 1970s, anyone was entitled to warn Magyars, whether on the train, the bus or on the street that "since you eat Slovak bread," speak Slovak.

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<sup>2</sup> Popély, Gyula: *A csehszlovákiai magyarság a népszámlálások tükrében 1918-1945* [Czechoslovak Magyars reflected in the censuses 1918-1945]. Regio Könyvek, Budapest, 1991, p. 44; In part from a speech by Gyula Popély, given at the 22<sup>nd</sup> Literature and Culture Days of Košice (Kassa) on October 25, 1992.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Denial of citizenship**

Bill 236 of 1920 restricted the granting of Czechoslovak citizenship to persons who obtained the official document at their place of residence -- before January 1, 1910. Those not in possession of such a document were enumerated in the category of 'foreigners' of uncertain citizenship (in opposition to the treaty signed in 1919 on the international rights of minorities). Ministerial decree 41/1920 enabled the police chiefs of towns to evict them at any time.

## **Election, manipulation of electoral districts (gerrymandering)**

The aim of redrawing the boundaries of counties, districts or administrative units of the successor state was to prevent the numbers of the Magyar minority from reaching the threshold specified in the language law and hence not have to grant official use of a mother tongue. The districts were redrawn in such a manner to produce as few districts where the proportion of the minority population reached the ratio necessary to apply the language law.

Since the Magyars formed a solid block of population about 50 km. deep along the Slovak-Hungarian border, long and narrow districts were created that ran north to south. This put the local Magyars into a disadvantageous situation as early as 1920 in the Bratislava (Pozsony), Košice (Kassa), Rimavská Sobota (Rimaszombat), Nitriansky (Nyitra) and Sečovce (Gálszécs) districts: lacking the required 20% minority standing, the Ministry of Justice [how droll-*ed.*] forbade the use of the Hungarian language. It was only in the case of the Rimavská Sobota (Rimaszombat) district that the superior court held the decree unlawful; but it brought no relief because the next census (1930) showed a proportion lower than the previous count.

In 1922, 35 Slovak and Sub-Carpathian towns were downgraded to villages, reducing the influence of the Magyar population in the affected areas, weakening the town population's identity defending, culture relaying forms by withholding their autonomous organizations.

Although voting was universal, individual and secret, on top of the requirement of Czechoslovak citizenship, the electoral districts were drawn up so that to gain a seat in a Slovak populated riding about 19,753 votes were required (in 1920), while in Magyar populated areas, the number of votes required to win a seat was about 27,697 (about 8,000, or 40%, more). In the case of senate seats, the situation was similar: it took about 73,949 votes to elect a senator from Prague, 105,504 for one from Nové Zámky (Érsekújvár), and 143,007 for one from Sub-Carpathia. The situation was somewhat better in the Czech ridings. Further discrimination was evidenced by the requirement

of 100 signatures for nomination in the Czech districts, while 1,000 were necessary from Slovak districts.

### **Manipulated census<sup>4</sup>**

The last credible census held in the Carpathian Basin -- one accepted by the international community -- was in 1910. Due to a policy in the successor countries of threats and intimidation, and various statistical manipulations, we have no recent reliable data regarding the numbers of Magyars living outside the borders of Hungary.

While the language law, handled as a constitutional article, spoke only of linguistic minorities and specified 20% as the minimum for the use of one's mother tongue, the government decree for the carrying out of the census law specified that nationality must be enumerated. During the 1921 census, the question of nationality was left to each responder but reserved the right for the electoral officials and political authorities to modify the data -- ensuring opportunities for abuses. (In some places, Magyars made declarations before a justice of the peace regarding the wrongs done to them.) Jews were enumerated separately from Magyars and, as noted before, those with 'uncertain citizenship' were denoted as foreigners. (In the end, this count showed 245,000 fewer Magyars than the 1910 census.)

During the 1930 census, the election scrutinizers -- in spite of previous instructions to the contrary -- turned out to be extremely resourceful when recording 'nationality.' (As a result of this census, the stock of Magyars diminished by 76,000.)

### **Restrained regional industrial development**

Slovakian factory closures were carried out on a large scale. Between 1919 and 1926, mining and refining production fell by 25.7%, metallurgy by 29.2% and construction by 2%.<sup>5</sup>

Between the two wars, it was primarily the Czech industrial sector that developed. The Prague government enacted unfavorable tax and custom policies towards Slovakia. The Magyar populated southern Slovakian districts became the most struggling straggler area. Of the 1970 to 1975 national budgets, the amounts spent here on investment and development were 71% to 75% less, per person, than in other parts of Slovakia.

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<sup>4</sup> Popély: *Ellenszélben...*, op. cit.; Popély: *A csehszlovákiai ...* op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Duray, Miklós: *Kettős elnyomásban* [Doubly oppressed]. Madách-Posonium, Pozsony, 1993, p. 101.

Where new industrial centers were developed, e.g. - Košice (Kassa), Slovak technicians were employed and the city's ethnic makeup and numbers were thus altered by their resettlement.

### **Taxation policies**

The income tax rate in Slovakia and Sub-Carpathia was 10% while, at the same time, in the Czech areas it was 4%; Slovakia contributed 15% of the collected Czechoslovak taxes but only received 6% in the budgetary distribution.

### **Discriminative banking policies**

After Trianon, 61.1% of Hungary's credit institutions found themselves in a neighboring country. In 1921, the assets of the Slovak banks exceed that of Hungarian banks.

As a result of subsequent bank regulations drafted by Prague, the number of formerly-Hungarian banks and financial institutions fell by 75%. (By the end of the '30s, of 30 Hungarian banks only 7 remained.)

### **Land reform through resettlement and emigration**

Of the Magyar populated and owned lands, approximately 35% was confiscated. The Slovak Settlement Co-operative was hoping to see a significant regional growth by the Slav elements as a result of land reforms and targeted settlement actions. The Magyar laborers and poor farmers received land allocations far below their proportional numbers.

Of 94 new Slovak settlements, 64 were sited in Magyar areas, and 77% of all Slovak or Czech settlements were located in Magyar populated areas to break up the closed block of Magyar settlement. It was not by accident that the biggest Czech and Slovak settlements were built in the purely Magyar populated areas of Žitný ostrov (Csallóköz) [southwest corner of Slovakia, north of the Danube-*ed.*] and the Tisza Ridge region (Tiszahát) [the part of Bereg County between the river Tisza and the Ukraine-*ed.*].

The increasingly well-to-do new settlements were cheek-by-jowl with dirt-poor Magyar villages.<sup>6</sup> Those left without land either gravitated toward the Czech parts in an attempt to find work, or they emigrated.

### **Closing of schools, alienated educators, reduction of the number of minority intellectuals**

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<sup>6</sup> Popély: *Ellenzélben...* op. cit., p. 164.

Every Hungarian-language school was closed in areas where Slovaks were in the majority. As a result of the teachers being let go and/or evicted, the number of Magyar educators fell from 2,182 (1921) to 1,521 (1930).

The Hungarian-language school network continued to shrink even in areas where Magyars represented the majority. (In the 1920/21 school year, of the 120,000 school age Magyar children, 90,000 attended 720 Hungarian-language schools. By the 1926/27 school year, this number dropped to 66,260 students.) Hungarian-language schools received lower government subsidies and support, while Magyar parents were courted with various inducements to send their children to the newly instituted Slovak schools.

The number of Magyar university students varied between 900 and 1,000. At the same time, in 1938, Czechoslovakia officially had 30,564 students in post-secondary institutions. Thus, the proportion did not even come close to the officially admitted ratio of Magyars making up 5.5% of the population.<sup>7</sup>

### **The situation of churches without independence**

It must be fairly obvious that one of the repositories of the language and traditions of an ethnic or linguistic minority is its church infrastructure. This role, however, presupposes that the language of the liturgy is in the mother tongue of the minority and that the priests and ministers come from the minority community. The religious ministers can become the (last) refuge of an intelligentsia who retain a sense of ethnic identity when that view is eliminated from the workplace, schools and intellectual life.

In the civil, democratic state of Czechoslovakia, only the Reformed Protestant Church enjoyed autonomy. During this period, a sole university-like Magyar institution was founded, the Reformed Church's School of Theology in Lučenec (Losonc), which sent forth Protestant ministers from 1925 onwards.

### **Discrimination in Sub-Carpathia**

Sub-Carpathia's autonomy was announced on September 10, 1919 with the signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye, later also guaranteed by the League of Nations on November 20, 1920. In actual fact, nothing came of it as Sub-Carpathia became one of the provinces of the Czechoslovak Republic, known as Podkarpatska Rus, with Užhorod (Ungvár) as its provincial capital.

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<sup>7</sup> Vigh, Károly: *A szlovákiai magyarság sorsa* [The fate of the Magyars of Slovakia.]. Népek Hazája sorozat, p. 83.

## **Denial of citizenship, replacement of public employees**

Following the instructions of the Károlyi government in Budapest, a great number of Magyar officials and public employees refused to take the oath of allegiance to the occupiers before the signing of the treaty; many not even after. They thus lost their jobs and whoever was not born in Sub-Carpathia was expelled from the territory. (Antal Papp, Greek-rite Orthodox bishop of Mukačevo (Munkács) was expelled to Hungary in 1925.)

The administrative replacements in offices and the courts were primarily Czech citizens. In their fear, many Magyars declared themselves either as Rusyn or Slovak.

The only Hungarian-language high school operated in Berehovo (Beregszász), even though its principals were Czechs. Every Magyar village was able to keep an elementary school open, either government or church run.

## **Land reform through population of the border zone**

Land reform followed careful political objectives: Land was not to be given to an original Magyar settler anywhere near the Trianon border, rather, Rusyns were brought in from the mountains. It seems obvious that the aim was to change the minority numbers to the detriment of the solid block of Magyars living along the border.

## **The situation of the churches**

It was thanks to the united effort of the Magyar priests of the various churches that it became possible to elect Jenő (Eugene) Ortutay, head dean of Greek Catholic diocese, as mayor of Berehovo (Beregszász). At the turn of the century, the search for identity, not uninfluenced by the growing Pan-Slav movement from Russia and its Ukrainian and Russian orientation, led many to leave the Greek Catholic Church and convert to the Greek Orthodox Church. The Czech authorities encouraged this schismatic movement since, from the day of its birth, it had an openly anti-Magyar slant. The hostility led to the sacking of Greek Catholic churches and other atrocities. The 'Greater Russian' direction grew with the activities of Orthodox priests who fled here from Bolshevik Russia. They were opposed by the 'Little Russian' Greek Catholic Ukrainians from Halichina (Galicia) [western Ukraine-*ed.*]. A search for identity lay behind the Rusyns' debates on language and creed; in reality, the majority wished again to be a part of Hungary.

## **II. The period of no rights for the minorities of Czechoslovakia 1945-1948**

The war was over, the Magyars were again on the losing side and the world took terrible revenge. The Paris peace treaties reinstated the Trianon borders, in fact, annexed a further three, purely Magyar populated, settlements (Oroszvár, Dunacsúny, Horvát-Járfalu) to Czechoslovakia. The victors completely overlooked the eager service Slovakia rendered to Hitler's Germany. It is typical of the Tiso government's over eager policy that the deportation of the Jews -- in opposition to Hungary's delaying tactics -- was completed in eminent fashion before the German occupation. All that made no difference. Magyars remained a thorn in the eyes of the Great Powers, which brought further terrible ordeals to a shattered nation.<sup>8</sup>

In March of 1945, the émigrés of London and Moscow jointly hammered out the program of the returning Czechoslovak government, later sanctioned by Benes, then head of the émigré Czech government in London.

### **Ethnic cleansing**

In the evening of June 18, 1945, Slovak soldiers massacred 270 people in the train station of Přerov, mostly Germans from Dobsina. Men, women and children were stripped to their underwear, their documents collected and burned, then forced to dig their own grave. The children, separated from their parents, were on their knees -- begging their executioners for mercy for their families. Once the soldiers were finished with the adults, it was the children's turn. After midnight, on June 19, the local villagers crept out and saw that the soil was still moving in some places. A few days later, they spread quicklime on the mass grave, and then added more soil on top.<sup>9</sup>

### **Denial of citizenship, substitution of public employees**

After the Red Army entered the Highlands and occupied Kassa, the Czech politicians gathered around Benes announced the 'Košice government program' on April 5, 1945. Its primary aim was remove all the German and Magyar nationals from the newly reconstituted Czechoslovakia on the principle of collective guilt. The desired end -- in their mind -- justified the use of every means. In this spirit, 89 such decrees were passed between 1945 and 1948 which exclusively served this goal. (It is a shame on the entire world that, of those 89, all but one are still in effect!) Government regulations directed their firing from their jobs, an end to their pensions and social assistance, the exclusion of Magyars from schools and universities, the move from local elected governments to national committees, ejected from political parties, as well as rescinding their right to vote; Magyar schools were closed, publishing and importation of Hungarian-language books and periodicals was forbidden, as was the use of Hungarian in public offices; Magyars were

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<sup>8</sup> [www.szelepcsényi.hu](http://www.szelepcsényi.hu) Home page of Sándor (Alexander) Szelepcsényi.

<sup>9</sup> [www.weblo.com/.../Dobsina/...a.../1](http://www.weblo.com/.../Dobsina/...a.../1)

forbidden to own radios, could not initiate civilian inquiries, were ineligible for war assistance, they could be evicted at any time from their houses and homes without compensation, and could be collected for forced community labor at any time.<sup>10</sup>

Members of the Magyar and German minorities were stripped of every citizenship right, their goods and chattels open to confiscation. Their ejection had begun, rather their expulsion; in many places, their physical destruction through the removal of the necessities of life. Nationwide, a system of tickets was introduced for food and other products -- but the tickets were denied for them. They were hauled up in front of People's Courts, interned and sentenced to years of hard labor. If they had any commercial businesses, they were handed into the care of a Czech or Slovak executor, who exercised complete control. In this way, and countless others, they enjoyed their thirst for vengeance. These decrees sealed the fate of 3,500,000 Germans and 800,000 Magyars.

It was in the spirit of the 'Košice government program' that the Slovak National Council passed law 44/1945 on May 25, 1945, under the terms of which ethnic Magyars were to be let go immediately from their civil service and public administration jobs, and public service pensions were to be stopped after May 31. As for the justification: Magyar national.<sup>11</sup>

The presidential decree 33/1945, of August 2, 1945, made the Czechoslovakian Magyar and German minorities into stateless persons. (Jews were already stripped of their citizenship in 1942 by the terms of law 68, at the same time ordering their expulsion.) Being stripped of their citizenship meant that they could not belong to any recognized political party, could not participate in elections, and lost their pensions and their government jobs. The actual removal of the Germans was begun at the beginning of May, the process of mass transportation starting after May 11, 1946. Subsequent to that, Eduard Benes nominated himself -- and had himself elected -- as president of the Czech and Slovak Republic. The first steps that the new masters of power took focused on getting rid of all those of German descent. Many sources mention that the number who were executed -- or otherwise forced into a grave -- by the Czechs approached 150,000. Public opinion still has no knowledge of it to this day, yet it is comparable in size to the Jewish victims of Czechoslovakia.

Internment camps were opened in several Slovak towns (Huncovce/Hunfalva, Novaki/Nováki, Limbach/Limpak, Petržalka/Ligetfalu, etc.) where those of German descent were collected. It is a wry turn of fate that

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<sup>10</sup> Popély, Árpád: *A csehszlovákiai magyarság történeti kronológiája* [The historical chronology of the Magyars of Czechoslovakia], in: Itthon Nemzeti kulturális hetilap, 2007, issue 2. [www.felvidek.ma/foto/itthon/itthon0702.pdf](http://www.felvidek.ma/foto/itthon/itthon0702.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Vadkerty, Katalin: *A reszlovakizáció* [Reslovakization]. Kalligram könyvkiadó, Pozsony, 1993, p. 11.

most of these camps were set up by the Slovaks during the war as concentration camps for the Jews. Of the 3,500,000 deported Germans, most were from the Sudeten region, 'only' about 120-130,000 were deported from Slovakia, chiefly to Germany, Austria or overseas.

When their deportation was well under way, it was the turn of the Magyars.<sup>12</sup> The numbers of the Magyar intellectuals and civil servants became negligible.

### **Incarceration, retribution, intimidation**

May 3, 1945: the State Security Unit begins the eviction of Magyars and Germans from their homes in Bratislava and proceeds with their internment. The eviction notice states, as justification: "You are without doubt of Magyar (German) nationality; your presence in Bratislava is not desirable in the interest of the state." The homes of those evicted were immediately seized by the authorities, all their goods were confiscated and they were conveyed to the collection camp established at the former ammunition factory, or taken to Petržalka (Pozsonyligetfalú) on the south side of the Danube to the homes vacated by the Germans, or to one of the barracks on former army bases. Among those deported were many Jews who, before 1928, declared himself to be a Hungarian. (The internment camp was closed in August of 1946.)<sup>13</sup> The most serious atrocities took place in Bratislava and Košice. In March and April of 1945, several thousand Magyar families were forced to leave the country, carrying no more than a 50 kg parcel. With that began the Slovakia-wide arrest, internment and forcible expulsion to Hungary of Magyars from territories annexed at Trianon. According to Czech data, in May and June of 1945, in a few short week, 31,780 Magyars were deported across the Hungarian border. In the fall and winter of 1944, about 10,000 persons were taken from eastern Slovakia to the Soviet Union, from where their earliest release took three and a half years; during the spring and summer of 1946, the

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<sup>12</sup> [www.szelepcsényi.hu](http://www.szelepcsényi.hu) "Under Czech direction, a large portion of the Slovaks fell on the German population settled centuries earlier under the Hungarian kings. Some disappeared without a trace after a brief court case, the rest - men, women, old, young, sick - were deported to Germany at a moments notice, without regard to their circumstance, each person restricted to one 50 kg. parcel. A new law was enacted, which banned use of the German and Hungarian languages in public. My grandmother once came home in tears from downtown. She was in one of the stores with her sister, Aunt Theresa, to buy something when a policeman noticed them and levied a 50 Krona penalty for each Hungarian word they said. The teacher, József (Joseph) Horváth, was taken away by the police. The Magyar school was disbanded, the teachers let go. In replacement, we got a young man with Clark Gable mustache, curly dark brown hair from Moravia, by the name of Ladislav Longaver. He spoke not a word of our language. The entire class sat in silence, when he spoke we did not understand a word but soon learned that when he crooked his index finger and said "Poty szem!" then we had to shuffle up to him for a slap across the face or a twist of a sideburn. Another teacher by the name of Eugen Duchon, and a female called Bosanka, were equally harsh with us, hitting our fingernails with sadistic delight."

<sup>13</sup> Popély: *A csehszlovákiai ...* op. cit., 2007, issue 2.

Magyars of Slovakia were interned en masse and taken to forced-labor camps.<sup>14</sup>

At the People's Court hearings (under the terms of the presidential decree of June 19, 1945), it was often Slovak fascists (Hlinka guardsmen or members of Hlinka's People's Party) who sat in judgement over the Magyars and branded thousands of the Magyar minority as war criminals. Those thought to be 'politically unreliable' were held in jail for years -- without being charged or sentenced.

Under the terms of the forced 1946 treaty between Czechoslovakia and Hungary regarding population exchange, 76,616 Magyars were forcibly deported to Hungary. (The number who fled voluntarily to Hungary can be put at around 10,000.)

The goal behind the 1946 decree to push re-Slovakization was to have no more than 200,000 Magyars on paper, whose fate was to be dealt with by the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>15</sup> During the 'time of the re-Slovakization campaign,' 326,679 frightened Magyars declared themselves to be 'Slovaks.' This so-called re-Slovakization process consisted of a visit to the families by committees, accompanied by several gendarmes, and convinced them, by threats, to hand in an official request, deny their Magyar ethnicity and declare themselves to be Slovaks. They would then not be bothered any more, would be permitted to stay in their home and keep their property. One can understand those who chose this route because the attachment to one's land of birth is strong. There were many families who, hoping for things to turn to the better, named one family member who would re-Slovakize and undertake to keep an eye on the property of those resettled, in the hope of their speedy return.

Presidential decree 71/1945 announced in September mandated that all persons stripped of citizenship had to report for work. Decree 88/1945, announced on October 1, contained details of the work circumstances, which mandated men from 16 to 55 and women from 18 to 45 -- up to a period of possibly 3 years (using the terms of decree 174/1948.) The authorities settled

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<sup>14</sup> www.szelepcsényi.hu "Men between 16 and 55 were assigned for slave labor, women 18-45. The method used was an idea born of devilish minds: Late in the evening, gendarmes would appear at those selected and delivered the expulsion order, which was dated for the following morning. A truck would stop in front of the house and whatever fit on the truck was taken, with the family members, to the boxcars waiting at the nearest railway station. Their estate left behind, real and movable, was confiscated by the state. The already stressed families were then faced by several days' travel in the unheated boxcars. Arriving at their destination, the Czech farmers would circle the wagons and, as in a slave market, chose those families with the most members able to work."

<sup>15</sup> Janics, Kálmán: *A hontalanság évei.* (A szlovákiai magyar kisebbség a második világháború után 1945-1948.) [The exile years. (The Slovakian Magyar minority after the Second World War 1945-1948)]. Hunnia Kiadó Kft., 1989, p. 219.

trusties (reliable Slavs) into the houses and onto the farms of those taken away on labor service.

In November of 1946, the internal deportation of the Magyars of southern Slovakia to Czech Moravia began (approx. 60,000 people). The authorities would surround a village with military units and, after allowing a short time to pack up their bare essentials, would transport them in boxcars to the former Sudetenland in western Czechoslovakia. The expulsion covered approximately 44,000 people from 393 settlements. Due to winter weather and harsh treatment, about 1,000 people died en route. In the period of 1946 to 1948, the population exchange under treaty, 120,000 were transported over the border to Hungary.

### **Confiscation of property**

The Slovak National Council adopted its decree number 4 on February 27, 1945, dealing with “the matter of the confiscation and distribution of the agrarian assets of the Germans, Magyars, and traitors and enemies of the Slovak nation.” (The total confiscation of assets was announced by presidential decree 108/1945.) The confiscation of Magyar farms had begun. Katalin Vadkerty estimates this property crime to have been 614,462 hectares (arable land and forest) [about 1.5 million acres-*ed.*] Small and medium sized Magyar-owned industries and artisan’s shops were placed under ‘national trusteeship.’ In towns and villages, the confiscation of Magyar owned houses and apartments was also begun. The confiscated assets, whether real estate or movable chattels, were distributed among those who put in a claim. (The repudiation and rescinding of the Benes decrees, and compensation for the Magyars of Slovakia, is still on hold today.)

As a net result of the population exchange that ended in 1948, those Magyars who resettled to Hungary, and swapped assets with Slovaks moving to Slovakia, left behind several times the value of land and real estate. Under the terms of the agreement signed at Csorba tó, the Magyars declined compensation for the difference.

### **Regulation of place names and family names**

The replacement of Magyar place names (settlements, streets, etc.) -- Slovakization -- was begun in the middle of the last century, in the period of the creation of a literary Slovakian language, around 1948. In the matter of proper nouns (family names), officials tried to re-write the Magyar names according to Slovak pronunciation and usage. A special permit had to be obtained to take on a Magyar family name.

### **Closing of schools, alienated educators, reduction of the number of minority intellectuals**

Decree 6/1944 ordered all Magyar and German schools closed that were opened in the Highlands subsequent to the 1938 Vienna Accord. When the Slovak national councils assumed administrative power in May of 1945 from the Red Army, all Magyar schools were closed, all teachers let go and all Hungarian-language publications banned. Also placed under ban were Magyar cultural and social groups; their assets confiscated.

The local national councils, through local by-laws, forbade the use of Hungarian language in public. In the '70s -- due to the limited number of Hungarian-language high schools -- only a maximum of 30 to 35% of the 15-year-old age group could pursue studies in the mother tongue. (At the same time, a ministerial order ensured that only those can apply to study at a foreign university -- including in Hungary -- who have completed high school in a Slovak-language government-run school.)

Parents often sent their children to the Slovak schools for fear of local (local national councils), or workplace, threats and harassment.

### **III. Czechoslovakia from 1948 to 1989**

1947-48 was a turning point year in the post-war years within the sphere of Soviet influence. The travesty of the democratic 'multi-party system' was ended in every country and everywhere power came to rest with one party, the Communist. With nationalization of private assets, the creation of the Soviet style economic and social system could begin. To a centralized economic and political power, minorities no longer represent a threat, thus, in the image of Soviet minority policies and the example of 'show policies,' certain cultural activism was permitted -- under Party supervision. In October of 1948, citizenship was again vested on the Magyars -- under orders from Moscow. (Of course, this does not mean any minority rights.) A decree of November 4, 1948, withdrew the confiscation orders for farms under 50 hectares, if the owner regained his citizenship. The order did not, however, cover lands that have, in the meantime, been handed to Slovak settlers or repatriatees from Hungary.

Law 143/1968 transformed the republic into a federated state. (This translated the minority question into a Slovak internal matter.) The cultural and educational improvements promised to the minorities (Law 144) remained, for the most part, a promise.

#### **Settlement in the border zones, reorganized public administration**

To replace the emigrated and deported Magyars, some Czechs but mainly Slovaks streamed in to take their place. The government planned and directed this tide. After 1945, about 30 new settlements were established; between

1945 and 1948, 150 purely Magyar-populated villages became of mixed population -- and the process did not stop even later. The settler villages and the Slovakized settlements became stronger and stronger, thanks to the reorganization of public administration.

In 1960, the administrative ridings were reassigned: 'small ridings' were abolished and 'large ridings' were created, which were organized into districts. The riding boundaries were carefully selected to ensure that the Magyar population would preferably be in the minority.

### **Discriminative economic policies**

By the end of the 'years without rights,' almost the entire Magyar intellectual and administrative class vanished, while the deportations mainly affected the farmers. The rural population fleeing to industrial jobs usually could only find uneducated laborer jobs in construction. Data covering investment and labor resources disclose that industry was encouraged mainly in Slovak populated areas, along the linguistic borderline or towns that were targeted for Slovakization, e.g.- Košice (Kassa); the skilled trades for the industrial plants of Košice were recruited from among the Slovak youth.

The government investment in the Magyar populated southern ridings of Slovakia was substantially less, per capita, than the average in Slovak populated ridings. So, these ridings remained mainly agrarian in nature. The situation was manipulated even in this matter to be disadvantageous: In several ridings, the co-operatives of the Magyar villages achieved higher incomes. In these cases, the district office responsible for the scheduling of farming machinery gave precedence to weaker, Slovak, co-operatives. In the 1970s, when the Slovak and Magyar co-operatives were merged, leadership usually fell into Slovak hands and the developmental differences usually benefited the Slovaks.

The results of the discriminative economic policy can be clearly seen in the data of the 1970 census. The number of those working in industry grew somewhat, but mainly employed as laborers and shippers, rather, it is mainly among farm workers that we meet Magyars. Data from the end of the 1980s discloses that the average income in the Magyar-populated southern Slovakia lagged substantially from the rest of the country.<sup>16</sup>

All these developments contributed to the fact that, even after the regime change of 1990, the emerging business class in the minority areas, those with some capital, mainly came from among the majority Slovaks.

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<sup>16</sup> Duray: *Kettős ... op. cit.*, pp. 99-102.

## **Industrial development and the dilution of minority numbers**

New positions in the rapid industrialization (socialist industrialization) in Magyar populated areas, in industry and in services, were purposefully filled with Slovaks (Bratislava/Pozsony, Rimavská Sobota/Rimaszombat, Košice/Kassa, etc.). Lacking job opportunities close to home, southern Slovakian Magyar youths are forced to accept jobs far from their homes. The number of commuters is approaching half of the Magyar community because industry is only slowly creeping from the -- more developed -- North to the mainly agricultural South. Due to the lower level of technical and skilled training, a large proportion of Magyar workers are employed in the construction industry. The continuing drifting away from home favors mixed marriages, and assimilation.

## **Closing of schools, alienated educators, reduction of the number of minority intellectuals**

In 1949, when the first Magyar classes begin again, there are only 110 Magyar teachers available, 5% of the old number. For years, untrained teachers taught the Magyar children. In the beginning of the 50s, the Magyar classes were housed in temporary buildings of terrible condition (many lacked running water, damp walls, etc.). They were made acceptable for teaching by the combined work of the students, teachers and parents. New buildings were not constructed for Magyar schools until the 60s. The good quality buildings went to the Slovak students.

While Slovakia in 1921 had 720 primary schools where instruction was in Hungarian, that number shrank to 376 by the 1977/78 school year. (Between 1950 and 1978, 233 Magyar primary school was closed.) Among ethnic Magyars, 30% finished high school; the same statistic among Slovaks is 43%. The language of instruction for the skilled trades -- to this day -- is Slovak. The greatest gap in the education of Magyar youth is at the college and university level. As an example, in 1977, only 5.9% of the 19-year-olds were accepted.

## **Instead of church autonomy: Assimilation of church infrastructure as a complement of assimilation of public administration**

The Slovakian Magyar community had a diminishing stock of Magyar-related priests and did not possess an independent hierarchy. Relegated to the care of Slovak bishops, the spreading of the Scripture in the mother tongue ebbed and the number of Magyar parishes plummeted. Catholic theologians are only trained in Bratislava (Pozsony) and the number accepted was, until

the end of the 80s, set by the authorities. Of the 130-150 seminarians in the mid-70s, 10 knew Hungarian. The language of instruction was Slovak but it was not permitted that Magyar theologians study in Hungary.

The Magyars had great expectations towards Pope Benedict XVI, since Germans are familiar with the historical background of Hungary and are disposed towards the thought of autonomy. Complete church autonomy has been granted to the Sorbs<sup>17</sup> under the terms of the Second Vatican Synod's decision regarding the language of the liturgy in a mother tongue. One of the most important elements of survival is the cultural gathering around the churches. In spite of that, the new 2008 diocese map of Slovakia more or less follows the years-old public administrative boundaries. This map does not follow the historical development of the natural emergence of the 'horizontal' county formations; rather, it divides the country along vertical lines. With it, the statistical balance of the Slovakian Magyars was skewed and resulted in the situation that, in the event of an election, no Magyar voting block can emerge which could lead to a Magyar town to become the county seat.<sup>18</sup> According to the head of the Slovak government, to a true believer, it is immaterial in what language the Gospel is heard.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, the only existing autonomous organized church is the Reformed Church, which operates on a diocese level and is unquestionably of Magyar character.

## Conclusion

In the Kingdom of Hungary, the number of Slovaks grew by 16% from 1840 to 1910, while the number of Magyars in Czechoslovakia fell by 13% over a similar time span. Until 1921, the language boundary shifted to the benefit of the Slovaks.<sup>20</sup> The official state language was spoken by only 12-

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<sup>17</sup> The area bounded by the Vistula, Saale and Unstrut Rivers was settled in the 9-10 century by Germanic and western Slav tribes, who were moving toward the South due to climactic changes. The state of Brandenburg's constitution guarantees the Sorbs their 'national' colors, coat of arms, right to homeland, right to identity, the settlements' German-Sorb features, cultural transmission and development through their language in kindergarten and school. The laws of Brandenburg guarantee the use of the Sorb language within the administrative boundaries where they reside -- obviously to protect the minority from Germans moving to the area.

<sup>18</sup> [www.parameter.sk](http://www.parameter.sk) and [www.dunatv.hu/otthon/gasparovic0319.html](http://www.dunatv.hu/otthon/gasparovic0319.html): Cardinal Jozef Tomko, papal legate, announced that on the decision of Pope Benedict XVI, the Vatican has decided to split the current Bratislava-Trnava (Pozsony-Nagyszombat) diocese, and to create a new one at Zilina (Zsolna). As well, the boundaries of the current Trnava, Nitriansky (Nyitra) and Banská Bystrica (Besztercebánya) diocese will be redrawn. Archbishop Jan Sokol will remain at his post in Trnava, with new extra privileges, in spite of the hope of many for his recall due to his alleged agent past.

<sup>19</sup> Source: MTI program on 2008.03.19, Wednesday, 17:12.

<sup>20</sup> Balassa, Zoltán: *Két nemzet a Kárpát-medencében. A szlovákok történelme* [Two nations in the Carpathian Basin. History of the Slovaks]. Kassa - Budapest, 2007, pp. 63-64.

14% of them, as a result of the then-existing minority and educational laws. The Hungarian government of the Dualist period encouraged industrialization in the minority areas as an aid to integration and to lessen the disparity and supported the use of the mother tongue in given areas and the use of minority languages in church liturgy. The period after 1920 to our day is more characterized by a plethora of discriminative economic, educational and political laws and regulations that aided, and aids still, forcible assimilation, ethnic cleansing and economic persecution. It is no wonder then that, in a period of 80 years, the Magyar population diminished by half. The currently ongoing rabid anti-minority policy (against Magyars, Rusyns, Germans) is essentially the reverse of what, in the Kingdom of Hungary, was called the 'legacy of King St. Stephen,' a state policy of toleration, inclusion and promotion of minorities.<sup>21</sup> It is patently obvious in the recently passed language laws, aimed at restricting the use of minority languages, as well as the prejudicial financing of Magyar institutions, especially those of learning.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Hévízi, Józsa: *Autonómia-típusok Magyarországon és Európában* [Autonomies in Europe and Hungary. A Comparative Review]. Püski, Budapest, 2001.

<sup>22</sup> "... the Magyar university ... only received a lower level of accreditation and the administrative reform, which chopped up Slovakia (1996) in such a way as to prevent Magyars from being able to form a majority anywhere..." in: Balassa: *Két nemzet ...* op. cit.