

Reflect Magyar-Slov

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(In this part of my Reflections I will be referring to some personal experiences I lived through during the four agonizing years of the Hungarian minority in the time of implementation of the Košický Program. It is such experiences that reflect the full depth of the tragedy.)

Rage of Irrational Passions

It was not difficult for Beneš and the new Slovak leadership to channel Slovak nationalist passions into an anti-Hungarian hate-campaign. The entire bourgeois and Communist press joined forces in creating a supportive atmosphere to the genocidal assaults inaugurated by the Košický Program in April, 1945. A study published by V. Jarošová admits: "Anti-Hungarian nationalism marked something special during those years; a significant portion of the Slovak nation, including the working class, fell under its spell." This spell was the result of mass-manipulation of the basest emotions. This period must be shockingly sad and shameful for the Slovaks as there was not a single courageous voice raised in the defense of the victims, not even among the Church leaders. One sample is enough to illustrate the base tone that was prevailing in the Slovak press and radio at that time. The item is taken from the Slovak Democratic Party's periodical, *Nové Průdy*: "It is enough for us that these people are Hungarians,... they have destroyed our state, and continue to undermine our Republic... We must free our land from mice and bedbugs... Let them go voluntarily to Hungary forever, where they will be turned 'gentlemen', into a prototype of falsehood and gypsyhood... Let's sweep out the Hungarians from everywhere even if they happen to be Communists or democrats."

(For years I heard through the windows of our Benedictine Monastery in Komárom the marching Slovak soldiers singing and yelling in choir: *Madari za Dunaj — Magyars across the Danube!*)

The chauvinistic frenzy reversed the normal meaning of words and the traditional scale of values. It equated democracy with unconditional Slovak demands; self-determination with expulsion; good neighborhood with surrender; resistance to injustice with revisionism; forced transportation of people with a national labor program. For the implementation of the Košický Program a series of presidential decrees, a barrage of instructions was issued against the Hungarian minority bringing about general confusion and state of lawlessness. These were, in most cases, simple re-applications of the anti-Jewish laws of the Fascist Slovak government to the Hungarians. Added to the helpless plight of the Hungarians that they felt abandoned by the world. The Allied Control Commission in Budapest was the only line of international help but its President, Marshall Vorosilov did not even bother to read the notes on this matter which the Hungarian Government sent to him. The Western World paid no attention to the events in Slovensko; they were satisfied with Beneš' false promises and lies.

The Vicious Scheme

The Czechs removed the Sudeten-Germans by a well organized, quick action. Since, however, Beneš' government could not get permission from the Western Allies for the expulsion of Hungarians, they planned a series of actions to reach the same end by gradual liquidation.

The first step toward this liquidation was a presidential decree which collectively deprived the Hungarians of citizenship, an act unheard of in the history of the civilized world. By this decree the Hungarians became defenseless objects without any legal protection, and were exposed to economic destruction. Another presidential decree excluded the Hungarians from economic life and confiscated their lands. The decree issued in July 1945 stated: "We mean by internal resettlement the totality of those regulations which will make it possible to return all the land into the hand of the original Slav element." This is a sheer fiction to justify robbery. Beneš deceitfully tore off masses of Hungarians from their ethnic body; now let the Slovaks rob the Hungarians of their personal properties. The Slovak National Committee set up a Confiscation Committee which carried out the legalized robbery.

(My father's 16 acres of land also fell into their hands, a property which he had acquired by the sweat of his brow while schooling his seven children away from home. I also witnessed how former gardists and ardent members of Hlinka Party took over the businesses of prosperous Hungarian businessmen as "Spravcas.")

State employees of Hungarian nationality were fired without financial compensation. Hungarian schools, at all levels, were closed, the teachers dismissed, many of them expelled. For four years, Hungarian children were excluded from any schooling. Organized private teaching was forbidden.

(A week after the Soviet Army occupied Komárom, the Russian Commander called the teachers together and ordered them to open all the schools, among them the centuries old Benedictine Gymnasium. Two months later the Slovaks took over the administration and closed all the Hungarian Schools. Some of the Benedictine Fathers went underground with their students of the upper grades who could not continue their education otherwise. They went over to Hungary in secret ways — often with the help of smugglers across the Danube — to take their examinations there.)

People's Courts' official task was to try the war criminals; in actuality they were the primary organs of government's expulsion policy. Legal justice certainly was not in their program. First of all, they aimed at forcing leading Hungarians, especially those of the educated class, to leave the country so that the people would be left without leaders. Thousands of Hungarians were sentenced by the People's Courts while the former members of the Hlinka Party were left unmolested. Šaňo Mach, Tiso's Minister of Interior, was among the few who were put to trial. He defended his approval of the deportation of Jews by saying that he considered the Jews as "90% Hungarians." This was a good enough argument to save him from the gallows. Count János Esterházy, who alone voted against the deportation of Jews in Tiso's Parliament, was sentenced to death as Fascist. It was enough for him to be the Hungarian Party's leader to deserve the gallows.

The previous measures were intended to soften, break up and thin out the solidly Hungarian ethnic areas for final liquidation. The ultimate end was to be attained through three major genocidal operations.

Slave Trade in 20th Century

One of these operations was dispersion of large section of Hungarian minority by internal resettlement. At a joint meeting, representatives of the Central Government and of local Slovak

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national organizations, held in Pozsony during August 1946, decided to transfer a large section of the Hungarian population to the evacuated Sudeten areas of Bohemia, under the pretext of the Presidential Decree on general labor services. The action was secretly prepared and launched by surprise on November 19, 1946. The method did not differ from the abduction of the Negro slaves from Africa with the exception that the Slovaks used UNRA trucks (United Nations Relief Action) donated to them by U.N. relief services, and cattle wagons. Without any premonition, military units surrounded one or two villages at a time, and then ordered the selected families to get ready for evacuation with the allowed personal belongings. They were told that they were to leave their homes for good. In Bohemia, Czech farmers and factory agents were waiting for them at the railroad stations and selected the needed merchandise. During the severe winter, the unclaimed families were left in the wagons for days. When the Hungarian press turned the barbaric slave-trade into a world scandal, the Slovak press, under a spell of moral insanity, denounced the Hungarians as uncooperative, undemocratic neighbors who are interfering with Czechoslovak internal affairs. The headline of the CAS, published in Pozsony, cried indignantly: "The Hungarians do not cease to incite against Czechoslovakia."

For 99 days, the Hungarian families lived in nightmare, not knowing when the "Relief" truck would stop in front of their homes. The pressure of international reaction forced the Czechoslovak Government to stop the brutal inhuman action before it could achieve its objective. Out of designated 100,000 persons, 44,129 were transferred, mostly small landholders from the border areas of Southern Slovakia.

Rape of Conscience

None of the genocidal attempts hit the Hungarians so deeply and caused so much spiritual anguish as the campaign of re-Slovakization, i.e. forced instant assimilation. It was launched at the time of the spring census in 1946, by the decree of the Commissioner of the Interior, and was carried out by the ultra-chauvinistic Slovenska Liga. This inhuman action was based again on the fictitious historical supposition that the territory of the present Slovensko was entirely populated with Slovaks until the 16th century. From then on the Hungarians, fleeing from the Turks, changed the ethnic composition of the area. The Slovaks pretended that they were entitled to restore the original ethnic status. Hungarians, constantly threatened in their daily existence, now were approached with a choice: sign or your life! Signing meant civil rights, security, retention of property; not signing meant homelessness, ruthless persecution, economic ruins. As the posters of Slovenska Liga read: "Think it over! Tomorrow you want to sleep in peace, or not? Become again Slovak!" Doesn't it sound as if the last sparks of moral sense had been extinguished in the Slovak minds?

In the beginning, the propaganda was met with stiff resistance. Later, the tortured souls, frightened and humiliated beyond endurance, gave in with an attitude of resignation; it was useless to fight the endless diabolical assaults. The Slovenska Liga reported that 325,000 persons were granted the "privilege" of being received again into the fold of the glorious Slovak Nation. As a result of this instant assimilation, the Hungarian minority fell in the census of 1950, by almost 50%, to an all time low of 369,000. The census of 1980 clearly proved the futility of the senseless violence on the human conscience; almost all the re-Slovakized people declared themselves Hungarians again, officially raising the number of the Hungarian minority to 579,000. (My sister, mother of five children, was dismissed without pension after 25 years of teaching. Facing hunger and misery with her family, she was ready to sign the re-Slovakization paper but her Slovak husband strongly objected to it. He remained a staunch Slovak under the Hungarian regime, was respected for it and never was given even a suggestion for changing nationality. They decided to face new trials rather than act against conscience.)

Enforced Population Exchange

Population exchange was the last resort through which the Czechoslovak Government tried to achieve a substantial reduction of the Hungarian minority. Their expectation was based on an unrealistic estimate of the number of Slovaks residing in Hungary, and on their willingness to exchange homeland. Because of the hostile attitude of the Czechoslovak authorities, the Hungarian Government was unwilling to enter into negotiations on arrogant and demanding Czechoslovak terms. Under pressure from the Soviet, finally they came to agreement in Budapest, on February 27, 1946. In accordance with this agreement the Czechoslovaks immediately transferred 1500 Hungarians as "war criminals" and they sent to Hungary a Committee for Resettlement, which for a period of six weeks was permitted to make free propaganda among the Slovaks in Hungary. An extorted unjust provision gave the Czechoslovaks the right to select the Hungarian families whom they wanted to get rid of. They again put on the exchange list those Hungarians whom they considered as potential leaders and organizers of the minority life.

The great hopes attached by the Czechoslovaks to this dictatorial measure became likewise frustrated. The Slovak propaganda conducted a private "census" which estimated the number of Slovaks in Hungary to be over 400,000. After all the heated propaganda, enticements and lavish promises, under the miserable conditions in post-war Hungary, only 59,000 persons decided to leave Hungary. After the happy reception of the returned Brethren it did not take long before the Slovaks realized that they could have done better without them.

Last Desperate Attempt

The Czechoslovaks still entertained some hopes that the Peace Conference would approve the transfer of at least 200,000 Hungarians from Slovakia to Hungary. Beneš, with his shrewd maneuvers, had already prepared a "legitimate" title to this last request. Through Russian pressure, the Allies went along with the expulsion of 200,000 Germans from Hungary, though the Hungarians themselves were against it. Beneš proposed at the Peace Conference to replace those Germans with Hungarians from Czechoslovakia. The United States, however, remained unyielding and rejected Beneš' machinations once and for all.

End of Insanity

The doggedly contrived genocidal assaults on the Hungarian minority ended in dismal failure. After the Peace Conference, Slovakia still remained in the grips of hostility toward the Hungarians. The slanderous tone of the Slovak press continued unabated. The political winds, however, began to change and the fervor for establishing a purely Slav state was running out of steam.

In February, 1948, the Czechoslovak Coalition Government

collapsed and yielded to a totally Communist rule. Czechoslovakia joined the ranks of the People's Democracies under close Soviet control. Beneš, the chief architect of the criminal post-war policies on behalf of a Slav dream, resigned and was relegated among the discarded instruments of the Soviet imperialistic plans. He died soon in solitary confinement, with a well deserved bitter taste of disillusionment in Slav Brotherhood. Discriminations against the Hungarian minority were legally ended in the fall of 1948, when the new government restored citizenship to the Hungarians, opened their schools, and let the deportees return from Bohemia to the land of their ancestors, though many found their former homes occupied by Slovak intruders.

The Slovaks had no other choice but to accept again the Hungarian minority which they wanted to get rid of at any price. Today, well over half a million Hungarians are still longing for secure life within a civilized, orderly society. They wish the wounds of unspeakable sufferings to be healed and the chauvinistic hatred to cease. The Hungarians are not the only losers. The irrational passions and insane actions wounded the Slovaks themselves, leaving behind moral damages whose consequences cannot yet all be seen. The Slovaks added a shameful chapter to the tragic history of Central Europe, for which they will have yet to repent. They must arrive at the sincere admission that they caused much more sufferings and humiliation to the Hungarians within a short time than they themselves had supposedly suffered from the Hungarians through a thousand years. In view of the post-war years, the continued accusations of the Slovaks against the Hungarians for the mistakes of a long past amount to repulsive hypocrisy. We can work at our common interests together only when the Slovaks, too, sincerely realize that there will be no peaceful future for Central Europe unless we approach our common problems in a new spirit and seek solutions in mutual respect and understanding.

The ways and modes of such cooperation will be the topic of the coming last part of my Reflections.