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## **Always Unanimous: Slovak Communists Reflecting on Foreign Policy (1939–43)**

by Marína Zavacká

Unanimity, stability, and eternal unchangeability as a confirmation of the righteousness of the ascended path—such is the impression given a reader of the official Communist party interpretation of history, written for propaganda purposes. However, the history of historiography is to a great extent linked with the history of its own relation to changes concerning the political climate. This process can be elucidated by tracing the gradual penetration of information about uncomfortable facts, or about persons and their views, into official publications, following the development of Communist reflections on such facts and changes.

Since the image of offering a united, unquestioned and unquestionable explanation of everything, including historical events, formed the core of the Communist appeal to the public, any changes caused ideological problems. These problems, in turn, needed further explanation. Usually the density of these explanations makes the existence and strength of the problem evident. A patterned example of this kind of information usually passed through the following levels: total concealment, the publication of ideologically-interpreted and -commented information, and attempts at independent evaluation.

For this case study I give a short overview of the history of Slovak Communist<sup>1</sup> reflections on foreign policy and of their later interpretations, concentrating on the main event of the time, the German-Soviet Treaty of nonaggression.<sup>2</sup> The date of the Pact (summer 1939) and of the attack of the USSR (summer 1941) divide the war-time propaganda into three periods: first, when fascism was an enemy; second, when imperialism was an enemy and fascists quite reliable partners; and third, when the Germans were the enemies and the Allies become allies.<sup>3</sup>

### *Post-War Interpretations*

From the political point of view, after the war even the simple acknowledgment of the existence of the Pact represented a fundamental problem. When this fact was finally included into history, there was the problem of describing the reactions of contemporary Communist, because they had to fit into the official image of unanimity and absolute trust into the USSR's policies. Moreover, in order to follow the post-war destiny of the different Communist activists who were excluded and included from the Party and consequently from History, hanged and rehabilitated,

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<sup>1</sup> The Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS) was recognized as a regional organization of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) during WWII. The decisive body of the Party, the Central Committee (CC CPC), settled in Prague during the whole war. The Slovak regional semi-dependent decisive body, located in Bratislava, was officially called the Illegal Central Leadership (CL CPS). Gradually four CL were liquidated, the fifth CL was active until the liberation in 1945.

<sup>2</sup> This was the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed on 23 August 1939.

<sup>3</sup> From the point of heuristics, the study is based on two kinds of sources. The first is fund ÚV/1, Ilegalna KSS, (Illegal Communist Party of Slovakia 1938–45, [hereafter “Il. KSS”]) of *Slovenský Národný Archív* (Slovak National Archive), containing 25 units of documents aimed at political, economical, social questions, instructions for celebrations, illegal press, leaflets, and finally documents of the Central State Security Office. Sources are defined by the numbered box, folder and/or a page number. According to the character of the fund itself and the time of its creation, the form of previous selection of materials has to be taken into consideration. On the other hand, since the fund had not been accessible for non-accredited historians and that different kinds of non-conformist views were labeled “Communist” by the state organs of the Slovak state, a number of documents proving the existence of a wide range of oppositional ideas survived the further selections. The translations of archival sources attempt to preserve the original vocabulary. Italics mark expressions emphasized by the author. Whenever possible, sources are quoted from volume of edited documents. The second category of sources encloses the changing interpretations of the events in different editions of the History of the Communist Party of Slovakia and other volumes of official Communist historiography.

the official interpretation of history had to be reshaped and actualized almost continuously.

The Soviet interpretation of the circumstances and causes of this agreement was outlined for other Communist Parties immediately and from 1939 until the 1980s there were only small changes. However, the evidence of them deserves attention. Generally, the accepted reasoning was that the Pact was a result of the failure of the British-French-Soviet negotiations on mutual guarantees in case of German attack on countries bordering the USSR. The beginning of German-Soviet negotiations was dated in the second half of August 1939, and proclaimed to have an exclusively political character with the following aim: “The Soviet government accepted Germany’s offer to conclude the Pact, in order to prevent imperialists from forming a united anti-Soviet alliance and to gain time for strengthening the defensive ability of its country.”<sup>4</sup>

Their mutual economic contacts are mentioned only much later, and even then a tendency to mention them only 'by the way' prevails. For example, one account reads: “In the extremely strained atmosphere of the spring and summer of 1939, Soviet-German negotiations about economic and later political questions were started. ... Because of the strained political atmosphere between the USSR and Germany, the Soviet government did not consider it possible to negotiate about the *broadening* of trade and economical contacts between the countries.”<sup>5</sup> The book quoted, although published in 1976, nearly forty years later, still contains neither information on the state of previous mutual economic and trade contacts, which should be broadened, nor information about later trade agreements, or even geopolitical issues, which were negotiated. However, it offers another piece of news worth thinking about:

The British and French failure to secure Polish and Romanian agreement with the transfer of armed Soviet units through and above their territories is used to explain the failure of the summer negotiations of allied military missions in 1939. The book recognizes, and even draws attention to the fact, that it is impossible to fight Germany without providing direct contact with its military forces. This objection sounds logical. On the other hand, it indicates a lack of logic in that there was

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<sup>4</sup> *Dejiny KSC v datech* (History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in data) (Prague: Svoboda, 1984), 351.

<sup>5</sup> *Dejiny zahraniční politiky SSSR* (History of the USSR Foreign Policy) (Prague: Svoboda, 1981), 454 ff. Translated from the Russian original (Moscow: Nauka, 1976).

an absence of a similar question when describing Soviet promises to help Czechoslovakia before the Treaty of Munich of 1938.

The post-war silence concerning such discrepancies does not mean that these questions were not formulated after the Pact was signed. Naturally, almost nobody who dissented from the official view voluntarily acknowledged having such heretical views after the war. Only the standpoint of Vladimír Clementis, who publicly expressed his disapproval of the Pact during his stay in emigration in Paris and London, became widely known and was criticized by dogmatic worshippers of the righteousness of any policy of the USSR both during that time and during the purges of the 1950s.<sup>6</sup>

*The History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia* of 1961 limited the expressions of disagreement exclusively to the mouths of the non-Communist *bourgeois émigrés*, whose views were summed up thus:

For their class interests they associated the righteous case of the liberation of our nations with the anti-Soviet Munich-like politics of the governments of the West, for which the Czechoslovak question had sense only as a subject of possible agreement with Germany. In this way they were apt to sacrifice Czechoslovakia again. The Moscow leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia decisively stood against such a policy of Czechoslovak bourgeois emigration.... In defense of the peace-making policy of the USSR the Czechoslovak Communists in the West also stood up unanimously. The CPC organization abroad also settled its accounts with *opportunists of the Clementis-kind* who, in Paris at the time of the Soviet-German Pact, supported anti-Soviet hunts.<sup>7</sup>

What is interesting about these statements, filling ten lines in one book, is exactly this phrase, “Communists stood unanimously” and mention of “opportunists of Clementis-kind.” Such usage of the plural to describe any number of opponents,

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<sup>6</sup> Slovak National Archive, fund II. KSS, box 5, folder 122, written materials of Július Duriš. See his letter from 1940, no. 7: “According to an agreement (in Prague) you can inform the functionaries, that Mr. Clementis was expelled from the Party, because he let himself to be corrupted for his own comfort and for release from prison.” Also see his letter from 20 July 1940: “If Clementis is there, expose him harshly and be aware of his ill influence... HQ's and my view is, that Clementis has to be used among the [Party] members as an example of betrayal in a hard moment... such cases must be punished.” Clementis was hanged during the political trials of 1950s.

<sup>7</sup> *Dejiny KSC* (History of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) (Bratislava: SVPN, 1961), 376.

leads (and led even then) to evident contradiction—and the appearance of any contradiction in supposedly unanimous Communist textbooks has to be treated with suspicion.

### *Foreign Policy 1939–41 in Contemporary CPS Documents*

The second kind of sources, documents of that time, demonstrates the state of actual knowledge and views and their development. For an outline of the pre-war propaganda line, let us quote from the paper “Ascending Fascism and Tasks of the Communist International in the Struggle for Unity of the Working Class against Fascism,” presented by Georgi Dimitrov during the Seventh World Congress of the Communist International, which took place in August 1935. Among other things, he said: “Fascism of the German type is the most reactionary sort of fascism. It boldly calls itself National Socialism, even though it has nothing in common with socialism. German fascism is not merely bourgeois nationalism, but rough chauvinism. It is the system of rule of political banditism, a system of provocations and the torture of the working-class and of revolutionary forces of peasants, petty-bourgeoisie, and intelligentsia. It is Medieval barbarism and bestiality. It is unrestrained aggression against other nations and countries. *German fascism acts as a striking fist of counterrevolution, as a main warmonger of imperialist war, as a manager of the crusade against the USSR.*”<sup>8</sup> The Communist International represented the highest authority of the Communist movement of the 1930s. References to its decisions and recommendations, and moreover its vocabulary, have been reflected in the propagandist activity of Communist activists of all levels. Thus, similar evaluations can be observed in the Communist propaganda until the contraction of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.

Another accessible source of ideas and opinions, promoted by individual national Communist parties, was the Communist periodical press. What kind of news did it offer to a common Slovak reader in 1938? On the first page, there were often articles expressing the Communist determination to defend the Republic against the strengthening fascist and nationalist menace, with headlines such as “No pasaran!”, and “Do not touch the sovereignty of the CSR!”<sup>9</sup> The confidence in the forces of international Communist military help in case of a fascist attack were to be sup-

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<sup>8</sup> *VII. kongres Komunistické internacionály a boj proti fašismu a válce, dokumenty* (Seventh Congress of the Communist International, Documents) (Prague, 1978), 116–117.

<sup>9</sup> *Slovenské zvesti* (The Slovak News) (Bratislava), 17 May 1938, and 27 July 1938.

ported by plentiful articles focused on fighting Spain and China; letters from interbrigadists; the Communist Oath of the First of May, which contained the message “firmly, unswervingly we will defend the peace of our country, rights of democracy, and independence, against any attack, from outside or inside” and so on..

An important part of the daily news consisted of articles condemning racism and anti-Semitism. They tried to change the views of the pro-racist population through slogans about characteristics common among exploiters of all races and religions. They also sought to strengthen the spirit of proletarian internationalism with articles about Hungarian proletarians oppressed by the political system of Miklos Horthy and about victims of political executions in Germany.

For the needs of the Czechoslovak Communists, a Czech version of the official History of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks was published in 1939 in Moscow. This issue, approved by the Moscow Central Committee in 1938, characterizes the future war as a *second imperialist war*. It predicts a German attack on Poland, accuses fascist Germany of endeavoring to gain the ruling position, both on the Continent in Western Europe and in the Anglo-French colonies, and it strictly refuses the politics of concession.

The second imperialist war is so far significant in the fact, that it is led by aggressive powers. Meanwhile the other powers, the so-called democratic powers against which it is actually aimed, pretend that it does not concern them, they wash their hands, draw back, praise their own peacefulness, in speech condemn the fascist aggressors and yet... step by step give out their positions to the aggressor, claiming that they are preparing for resistance.<sup>10</sup>

It is a kind of *ex post* paradox that the news concerning the Soviet-German pact reached the Czechoslovak Communists almost simultaneously with this text. The first illegal proceedings of the newly established illegal regional, and later central, committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia retained the spirit of this ideological line.

After more than five years of massive propaganda concerning fascism, the image of the contemporary international political situation as viewed by a non-critical reader of an exclusively Communist press would have definite features. Terms such as fascism, Germany, and Hitler almost merged and were to be considered the greatest enemies of civilization and of working people. They were murderers,

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<sup>10</sup> *Dejiny VKS(b), stručný výklad* (History of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, A Short Course) (Moscow, 1939), 317–318. This history was approved by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in 1938

bombing Spanish children and shooting at barefoot Abesinians. Such a reader would identify with a total condemnation of Munich politicians, not only because of the result of their policy, but also for their immorality, which was revealed solely by their interest in starting negotiations with Hitler. Such a person would, together with the Party leadership, accuse Beneš's government of state betrayal, because it had not accepted the military support offered by the USSR which—it is said—had already mobilized dozens of divisions and hundreds of aircraft on the borders, and was thus prepared for the war and willing to fight for Beneš—and for the reader, even if other powers would not join. How would such a reader receive news about a negotiated pact between his greatest friend and his greatest enemy?

On the basis of the above quotations, it can be assumed that information concerning the Pact, even that ideologically selected and supplemented with ideological commentary by Radio Moscow, was received with surprise and embarrassment. A relatively reliable biography of Ján Osoha, at that time the leading activist of the Communist Party in Slovakia, who was known for his firm trust and devotedness to the ideas promoted by the USSR, notes that even the explanatory speech by Zhdanov on Radio Moscow could not satisfy the Slovak leadership. Despite the strict rules of conspiracy, which limited personal contacts to a minimum, Osoha considered it necessary to risk a journey to the Protectorate, to Prague in order to consult there about further steps to take. According to witnesses, he even expressed his disgust towards the “dirtiness of international politics.”<sup>11</sup>

After returning to Bratislava, Osoha issued an official proclamation of the CPS, actually a set of facts and arguments for agitation and enlightenment among the members and fans of the CPS. This “Proclamation of the CL CPS concerning the contract of the German-Soviet Treaty of nonaggression and the German attack of Poland” became the first official document issued by the first illegal Central Leadership of the Communist Party of Slovakia (CL CPS).<sup>12</sup> The document offers answers to two questions, formulated in the introduction: Why has the USSR signed the Pact, and What is the relation of the Communists towards the war that is just beginning in the West. The document stresses, that the USSR has been and remains a merciless enemy of the fascist states, because they are ruled by capitalist dictatorships. The responsibility for the contemporary situation is laid on *the Polish ruling*

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<sup>11</sup> Anna Štvrtecká, *Ján Osoha* (Bratislava: Epoque, 1970), 79.

<sup>12</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 1, folder 6 and 6a. Also quoted in Anna Štvrtecká, *Činnosť prvého ilegálneho ÚV KSS* (Activities of the First Illegal Central Leadership of the Communist Party of Slovakia) (Bratislava, 1959), 109–111.

*group*, which refused the help offered by the Red Army and thus left its nation at the mercy of fascist tyrants and further on the treacherous policies of England and France, which attempted to involve the USSR in the war against Germany without participating themselves. The USSR's innocence is made definitive by this explanation: "the conclusion of the German-Soviet Pact does not support fascism, on the contrary, it strengthens the contradictions among the capitalist states and the war-like solution of those contradictions weakens capitalism as a whole."

In the second part of the document the German war against Poland is defined as an imperialist and aggressive war that the Communists should decisively oppose. The Polish struggle is described as a defensive war with which the Communists should sympathize. The Polish 'Regime of Colonels' is heavily criticized, because it "had weakened the defensive forces of the state by regardless exploitation of the working masses and persecution of minorities." The document also evaluates the guilt of the western "democracies," England and France, who "despite their signing of guarantees and their promises of quick help in case of attack failed once again in the decisive moment, as in the Czechoslovak case."

Despite its conscious effort to fit into the line promoted by the USSR, Osoha's Proclamation slid into a conflict as soon as it was issued, due to its expression of sympathies and support towards the Polish nation: "*it is a duty of all true Slovaks to help the Polish nation in its righteous struggle against the fascist aggressor by all forces and means.*" However, the proclamation of the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Communist International of 16 September 1939 condemned the contemporary war as a *mutually imperialistic war*. Thus Osoha unwillingly expressed his sympathies to classified imperialists. It is a matter of strange coincidence, that this Slovak proclamation has been "discovered" in the archive only after 1956.<sup>13</sup>

In the forthcoming document of October 1939, the Slovak CL fully recognized the new definition of the enemy and of the war. The "Instructions for the internal party organizational and ideological campaign" noted: "the Masters of Poland sold the nation to the power-interests of Western imperialists ... *The guilt is equally on both sides.* ... In today's pillage we are not interested in the victory of any side, but in the defeat of both sides."<sup>14</sup> The main task of the Communists should be subversion of the capitalist war-front, thus the German proletariat (in brotherly union with Slovak and Czech [proletarians] and proletarians of other nations) could con-

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<sup>13</sup> Štvrtecká, *Cinnost*, 38.

<sup>14</sup> Slovak National Archive, II. KSS, box 1, folder 8; also quoted in Štvrtecká, *Cinnost*, 113–121.



vert the conflict into a revolutionary war for socialism—everywhere, including Britain and France. Here, for the first time, the Czechoslovak members of the Allied armies fighting against fascism are labeled as persons fighting for the interests of the Western imperialists, well-known betrayers of the small nations. The democracies of the West temporarily became only “so-called democracies.”

This document also outlines the problem of Soviet expansion into Poland. The Instructions offer two positive results: the social liberation of the Ukrainian and of the Belorussian nations, and a no less important fact, that “The strategic positions of the Red Army were moved deep to the Baltic sea, to Poland, and to the Carpathian mountains—that means to the gates of Western imperialism.” The topic of social liberation is mentioned in a few other leaflets. “It is not true that Russia abandoned Communism and turned to nationalism! In annexed Poland Communism has been introduced immediately.”<sup>15</sup> Another document of this period states that it is only the jealous persons who blame the USSR for not fighting yet, but the USSR knows best, what to do: “*capital—American, English, Jewish as well as German —has to be blamed for the war.*”<sup>16</sup>

Further argumentation takes the form of a discussion with the official Slovak pro-German press. The document “Vain is your slander” states:

So the ruling Lords tell the people that Moscow is connected with Berlin, and therefore she does not bother about the Slovak Communists any more... but... the nations of the USSR are free, and they can settle pacts with other states about non-aggression, friendship, and economic collaboration (moreover, if it may help to destroy the anti-Comintern block).<sup>17</sup>

Further it encourages the Slovak government to start negotiations with the USSR, for the sake of the Slovak people.

This line of propaganda, directed against both of the fighting sides, was maintained for the following two years. A proclamation by CPS concerning attacks on Holland, Belgium, and France by fascist Germany, which was issued in June 1940 under the title “The Hour is coming” can serve as a proof: The reader is offered a manual outlining how to evaluate the “*invasion by the German armies of Holland and Belgium, which was provoked by Anglo-French imperialists and their collaborators in Holland and Belgium.*” It continues: “We are not going to philosophize about the

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<sup>15</sup> Štvrtecká, *Cinnost*, 122–125.

<sup>16</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 9, folder 241.

<sup>17</sup> Štvrtecká, *Cinnost*, 133–135.

chances of both sides. Our sympathies lie on the side of the German, French, English, Belgian, and Dutch people, who suffer so much for the interests of their capitalist rulers.”<sup>18</sup> The governments, which proclaimed neutrality instead of asking the USSR for help, and thus gave themselves up to Hitler, are heavily criticized for this. The document predicts the widening of the conflict to the Balkans, because “*when the German offensive on the West becomes too strong, the Anglo-French imperialists will try to lead a part of the German forces to the East by provoking a war in the Balkan basin.*”<sup>19</sup>

Even in April 1941, after the breakup of the Yugoslav uprising, the CPS issued a document “Hands off Yugoslavia,” which characterizes the uprising as:

an action of the people, who in order to save the country from the catastrophe of war, turned over the government which was mercenary force for German imperialism and imprisoned its representatives.... The new government proclaimed its will to live in peace with everybody, particularly with its neighbors. With this aim, on April 5 Yugoslavia signed pact of friendship with the USSR... *Now, in course of war, the working masses stand before a great task, that while fighting the German intruder, they have to observe cautiously their own contemporary government, so that this will not drive the nations of Yugoslavia into the territorial waters of Anglo-American imperialism, which is not any better than the German one. Anglo-American imperialism, as much as the German one, tries to overrule and enslave as many nations as possible, to ensure better power-positions and possibilities for exploitation. With malicious cynicism it drives each nation into the fight for its own interests, without providing it with appropriate help.*<sup>20</sup>

Other kinds of questions and arguments concerning Soviet foreign policy came in response to the annexation of the Finnish territories. Here the arguments of the Slovak Communists were aimed at the statements of the representatives of resistance in the West. A cyclostyle under the headline “What’s the matter with Finland” notes:

The press and radio broadcast of the capitalist states, namely of the so-called Western democracies is shouting around about the USSR’s actions in Finland, accusing the USSR of imperialist aggression against a small 'de-

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 136–138.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 136–138.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 154–155.

mocratic' Finnish nation.... Even some Slovaks—brave, progressive, but not sufficiently aware of the imperialist demagoguery—have wavered concerning the Finnish question, being influenced by this false Judas-like tumult.<sup>21</sup>

This argumentation is based on the claim, that the annexation was in order to retain peace simply *necessary*. It seems that even the idea of negating something that the USSR considers necessary was considered absurd by the authors. On the contrary, they stress, Finland was offered compensation, and its independence and sovereignty were not violated. The Finnish people were even liberated from being enslaved by their own bourgeoisie. This makes the Finland action “*the first case since the October Revolution, when the Red Army, fulfilling Lenin’s heritage, helps the oppressed nation of another state and another nationality to liberate itself from the chains of capitalist oppression.*” Today a reader can enjoy Communist reasoning concerning the slow advance of the Red Army, which implied the presence of a strong Finnish resistance. According to the above quoted document, the Red Army tried to avoid damaging the towns, villages, and property of the Finnish people as a whole, and also “the senseless hazard with human lives, namely in fifty degrees below freezing, is not compatible with its heroic spirit.”

After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact had been signed, the official Moscow propaganda persuaded people that a military conflict between fascism and Communism would probably be inevitable. Thanks to diplomatic negotiations, however, the danger was not a current threat, although it could be expected in the distant future. To divert attention away from the merely temporary validity of the Pact, its reliability was stressed. This image came to be strengthened so much so that total censorship has applied to news reports about evident German preparations for attack.

Unlike the Communist activists sent from the USSR to help the CPS during the years 1940–41, who stuck to the given party line even in spring 1941 and predicted a possible attack on the horizon in one to two years, the Communists in Slovakia did not or could not resist the alternative news from other sources.<sup>22</sup> Consequently some real predictions of conflict, based on non-Moscow data, can be found in their documents during the time, when information about war was taboo in the USSR. For instance, the instructions of CL CPS from May–June 1941, with the title “Let’s Prepare the Party for Decisive Struggle” places itself to a “*period of the ripening of the political and revolutionary crisis of capitalism*” and reminded its readers

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 129–132.

<sup>22</sup> Štvrtecká, *Ján Osoha*, 149.

“not to forget, that the permanent readiness for the mobilization of the USSR and its Red Army is a warning challenge also for us.”<sup>23</sup> Or more literally documents read, “the German fascists secretly prepared war against the USSR—be prepared!”<sup>24</sup>

### *Soviet Slovakia—A Short Visit of Internal Party Discussion*

The post-war international status of Slovakia, which meanwhile became a satellite state of Hitler, represented for the Slovak Communists another one of their great explanatory problems, strengthened by the fact that, after a wave of emigration of the most endangered pre-war top politicians, the new leaders lacked collaborators with sufficient overview and preparation for propaganda and instructive activities. Without formal delegation of power, they did not feel empowered to draw their own proclamations. On the contrary, according to previous experiences they could be afraid of harsh measures adopted against promoters of such views, which (however ex post facto) appeared to be in contradiction with the newest line in Moscow. Here once more the self-confident Ján Osoha played a decisive role. Born in Moravia, as a young apprentice Osoha took part in the Interhelpo project, and later graduated from two four-year-long courses for political cadres in Moscow—no wonder Osoha expected a post in decisive party organs after returning to Czechoslovakia. To his disappointment, however, he was sent to eastern Slovakia to organize grass-roots work. Being a son of a peasant, with quite strong populist abilities, Osoha soon became popular among the local agricultural workers. Consequently he started promoting the backward peasant masses as possible leaders of the social revolution in Slovakia, thus distinguishing it from the more industrial (and thus 'more ready' according to Marxist theory) Czech lands. If successful, the kind of revolution he dreamed of would even overrun the ungrateful comrades in Prague. During the existence of the Czechoslovak Republic such a scenario seemed unreal, but now the chance had come. After the proclamation of the Slovak state, Osoha became a member of the first Illegal Central Leadership of the Communist Party of Slovakia. Due to rising difficulties in keeping contact with the Protectorate Bohemia-Moravia CL CPS was empowered for independent actions in special cases, but it was still formally subordinated to CC CPC in Prague. Neither did the

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<sup>23</sup> Štvrtecká, *Cinnost*, 181–187.

<sup>24</sup> Slovak National Archive, II. KSS, box 4, folder 91, leaflet *Proletáři všech krajín, spojte sa!* (Proletarians of all countries, unite!)

Comintern recognize it as an independent body. On the other hand, on the basis of the Soviet Constitution of 1936, which promoted the possibility of the admission of new states into the USSR, and further annexation of the Baltic states, Bessarabia, Bukovina, and western Ukraine, Osoha became persuaded that a change of regime in Slovakia towards a Soviet one would be gained more easily if Slovakia retained its actual position—outside a common state with Czechs. This line of political project, known as the Soviet Slovakia Campaign, according to terms outlined in the CL CPS documents written under Osoha's direct influence, temporarily formed an alternative to the idea of the re-creation of Czechoslovakia. The first such discrepancy is dated October 1939. In the Slovak CL version of the "Instructions" for the internal party organization and ideological campaign, Communists are encouraged "to use the slogan of the *independence and sovereignty of Slovakia* in the struggle against German imperialism."<sup>25</sup> In documents of this period, the call for the independence of Slovakia is related primarily to the withdrawal of Germans. There are no mentions of the non-restoration of Czechoslovakia or even of the creation of a Soviet Slovakia, however, the whole topic of Czechoslovakia is omitted. In March 1940 this was formulated as "a new, free Slovakia, in which the liberated Slovak people will decide the form and content of the state in the spirit of the right of self-determination and proletarian internationalism."<sup>26</sup>

After this document was questioned in Prague, Klement Gottwald (working in Moscow center) delivered this opinion: "Thus it is necessary to make clear for every Slovak, that now imperialist and anti-Soviet plans from world-capitalism are hidden behind the slogan of *new Czechoslovakia*...the Slovak state is a given basis."<sup>27</sup> Osoha's authority was also supported by Soviet diplomatic recognition of the satellite Slovak state. In materials for intra-party instruction from the beginning of 1941, the need for peace, bread, and freedom is stressed, it focuses on the need for positive relations with the USSR. It calls for recognition of the rules of class struggle: "Struggle for the liberation of the Slovak nation from oppression by Slovak capitalists and German imperialism is a struggle for the liberation of the working class, for a Soviet Slovakia. The Communist Party of Slovakia considers the *foundation of Soviet power in Slovakia* of primary importance in its propaganda."<sup>28</sup> An-

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<sup>25</sup> Štvrtecká, *Cinnost*, 120. See also Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 1, folder 8.

<sup>26</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 1, folder 21.

<sup>27</sup> F. Beer, A. Bencík, B. Graca, J. Kren, V. Kural, and J. Šolc, *Dejinná krizovatka* (Historical Crossroad) (Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo politickej literatúry, 1964), 61.

<sup>28</sup> Beer et al., *Dejinná krizovatka*, 79–80.

other wave of the promotion of a Soviet Slovakia in the CL press took place at the beginning of the German attack on the USSR, and expectation of quick progress by the Red Army into Slovak territory, with its consequent “social revolution.”

After the German attack of the USSR the situation in international politics changed rapidly. Among other consequences, promotion of Soviet Slovakia outside the Czechoslovak state was undermined by the USSR’s recognition of the Czechoslovak government in exile. Paradoxically, Osoha was not willing to reshape his line of policy, and Moscow center had to send emissaries to bring and promote new viewpoints. Even then the new line was ignored. Beginning in July 1942, a strange situation occurred. All members the third illegal CL, including Osoha, were imprisoned. According to the post-war testimony of his comrades, in 1943 when he received a letter about Stalin’s proclamation concerning Czechoslovakia, he “dismissed it as untrue and forged and labeled us as betrayers and criminals.”<sup>29</sup> The remaining members of the party formed the fourth and fifth CL, which obeyed the orders from the center and retreated into the Moscow-promoted line, which was already based on the recognition of the Czechoslovak government and on preparation for the post-war restoration of the republic. Osoha died as a German prisoner in 1945.

### *In the War with the USSR*

The Slovak Communists were surprised from the very moment of the opening of conflict on the Eastern front, but war as such had long been expected and was in some sense welcomed. According to ideological constructions of the Slovak Communists, the Pact formed an obstacle to possible actions of the Red Army on Slovak territory. After the Germans attacked the Soviet positions, no more formal obstacles were evident.

However, some problems of an ideological character arose. Besides the lack of success of the Red Army, there was the necessity finding of new arguments in favor of agreements of alliance with Anglo-American imperialists and for reasoning in favor of further “tactical maneuvers” by the highest Soviet leaders, e.g., Soviet recognition of the Czechoslovak government in London.

The CPS first expressed its standpoint in its “Proclamation of the CPS leadership concerning fascist Germany’s sudden attack of the USSR” which appeared under

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<sup>29</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 23, folder 544.

the headline “Our fight has started.”<sup>30</sup> While commenting on developments in world politics, stress was laid on “*allied people*” and “*German imperialism.*” “*The war has changed its mutually imperialist character,*” or even “*the English and American people defend interests of socialism against an attack of the most reactionary forces of the world.*” Besides this, one can often find expressions of the old Comintern spirit, dividing the oppressed German, Italian, and Japanese people from the war-leading top social strata.

The shock, caused by finding oneself on the same side of the barricade with yesterday's enemy, could not be healed easily just by increasing the frequency of mentions of the *American people*. The old vocabulary seeped into the contemporary news. The situation on the Allied front was evaluated as follows:

In foreign policy we observe a quick turn. America and England are afraid that the USSR will destroy Germany with a quick victory and that it could overrule Europe. For the Capitalists, this represents an unbearable idea and a constant danger. Therefore, Roosevelt and Churchill met and consulted on the adoption of necessary measures. They will take some action and realize the second front for sure, not of course in an attempt to help the USSR, but to have the possibility to annex as large a part of Europe as possible and to enact there ‘democratic’ order. With this aim they are already training few hundred governors in their universities. Their task will be to manage, incorporate the annexed territories, and give them over to a civilian government, when, as they say, the people decide about the future form of the state.<sup>31</sup>

In order to outweigh one-sided information broadcasted by the Slovak state-censored mass-media, the CL tried to support the illegal Communist journal *Hlas ľudu*, *The Voice of People*, by issuing an independent edition of periodical pamphlets of actual news with commentary. Such pamphlets, entitled *KTK News*, (Komunistická Tlacová Kancelária, Communist Press Office) were published from October 1941 until January 1943. Memos containing transcripts of news from illegal radio broadcasts were also circulated. Due to the lack of positive news from the front, KTK concentrated on pointing out the unreliability of the official Slovak sources, usually comparing two contrasting news reports. For example, in September 1941 *KTK* circulated a leaflet entitled simply “Have you noticed?” The leaflet

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<sup>30</sup> Štvrtecká, *Cinnost*, 188–191.

<sup>31</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 7, folder 183.

then continued: “Have you noticed, that the Germans have already crossed the Dnester river twice? How can this be? Or have they had to retreat between the two [crossings]?”<sup>32</sup> In another case *KTK* pointed out that according to one official news report the “Russians had only 7,000 aircraft, yet [according to another one] the Germans shot down 7,500 of them?”<sup>33</sup> A similar column also appeared in *Hlas ľudu*, whose authors registered this event: The editor-in-chief of the *Slovenská politika* journal in his column sunk one million BRT of the enemy’s shipping placement more than the main editor of the *Gardista* newspaper! The article concluded that the editor-in-chief of *Slovenská politika* is said to be appointed head admiral of the Slovak navy, which is already being formed on the Váh River near Zilina for attack against America.<sup>34</sup>

This tactic was also used by authors of non-authorized leaflets. The official report about illegal leaflets of 1941 noted a question: “How could the Ukrainians offer Slovak soldiers white bread, when it is said they have not seen it for two years?”<sup>35</sup> In 1942 another “unknown Communist element” sent a letter to a local branch of the *Deutsche Partei*, asking where that man [Soviet general] Timoshenko had come from, since, according to official information in 1941, he had already been totally destroyed together with the whole Red Army.”<sup>36</sup>

From the beginning of 1942, the roots of change within the agitation policy, which prevailed in the following three years, can be traced. Gradually the leadership of the CPS, under the influence of the creation of the Allied bloc, exchanged its idea of class exclusivity for recognition of both the possibility and the necessity of collaborating with non-Communist anti-fascists. On 8 February 1942, the second illegal leadership of CPS adopted a resolution stating that “*our first and most important task is, together with the Red Army and the proletariat, to destroy German Fascism as soon as possible. This is our primary task, all others are secondary. In order to fulfill this task, it is necessary to mobilize the entire nation and all its means, against the enemy. A pre-condition of this is, naturally, collaboration of all branches of the nation, or*

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<sup>32</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 4, folder 107, *Všimli ste si?* (Have you noticed?)

<sup>33</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 4, folder 107, *Všimli ste si?* (Have you noticed?)

<sup>34</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 23, folder 539. Document is a copy of *Hlas ľudu* (Voice of People) no 2., April 1943.

<sup>35</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 10, folder 289.

<sup>36</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 9, folder 253, letter reported from 28 June 1942



*its political groups.*"<sup>37</sup> The possibility of such a resolution reflects great changes in the international context.

The second feature of this change was represented by an emphasis on an ethnic definition of what constituted an image of "the enemy." A comparable process can be observed in Soviet propaganda after autumn 1941. The definition of war was changed from a mutually imperialist conflict to a patriotic quest, consequently the army of socialism, workers and peasants became an Army defending Russia. The Slovak Communists, true to the line of propaganda, abandoned the image of a class-enemy and promoted instead an enemy characterized primarily by his ethnic origin. The exploited German proletariat could scarcely be found any more. All the negative connotations that were attached to German imperialism were invoked with the term "the Germans." The Hungarian case was similar. The condolences for Communists executed by the regime of Horthy were replaced by nationalist slogans with an anti-Hungarian spirit. It seems that the replacement of a class- and internationally-oriented propaganda with a nationalist one caused relatively heated internal Party discussion. In 1943 one activist, Štefan Baštovanský, supplied the argument with theoretical background during his instructive lecture for younger Communist activists. In his paper "*The National development of Slovaks in the light of Marxism,*" Communists were said to be hailed as *consistent defenders of national interests*. The best expression of the new rhetoric is the statement: "*Internationalist communists in Yugoslavia or in Czech lands ... are in the leading positions in the struggle for national liberation. ... nationalism and internationalism are in dialectic unity.*"<sup>38</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In a broader historical context, the period 1939–43 forms an interesting chapter in both Communist history and historiography. Developments during this time possess many features characteristic of internal CP history during the previous and following eras. However, in more dramatic circumstances influenced by war, their visibility differs.

The conflict of interest between the Comintern and locally based Communist activists can be traced during the whole interwar period. Let me mention the struggle for the 'Bolshevization' of the Party in the 1920s and for definition of its rela-

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<sup>37</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 5, folder 140.

<sup>38</sup> Slovak National Archive, Il. KSS, box 7, folder 199.

tions to the Social Democrats. The line between the opinion groups never divided Comintern from the CPC, there were always groups of more and less obedient members within the Party itself. Lasting conflicts and the following purges in the 1930s were considerable, and only the democratic system of the Czechoslovak state protected the heretics from worse punishments than expulsion from the Party.

Among the disputable questions, the recognition of Czechoslovakia and the status of Slovakia were treated with devotedness to Comintern. According to its shifts of politics, Czechoslovakia was until the beginning of the 1930s refused by the Communist party of Czechoslovakia as a product of an imperialist war and the Peace of Versailles, its government was accused of fascism, the Czech bourgeoisie of occupying Slovakia and Ruthenia, etc. Finally, partly due to the conclusions of the seventh Congress of Comintern and partly thanks to the emigration of the most radical Comintern exponents to Moscow who left their posts for more realist politicians, before the beginning of the war the Czechoslovak Communists decided to join and actively support the people's front for the defense of the Republic against the fascist menace from abroad.

During the war, the newly created Slovak Central Leadership of the Communist Party of Slovakia continuously strove to keep the Moscow-mandated party line. Facing great difficulties with the explanatory campaign, it adopted the new definition of the enemy after the adoption of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the consequent double-sided occupation of Poland. Even the project of Soviet Slovakia did not depart from the pre-war and contemporary Comintern instructions. In the interwar period, the Slovak question occasionally served as a populist slogan for both far right and far left. Moreover, after the creation of the satellite Slovak state and its diplomatic recognition by the Powers, Moscow encouraged the home resistance to adopt the slogan of national independence for tactical use against external oppressors. This scheme came into long-term conflict with Moscow only after the change of Soviet foreign policy following the German attack of the USSR. Here the contemporary Slovak leaders refused to submit and kept promoting the Soviet Slovakia project (out of the CSR) for more than two years.

Another interesting comparison can be drawn between two groups of Slovak Communists: those influenced by Osoha, and their descendants represented by Husák, Šmidke, and Novomeský. Osoha lacked sympathy for a wide, united, anti-fascist front with civic non-Communist resistance as an equal partner, which was promoted by Moscow after the German attack, instead of the exclusively Communist concept of liberation, combined with Communist revolution. As such, he was criticized, and his standpoint had been erased from the official historiography for years. Since he died before the end of the war, we can only guess about his would-

be post-war destiny. The next wave of leaders, coming from the young generation, obeyed the call for a united civic front. According to the contemporary Moscow line they collaborated with the non-Communist resistance, took part in common preparation and leading of the Slovak national uprising, etc. After the next turn of the USSR's foreign policy, beginning with the Cold War with its Western allies and a crusade against the 'class enemy' within the socialist camp, activists of this group were accused and tried as bourgeois nationalists, collaborators with bourgeoisie, and as lacking class-based and international consciousness. Consequently, their role in the anti-fascist insurrection was lowered and they were effectively erased from public memory.

On the basis of this study, it can be claimed that the sense of unanimity created by the textbooks has a pre-determined structure. It has been continuously created and updated according to shifts in contemporary Communist politics. Thus, it has retroactively reevaluated all persons and concepts of history. In this sense, no stability for the Communist interpretation of history can be claimed, with one exception: the acceptance of a dialectic interpretation of stable and continuous change.

Another conclusion to be drawn from this study may confirm the statement, that even within the official, censored Communist version of history, conflicting claims can be found—i.e., Communist historiography itself provided clues to its greatest manipulations of facts. The rest depended on the skill and will of the reader.