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The Slavic Congress in Slovak Historical Memory

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Abstract. The Slavic Congress of May 1848 was one of the significant milestones in the revolutionary year of 1848. In Slovak historical and journalistic writing, there is a surprising contrast between the evaluation of the congress as the first occasion for the presentation of Slovak demands in an international forum on the one hand, and the modest treatment of the issue in the form of source editions and in-depth analyses on the other. This was due to the fact that great expectations were replaced by disappointment, and the quality of the returns associated with the event and its place in historical memory corresponded to this. The Slavic Congress was the subject of extensive ideological instrumentalization and remained subject to considerable manipulation, obfuscation, and distorted interpretations by contemporaries and later publicists, politicians, and historians (after 1948 in the service of communist politics). This is what this article is about. Numerous inter-Slavic conflicts after the fall of communism leave virtually no room for the revival of Slavic ideas.

Keywords: the Slavic Congress, Slovak historical Memory, ideological instrumentalization, distorted interpretations

If we gloss over references to so-called Baroque Slavism and the isolated and simplified references to Slavic identity, the emergence and rediscovery of the Slavic idea has been dated to the beginning of the nineteenth century, which is identified with the century of modern nationalism and the birth of young modern nations. Russia's victory over Napoleon played a major role in the discovery of Slavic identity, as well as in the growth of the pride and national self-confidence of the individual Slavic peoples. It is not at all accidental that Ján Kollár, a Slovak with a Czechoslovak and Slavic identity, became the 'father' of Slavic reciprocity and at the same time the representative of the integrative concept of the four Slavic tribes (Russians, Poles, Czechoslovaks and Illyrians, i.e., South Slavs) and the four Slavic 'dialects' (Russian, Polish, Czechoslovak and Illyrian). According to the latter, the Slovaks were part of the Czech tribe, and the Slovak language was a subdialect of Czech. The German stimuli in the formulation of his Slavic theory were not accidental: the frustrating

fate of the Polabian (Lusatian) Slavs, the all-German festivities at Wartburg Castle calling for the unification of Germany, and Johann Gottfried Herder's philosophical concept of the Slavs as the bearers of the future of humanity and the guarantors of its regeneration. Kollár's Panslavism rightly became a Czech (Czechoslovak) product made of German material.

In 1825, the Slavist Pavol Jozef Šafárik published his work *Geschichte der slawischen Sprache und Literatur,* in which he even then identified the Slovaks as a separate nation and distinguished the Slovak language from the Czech (later, he changed his views on an independent Slovak language). A year later, linguist Ján Herkel' published the basics of the universal Slavic Language, in which, in addition to the rules of 'Slavic Esperanto,' he also developed the concept of the literary unity of the Slavs. Apparently, the concept of Slavic solidarity and interdependence was very productive at this time. It had a national consciousness dimension and gradually acquired national political significance. Kollár's concept was developed by another Slovak, writer and politician Ľudovít Štúr, and it should be noted that this occurred in constant conflict with Kollár. Štúr justified the mutual independence of Czechs and Slovaks and gave expression to this in the codification of the Slovak written language. This formed the basis for a new perception of Slavicity, Slavic reciprocity, and, within a dialectical framework, a closer Czech–Slovak connection. This has since become a permanent portfolio of Slovak political thought—the thinking of a small nation struggling for its survival.

Štúr and his followers began to consciously link Slavic belonging with the political context, with social reforms, and the state-law reconstruction of the monarchy. He considered the concept of Slavicity as a supranational unity as a guarantee of the further multilateral development of independent and sovereign Slavic peoples, and that only in such a form could it have a future. As early as the early 1840s, Štúr posed a number of questions about the relationship between the Slavic and non-Slavic worlds and attempted to seek answers to them in his voluminous but unfinished and little-known work *Azya a Evropa: čili určení Ruska v ohledu na Azyi* [Asia and Europe: Or the Determination of Russia in Relation to Asia].

The Slavic Congress, like a number of other historical events, was the subject of extensive ideological instrumentalization. While the revolution of 1848/49 remained embedded in Slovak historical consciousness as a key historical event, with changes only to the perspective and angle of view (and thus, secondarily, the ideological relevance), the Slavic Congress remained subject to considerably more manipulation, obfuscation, and distorted interpretations. Mostly, it remained only an unsuccessful meeting, which took on 'reactionary' connotations and led further developments to a dead end.

The causes of this state of affairs lay in the failure of political negotiations and pan-Slavic unification, which led more to the escalation of mutual conflicts than to unity. The congress did become a great Slavic manifestation, but as a counterbalance to Pangermanism, it was not enough. All future intra-Slavic conflicts emerged clearly even during the Prague Congress and foreshadowed individual political and interest contradictions. Moreover, practically all the questions raised at the congress remained unanswered.

The participation of the Slovak delegates (almost forty participants) was closely linked to the hopes for a solution to the situation of Slovaks in the monarchy. The Slovak elites believed that a document with the relevant political demands of the Slavs would be drawn up in Prague, and that it could force the Austrian government to make concessions and accept Slavic-, and within this framework, Slovak political demands as well. This did not happen: there was a lack of political power, a lack of full authority—i.e., a mandate—and a lack of willingness to compromise. The congress could have at most achieved a resolution, but it was not even able to do that. As Štúr said in 1848:

> "In our division is the strength of our enemy and our grave; in our union is [the enemy's] destruction and our salvation."[1]

Subsequent revolutionary events, therefore, naturally overshadowed the convention's negotiating days and relegated them to the periphery of attention in relation to the revolution.

Historian Daniela Kodajová, in the introduction to her seminal study of the issue of the convention in Slovak historiography, already very explicitly stated,

> "In Slovak historical and journalistic writing on the Prague convention, there is a surprising disproportion between the evaluation of the convention as the first occasion for the presentation of Slovak demands in an international forum and as a prelude to the Slovak uprising, on the one hand, and the modest treatment of the issue in the form of source editions and in-depth analyses, on the other."[2]

Great expectations were replaced by disappointment, and the quality of the returns to something the event and its place in historical memory corresponded to this.

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, three important memoirs were written by three Slovak participants in the revolutionary events (J. M. Hurban, M. Dohnány, and S. Štefanovič). However, only Jozef Miloslav Hurban, in his biography of Ľudovít Štúr, dealt in detail with the actual Slavic Congress, since Štúr not only took part in the Prague events, but was even one of their main protagonists.[3]

1 Štúr, *Pogled*, pt. 3 from 11 August 1848 (quoted from Bokes, ed., *Dokumenty,* 36).

2 Kodajová, "Prager Slavenkongress," 81.

3 Hurban, "Ľudovít Štúr."

In Štúr's understanding, Slavicity was a qualitatively higher-level conception of Slavic reciprocity and unity as a supranational entity of distinct and sovereign Slavic peoples. During the revolution of 1848/49, however, the idea of Slavicity was becoming a political article and an effective weapon of political struggle. According to Ľudovít Štúr,

> "our people wanted to show their ideas also to Europe and to sympathize with their Slavic brothers, they wanted to further make their demands to the Austrian government, and finally they wanted to conclude a federation of the Slavic branches."[4]

According to Štúr, the result of the congress was not great and remained only on the moral plane:

> "When the Slavic spirit spreads even more widely in Russia, when the progress of liberty becomes apparent there too, this country will accomplish great and important works for Slavicity, serious and decisive for the world."[5]

Neither for Hurban's loyal supporter Mikuláš Dohnány nor for the polemically anti-Hurban Samuel Štefanovič did the Slavic Congress represent anything extraordinary. They did not participate in it, and as witnesses, they concentrated on events that they had experienced themselves and on their own skin, so they perceived them completely differently. According to Štefanovič, Slavic reciprocity had not yet proved itself in any substantial way, nor did it have sufficient material support. He therefore considered the reliance on it by Štúr to be a political mistake. In hindsight, Štúr perceived Czech Austro-Slavism as a means of achieving hegemony over the other Slavic nations of the monarchy.[6]

During the revolution of 1848/49, the idea of Slavicity became a political article and an effective weapon in the political struggle. The Slavic Congress, Austro-Slavism, the cooperation of Slavic radicals, military traditions, Slavic symbols, and the Russian invasion of Central Europe in 1849 have been preserved in historical memory as images of glory and pride. On the non-Slavic side, however, the revolution was associated with traumatic experiences that fed the panic and fear associated with Pan-Slavism and Russophilia for decades afterwards. Gradually, however, the first complications, such as the chronic Russian–Polish dispute, Polish legions and Polish generals in the ranks of the Hungarian revolutionary army, as well as Serbo–Croatian, Ukrainian–Russian, and even Czech–Slovak conflicts, were already emerging.

4 Štúr, *Pogled*, pt 4 from 12 August 1848 (quoted from Bokes, ed., *Dokumenty,* 37).

5 Štúr, *Pogled*, pt 4 from 12 August 1848 (quoted from Bokes, ed., *Dokumenty,* 39).

6 Štúr, *Slovanstvo*, 138.

All of this led Ľudovít Štúr, in his work *Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti* [Slavicity and the World of the Future],[7] to the realization that any Slavic federation was an illusion. Also, the experience of the revolution as well as immediate post-revolutionary developments led him (in contrast to Czech politician and historian František Palacký) to reject Austro-Slavism as a concept of a reformed Habsburg monarchy with the sense of a kind of optimal protective 'hat' for the Central European Slavs. Under the influence of several disappointments and disillusions, and even under the influence of his own depression, Štúr came to the conclusion that Slavicity, as an equal member of the European family of nations, had to rely on the only independent Slavic power—Russia. Only Russia was in a position to protect the Slavs and to paralyze all their conflicts. Under the protection of the tsar and the Orthodox faith, rapprochement with Russia was to be preferred. In this, it was forgotten that Russia had to democratize its political system and Russian society had to adapt to the 'new times,' according to Štúr. The conditions thus specified made his conception, in fact, a completely 'non-conceptual' one.

The Second Slavic Congress[8] was held in completely different conditions, in Moscow in 1867, and only reinforced Austro-German and Hungarian fears of Pan-Slavism. For Russia, this was only one possible political alternative, and far from decisive. The three Slovak representatives in Moscow and their quite servile behaviour did not allow the congress to become more firmly rooted in historical memory. Neither did the purposeful publication of Štúr's *Slavicity and the World of the Future* in its Russian translation. Such a congress, held under the protective hand of tsarist policy, was associated with even less reason for any commemoration.

Nevertheless, before World War I, the Czech (and Hungarian) professional historians' return to the Slavic Congress was perceived and commented upon in the Slovak press. In terms of the decisive impulse, the reaction from Slovakia was that it was not German integration efforts but the national situation in Hungary and the authority of Štúr that should have been the initiating stimuli for the Slavic Congress.[9] An interesting fact was that even the national congress of 1895 (and this was not Slavic in character, given the presence of Romanians) claimed the traditions

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7 The book was first written in German in 1852, then translated into Russian and published in Moscow in 1867 on the occasion of the second Slavic Congress.

8 The term 'congress' (Russian *sjezd*) for the presence of Slavic delegates in Moscow in connection with an ethnographic exhibition in Moscow is used in Russian literature. See e.g. Dostal', "Slavjanskiĭ sjezd 1867 g."; Gerasimenko et al., eds, *Rossija i slavjanski mir;* Platonov, ed., "*Vserossijskaja etnograficheskaja vystavka";* Churkina, "Ėtnograficheskaja vystavka." On the other hand, the character of a congress is questioned, for example, by Milan Hlavačka, who speaks of a kind of pilgrimage. See Hlavačka, "Ještě jednou pouť Slovanů"; Hlavačka, "Eshche raz o poezdke."

9 Škultéty, "Recenzia na knihu Zdeňka Tobolku," 456–58.

of similar meetings and perceived the Slavic Congress, at least in relation to the nature of its implementation, as its model.

The Russian invasion of the Balkans in the 1870s, as well as the Russian crossing of the Carpathian Mountains in the winter of 1914/1915, raised high Slavic and Slovak hopes. They indicated a pattern of how things could move powerfully, even if they did not move politically. However, events eventually took a completely different course, and Russia remained on the periphery of Central European development.

The year 1918 and the creation of Czechoslovakia significantly shuffled the cards in the historical pantheon and in the perception of individual historical events. While the Revolution remained in pride of place in the commemoration and shaping of historical memory, the significance shifted in favour of armed struggle, the formation of a democratic political program, and Czech–Slovak cooperation. However, the Slavic Congress was marginalized, and the fighting on the Prague barricades also pushed it into the background in terms of significance.

After 1918, there was an obvious effort to locate the 1848/49 revolution (and only marginally the Slavic Congress within it) both as a subject of research for the newly emerging professional Slovak historiography and as part of official historical memory. The first task was successfully undertaken by Daniel Rapant in his monumental thirteen-volume work *Slovenské povstanie 1848/9* [Slovak Uprising 1848/9] (1937–1972), planned for decades, which remains an insurmountable challenge for historians. Štúr's assessment of the Slavic Congress as a missed opportunity for the Slavs is summed up by Rapant in the following sentence:

> "At the Slavic Congress, Štúr was clearly in favour of a new orientation of Slavic cooperation; Hurban vacillated between the old Pan-Slavism, Czechoslavism, and Austro-Slavism; Hodža [Michal Miloslav Hodža was the third and last man in the triad of Slovak political leaders at the time.—R. H.] faithfully adhered to the latter." [10]

As far as historical memory was concerned, there were several reasons for linking the 1848/49 revolution with the 1918 celebrations. First, there was the interest in anchoring the revolution firmly in historical memory, or more precisely, in finding an appropriate place for it, since traditions and memories of the revolution functioned only minimally or not at all in Slovak society. The second reason was to combine the two eight-year anniversaries into a single commemoration, thus pointing to the historical connections between them, to a certain developmental continuity and to the so-called historical logic, which was also to legitimize 1918 in Slovak historical memory, since the Slovak share in the younger historical event was significantly smaller.

10 Rapant, "Štúrovci,"33 (quoted from Kodajová, "Slováci," 89).

The third reason was to show the aspirations of the circle of Štúr's collaborators for national emancipation and to perceive it in relation to the background of intensive Czech–Slovak cooperation (the revolution had, after all, involved intensive Czech–Slovak cooperation) and to consider 1918 as the fulfilment of this cooperation. There were attempts to show continuity at least in the Anton Bernolák (the oldest creator of literary Slovak)–Ľudovít Štúr–Milan Rastislav Štefánik (one of the founders of the Czechoslovak state) line, while other names could have been inserted into this scheme (such as those of many of Štúr's followers).

A problematic fact was the fact that both revolutions (1848 and 1918), though seventy years apart, took place against the Hungarians as the age-old enemy No.1. In the first case in particularly, however, the Hungarians were the driving force of the revolution, and Štúr's followers fought for 'their' revolution under imperial banners, i.e., in the service of conservative Habsburg Vienna. This circumstance had to be either glossed over or explained with the help of often tortuous interpretations. Especially in journalism, the anti-Hungarian and anti-German stance began to be emphasized in line with the definition of the monarchy.

Thus, the liberation of the peasants from serfdom, i.e., from 'labor,' was emphasized, which liberated the people socially, while 1918 brought them national and political liberation. This interpretive model at least gave a successful outcome to the 1848 revolution, which could then lead the people to their national liberation.

An example of the linking of the two key milestones is the monument to Adolf Ivanovič Dobriansky in Michalovce, which was unveiled in 1928, on the tenth anniversary of the Republic and the eightieth anniversary of the Revolution and the Slavic Congress, in which Dobriansky was an active participant as a leader of the Ruthenians and an organizer of their cultural, ethnic, and linguistic rapprochement with the Russians. Dobriansky's statue commemorates Ruthenian–Czech–Slovak cooperation, which is specific and, at the same time, characteristic of the conditions of eastern Slovakia. But it also recalls the union of the Czechoslovak state with Subcarpathia. The statue was dedicated to Dobriansky as a "great Slav […] on the tenth anniversary of the independence of the Czechoslovak Republic, in a sign of brotherly love and the unity of the three branches of one Slavic tribe."

In June 1928, on the initiative of the Czechoslovak National Council, the Slavic Congresses of 1848 and 1908 (congresses mainly for students and journalists) were commemorated with a festive event in Prague. A lecture from the Slovak side was given by writer and editor Jozef Škultéty and was devoted to the older of the congresses. He repeated several ideas from his extensive review of Czech historian Zdeněk Tobolka's book from 1901 (the first collection of Congress's documents), while mainly reinforcing the anti-German and anti-Hungarian rhetoric (this was also the case in identical or similar texts by Slovak historian Julius Botto

and politician Milan Hodža from the period before and after 1918). Škultéty saw the importance of the congress mainly in its broad and timeless Slavic character.[11]

In 1936 (i.e., in anticipation of the 90th anniversary), a commemorative plaque to Štúr with text by the Czech author Josef Pospíšil was installed on the main building on Žofín Island (or Slavic Island) in Prague. The red marble plaque with a bronze relief likeness of Ľudovít Štúr and an extensive Slovak text tells of his speech at the local Slavic Congress. His words are particularly quoted as follows:

> "Our aim should be to preserve the Austrian Empire? Our aim is to preserve ourselves, us. First, we must serve ourselves, then others. So far, Austria has stood, and we have perished. What would the world say to us if we stood for nothing but the preservation of Austria? The fall of Austria is not the fall of us."[12]

The telling value of these words increased especially after 1918. No wonder, therefore, that they are followed on the memorial plaque by the remark, "Štúr was already preparing what was not accomplished until the world war." Here, too, then, the relationship between 1848 and 1918 was evident; it was here that a positive moment could also be identified at the Slavic Congress.[13] The commemorative plaque was installed by the associations of Slovak students in Prague (Detvan, Považan, and the Janoška circle), as well as by the associations *Československá jednota* [Czechoslovakian Unity] and the jubilee committee from Bánovce nad Bebravou.

It was characteristic that Štúr's words could be used, although they were not dominant at the congresses. Rather, the Austro-Slavist concept prevailed there, which was best formulated in 1865 by Czech politician and historian František Palacký in his well-known statements:

> "Truly, if the Austrian empire did not already exist long ago, one would have to hasten to create it in the interest of Europe, in the interest of humanity itself" and "[…] if I have always wished for the existence of an Austrian state, I have always had in mind an Austria that would be fair to all its peoples, and a government would prove to be a mother to all and a stepmother to none of them."[14]

11 Škultéty, "Slovanský sjazd."

12 Rapant, *Slovenské povstanie*, 21.

13 There are some other well-known statements by Štúr from the post-revolutionary 1850s: "What has outlived itself, what has lost all sense and meaning, and the situation in Austria is like this, must perish." or "Shall we and can we join with those who have worked most strenuously for our complete destruction?" The memorial plaque is shown on the website https://www.turistika.cz/mista/praha-1-slovansky-ostrov-zofin-pametni-deska-ludovit-stur/foto?id=1970823, and a detailed description can be found on the website: https://pamatkovykatalog.cz/pametni-deska-ludovita-stura-3221504.

14 Palacký, *Idea,* 36, 38. For more details, see: Moritsch, ed., *Der Austroslavismus*.

The first of Palacky's quoted statements can also be found in his famous letter to the President of the Committee of Fifty of the Frankfurt Pre-Parliament in April 1848, Alexander von Soiron.

The foresight of Štúr in comparison with that of Palacký was a frequent motif in Slovak texts about the Slavic Congress after 1918.

Apart from Štúr's prescient words, before 1945, and especially during World War II, the Prague Slavic Congress was perceived in Slovak historical memory as a reactionary event, which mainly involved defining oneself in opposition to the Germans and Hungarians. The anti-German tendency could have been perceived as problematic during World War II, especially if the negatively evaluated Czech–Slovak cooperation was added to it. Austro-Slavism, as the dominant Czech concept, was also evaluated rather negatively.

Slavicity and the Slavic idea were still subject to a few attempts at reincarnation in the twentieth century. These involved fantastic and politically naive visions, e.g., from the work of Czech politician Karel Kramář or the politically expedient Slavic character of Milan Hodža's agrarian democracy. In this, he drew on the agrarian politicians of the Bulgarian Alexander Stambolijski and the Croat Stjepan Radić, as well as on the Czech writer Josef Holeček and his "philosophy of Czech peasantry." In his monumental work, the latter brought the Slavic world and the village together into a single whole, into a synthesis of each other.

Czech politicians Tomáš G. Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, on the other hand, linked the fate of Slavicity with the fate of democracy and humanity:

> "I refuse to build Slavicity on reactionary nationalism and I seek its basis in »democracy and humanity«, that is, every Slavic policy and Slavicity must be in full harmony with these two great ideas."[15]

Such a conception had its justification for some time under authoritarian regimes in Poland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, not to mention the communist dictatorship in the Soviet Union. However, the historical development along these lines also indicated that Slavicity no longer had prospects for development and that existence on the basis of reactionary nationalism was unproductive, and on the basis of democracy and humanity, idealistic and illusory.

The year 1945 was also a significant turning point in Slavic politics. After this, the Slavic idea underwent a very complicated development. Edvard Beneš pointed out even at the end of the war that the prerequisites for a new stage of Slavic cooperation were the settlement of territorial disputes, the sacrifice of any potential minorities in favour of merging with the dominant Slavic nation, the mutually

15 Beneš, *Úvahy,* 308.

independent national settlement of all national internal political problems, a common stand against any forms of Pan-Germanism, and the exclusion of the religious element. The New Slavicity meant burying the old Slavophilism, Pan-Slavism, Pan-Russianism, Messianism, and Neo-Slavism, which had failed and remained more on the plane of illusion than reality. Beneš considered the formulation of common interests to be essential in the interests of post-war Slavism.[16] In doing so, he presciently stated that "I consider it simply impossible to form an exclusive Slavic ideology of monarchist, socialist, communist, Orthodox, etc.," having already rejected the concept of Slavic agrarianism.[17] This was precisely the problem of Slavicity after the communist takeover, when there was a merging precisely on ideological positions and no place for ethnic demarcation (at least outwardly) anymore.

Developments went in a completely different direction from what Beneš had indicated or imagined.[18] Less than two months after the fascist attack on the Soviet Union, the so-called Panslav (Slavic) Committee, made up of communist intellectuals, was mobilized in Moscow. In April 1942, also in Moscow and with the support of the Soviet government, a representative meeting of Slavs was organized, already 'exporting' the Panslav propaganda to all parts of the Western Allied world, exploiting the enthusiasm for the Russian ally. The defeat of fascism and the occupation of half of Europe by the Red Army enabled the instrumentalization of Slavicity exactly in the spirit rejected by Beneš: state-based, class-based, and ideologically driven.

The Slavic Congress in Belgrade in December 1946 was a pompous spectacle that referred to Moscow's domination of (not only) the Slavic world. A congress with many empty speeches, ideological cotton wool, a lack of ideas, and an unrepeatable unity of words and deeds. But accompanied by crowds of tens of thousands, in bizarre colours and with participants many of whom would soon end up in disgrace or in Stalinist prisons.

The opening speech was given by Marshal Josip Broz-Tito, a man whose name no one wanted to remember only one and a half years later. One of the main speakers was the future dissident Milovan Djilas. On the rostrum, alongside the portraits of Stalin, Dimitrov, Bierut, and Tito, there was a huge portrait of Edvard Beneš. The speeches stressed the importance of the individual Slavic nations to world culture. Czechoslovak Minister of Education Zdeněk Nejedlý, in the spirit of his lifelong admiration, even mentioned the merits of T. G. Masaryk! This was a remarkable circumstance, resulting from the peculiar personality of the speaker, who held Masaryk in high esteem throughout his life. It was Nejedlý and Gustáv Husák, the

16 Beneš, *Úvahy,* 198–223.

17 Beneš, *Úvahy,* 213.

18 In more detail, Neander, *Panslawismus*, 53–55.

Slovak chairman of the Assembly of Commissioners, who were the only ones to draw attention to the traditions of the Prague Slavic Congress. According to Husák,

> "as early as the 1848 Congress, it was stated that the common enemy of the Slavic peoples was the Germans, who prevented them from cooperating. This was shown most clearly by the just-ended war."[19]

According to Nejedlý, the proof that the cradle of the Slavic movement was the Czech nation was the holding of the Prague Congress in 1848 as "the first political manifestation of the Slavic nations."[20]

At the congress, it was agreed that the next one would be held in 1947 in Moscow. The latter, however, fell victim to the Yugoslav rift with the Soviet Union, which had devastating consequences for the entire Slavic Renaissance. In this spirit, the long-prepared Moscow Slavic Congress, or scientific congress, was associated with a characteristic fate. It was organized throughout 1947, emphasizing its great scientific importance. As a Slavic congress in Moscow, it was first postponed several times, and only in September 1948 came the news that the congress—a hundred years after the first Slavic congress—would no longer take place.

In Czechoslovakia, the renaissance of Slavicity lasted a few years longer. First came a very strong revival of Slavic ideas after 1945, as witnessed in the pompous Slavic Day in July 1945 at the ancient, symbolic and memorable Devín Castle, which became part of Czechoslovakia again after years of war. The large gathering claimed to uphold the traditions of Cyril and Methodius, referred to the Slavic Congress of 1848, welcomed delegations from Slavic countries, and among the speakers we can find several remarkable personalities (for example, the peculiar Catholic priest Ferdiš Juriga).

As part of the popular Slavic celebrations, so-called Pan-Slavic or Slavic Days were held in Bratislava's Devín from 1945 until 1951. They were about several things. Their content ranged from the original demonstration of difference and demarcation from the Germans and Hungarians, who had to be expelled from the republic in as large numbers as possible, to the celebration of the Soviet Union, to Czech–Slovak reciprocity. Among the speakers were representatives of Slavic states, communist and civic leaders, and gradually, the direction was monopolized by leading state and communist functionaries in one person. The originally central message of Cyril and Methodius was also increasingly sidelined.[21] The Slavic dimension, which remained only in the title, was not mentioned at all in the spirit of the Slavic Congress of 1848, which was interpreted at the time as an event with several reactionary features.

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19 Burian, Frinta, and Havránek, eds, *Slovanský sjezd*, 40.

20 Burian, Frinta, and Havránek, eds, *Slovanský sjezd*, 87.

21 Kiliánová, *Identita a pamäť*, 87 f.

The year 1948 was completely distorted in terms of celebrations (in addition to the centenary of the revolution, it also involved dealing with the thirtieth anniversary of the Czechoslovak Republic), but especially in terms of the communist takeover. Although the republic was restored after the war, it found itself with in the Soviet sphere of influence, and after the coup in February 1948, the communists came to power. Their interpretation of history was diametrically opposed. Therefore, although, for example, the preparatory committee for the Slovak celebrations of the founding of Czechoslovakia had already been set up at the end of 1947, in the end everything took place in a completely different atmosphere. The large exhibition planned for Bratislava under the title *100 Years of Struggle – 30 Years of Building* was—like many other projects—ultimately not realized.

Within the framework of the class interpretation of national history, completely new motifs were instrumentalized. In April 1948, for the first time, national celebrations were held in Nitra to mark the centenary of the abolition of serfdom. Communist speakers linked this event to the promotion of the Communist Party's agricultural policy. This was already a novelty in the way of returning to the revolution of 1848/49. The celebrations in Nitra prompted the Commissioner for Agriculture and Land Reform, Michal Falťan, to draw up a peasant program for the Slovak National Council (the so-called Nitra Program), which took into account the national economic and social specifics of Slovakia. Historian and museologist Eva Kurincová characterized the spirit of the Nitra celebrations as "from the whipping board to property decrees for Slovak peasants" or "a presentation of the social policy of the communist regime."[22]

As the centenary of the Slovak uprising approached, a number of events were being prepared. The most important part of the celebrations was the preparation of a monumental memorial on Polana Hill near Brestovec, which was at that time part of Veľká Myjava. However, the celebrations were harmed by the change of political conditions after February 1948, which, for unknown reasons, did not favour the aforementioned monument, and its construction was not continued.[23]

Bratislava's May Day celebrations in 1948 also commemorated the founding of Czechoslovakia for the last time, and not at all in a typical way. An allegorical chariot with not yet caricatured figures of Masaryk, Beneš and Štefánik as founders of the Czechoslovak Republic and a reference to the legionary battlefields from World War I at Zborov and Bachmač reminded the people in the May Day town that they were in the thirtieth year of the establishment of the common state of Czechs and Slovaks. However, the closer October approached, the more distorted the planned

22 Kurincová, "1948," 194.

23 Gálik, *Myjava*, 52–56.

celebrations appeared. In the end, it was not 1918 that came to the fore, but the much more neutral centenary of the 1848/49 revolution. And new connotations with the post-February state were sought.

In 1948, therefore, revolutionary, social, and national principles were intertwined, which the Czechoslovak Jubilee (1918) fulfilled only with reservations or not at all. In Slovakia, during the centenary celebrations as part of the communist reinterpretation of the revolutionary events of 1848/49, in addition to the petitions and political demands of Slovaks, whether in Brezová pod Bradlom or in Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš, there was also a place for commemorating the abolition of serfdom. With this explicitly important social moment was completed the new interpretation of the revolutionary events, in which dominated *Žiadosti slovenského národa v stolici Nitrianskej* [Requests of the Slovak Nation in the County of Nitra], adopted in Brezová pod Bradlom, as well as the most radical Slovak (and not only Slovak) political program *Žiadosti slovenského národa* [Requests of the Slovak Nation], adopted in May 1848 in Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš. At the first celebrations, i.e., in Brezová, the Minister of National Defense and General Ludvík Svoboda gave a speech and connected the local native Milan Rastislav Štefánik with the revolution. According to Svoboda's interpretation, the "Slovak solution" had passed through the "Slavic" to the "Czechoslovak solution." In his speech, on the other hand, Commissioner for Education and Enlightenment Ladislav Novomeský linked the national and social dimensions.

About a month later, nationwide celebrations were held in Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš. Slovak commissioner Ladislav Novomeský unveiled a commemorative plaque to the revolutionary poet Janko Kráľ, and Czechoslovak Foreign Minister Vladimír Clementis gave a speech, while another Czechoslovak minister from Slovakia, Vavro Šrobár, also took part in the rally. His presence was associated with the assembly in Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš on 1 May 1918, where he was a central figure and thus once again linked the celebrations of the Revolution with the events of 1918 that led to the creation of Czechoslovakia. The keynote speech was delivered by the President of the Slovak National Council, Karol Šmidke. What was remarkable about this celebration was the national emblems of the friendly Slavic states. This corresponded to the popular and widespread post-war pan-Slavic concept, within the framework of which the aforementioned so-called Slavic Days were held at Devín Castle from 1945 to 1951.

The new 'class' interpretation of history did not bypass the Slavic Congress of 1848 and placed it outside the main focus of scholars. It was gradually pushed out of historical memory and presented as a reactionary enterprise with the dominant narrative that Austro-Slavism aimed at and supported the preservation of the monarchy and aided the reactionary forces of the European counter-revolution led by the Tsarist regime.

It was therefore characteristic that the new formation of historical memory, while returning to the legacy of the 1848/49 revolution, embedded it in memory in a very neutral and selective way. Above all, the social-revolutionary aspect was highlighted, while the still vivid jubilee of the Czechoslovak state, which had been restored only a short time before, ended up part of a very ideologically one-sided, clichéd representation. The revolution soon ended there too, discredited above all by the collaboration of the elites following Štúr with reactionary Vienna, and made problematic by Karl Marx's remarks about the counter-revolutionary Slavic peoples.[24]

Among the Slovak historiographical works of this (already Marxist) period, one should highlight the extensive multilingual proceedings of the international scientific conference held in Smolenice in June 1966, which (also thanks to the controversial character of the event and the publications) brought about a confrontation of different approaches and perspectives concerning the Slavic problem, with the personality of Ľudovít Štúr and his concept of Slavic reciprocity standing at its centre.[25] Tatiana Ivantyšynova's monograph on the ideology of Russian Slavophiles has been unjustly forgotten.[26]

In this period, a number of source editions already appeared, thus making up for the shortcomings of Slovak professional historiography. Apart from the aforementioned Daniel Rapant and the utilized František Bokes, Karol Goláň and his work *Štúrovské pokolenie* [The Štúr's Generation] were also principal.[27]

In the historiography after 1989, the topic of the 1848/49 revolution (and within it, the Slavic Congress) appeared, although only sporadically, but in a quite fundamental way in terms of instrumentalization. There was one collection of papers from a scientific event in 1998 dedicated to the anniversary of the revolution,[28] another devoted to the revolution and historical memory,[29] and a number of texts centred around the personality of Ľudovít Štúr, where, without much scientific ambition, contributions focused on Slavicity and the Slavic Congress appeared sporadically.[30] The most beneficial and specifically devoted to the Slavic Congress were two studies written by Daniela Kodajová in 1999 and 2000, both of which are mentioned above.

Despite all the deficits, much has been done after 1989 to de-legendarize the events surrounding the 1848/49 revolution. The greatest stir was caused by the

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24 In more detail, Holec, "»Bije zvon slobody«."

25 Holotík, ed., *Ľudovít Štúr.*

26 Ivantyšynová, *Česi a Slováci.*

27 Goláň, *Štúrovské pokolenie.*

28 Sedlák, ed., *Slováci v revolúcii.*

29 Macho, *Revolúcia 1848/49.*

30 First of all, Macho, Kodajová et al., *Ľudovít Štúr.*

publication (originally samizdat) of the publicist Ladislav Szalay, hidden behind a pseudonym, which caused quite a controversy.[31] There was talk about the confessional determination of Štúr's followers, Slovak members of the Hungarian Revolutionary Guards, the mistakes and deficits of the previously 'infallible' historical personalities, etc. In this spirit, texts about Štúr and the Štúr-followers then appeared, showing this personality as a man of flesh and bones. The topic of the Slav Congress itself tends to appear more in recent Czech works of history, such as in modern biographies of František Palacký.

However, in public space and in simplified school (textbook) interpretation, legends still have their place. This is best expressed by the monumental equestrian statue of Jozef Miloslav Hurban, erected in 2006 and referring to the victorious battles of Slovak volunteers at Budatín, north of Žilina, at the turn of 1848 and 1849.

To conclude this historical overview, the renaissance of nationalism and the numerous inter-Slavic conflicts after the fall of communism leave virtually no room for the revival of Slavic ideas. Even the new geopolitical order of Europe has not provided any conditions for this, no matter whether we move within the framework of European cosmopolitanism, nation-state patriotism, or simple nationalism. All Slavic messianisms that have sought any form of Slavic cultural or political unity have simply failed. There is room for reflection on the extent to which it is realistic to contemplate a Slavic spirit, identity, cultural affinity, or mentality, at least to the extent that the spirit and fluidity of the Habsburg Commonwealth, which has been defunct for over a hundred years, no longer lives on. Even if we were to admit to some common elements among the very differently embedded Slavic states—mental, political, or cultural—this would not be enough to revive the ideas and politically instrumentalize the phenomena that played a significant role in the history of Central Europe at one time. They have disappeared along with the image of the common enemy. This inevitably forces us to reflect on whether this is not precisely the cause of the emergence of the Slavic myth and Slavic unity. And what about today, when the one who—according to expectations and historical tradition—was supposed to save us has become the enemy? The roles and stereotypes are changing, and our historical experiences with Russia differ in many ways. The role of the Slavic Congress of 1848 in the historical memory of Slovaks from the 1850s to the present day is changing too. Today, its importance is practically marginalized. The role of historians is to understand and explain all the changes in thinking and interpretations.

31 Viktor, *Legenda*.

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